**Being In the Middle**

Times of transition are challenging, yet often provide us with insights we may not have gotten had we not been uncomfortable. This session invites us to consider “middle space” in relation to our spiritual lives and the life of our parish.

**A Reading for Reflection:**

From Lauren Winner’s “Still: Notes on a Mid-Faith Crisis”

Here at what I think is the beginning of the middle of my spiritual life, I begin to notice that middle rarely denotes something good. Middle school—when girls turn mean, and all kids turn miserable—is that “wasteland of our primary and secondary landscape,” the “crack” between grammar school and high school. And middles are often defined by what they are not: the space, the years in between that which is no longer what came before and that which is not yet what will come later…

I am not thrilled by the idea that I am entering a vague in-between, after the intensity of conversion and before the calm wisdom of cronehood. I don’t like to think that I am embarking on an extended sojourn into the spiritual equivalent of middle school, all insecurity and queen bee alpha girls. I begin to look for other middles, middles with more specificity, more grist.

My friend Samuel, who is a chess player, tells me about the middle game, how in chess the middle game is not merely whatever happens between the opening and the endgame. The middle game is where players stake out their strategies…The middle game is where creativity begins, where tactical daring and subtlety take over. In the middle game, everything is open.

There are middles in architecture and design, too. I learn that churches of the fourteenth-century middle-point style were characterized by lots and lots of windows, whole cathedral walls given over to stained glass and tracery, trifoliate windows insistent with light.

One morning I am reading the journal of an eighteenth-century English minister. He describes hauling barley to something called a *middlestead*, which turns out to be the threshing floor of a barn, where the inedible hull of the wheat is loosened and removed. It is as if John the Baptist has called down to my library carrel, telling me the same thing about Jesus that he told his original audience two thousand years ago: “His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into his barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” The middle of the spiritual life may have many windows, and lots and lots of light, but it will also be a season of winnowing.

I remain on the lookout for other middles.

**Questions for Reflection:**

1. How did your spiritual life begin? Did you have a “conversion experience,” or rather a more subtle, perhaps drawn out entry into the spiritual life?
2. Whether your spiritual life, or some other experience, how have you experienced being in a “vague in-between” time? What have you learned from it? Was there anything you appreciated about it?
3. Where is St. Paul’s in its spiritual life?
4. How can we be present to “middle space” as individuals, but also as a community? Are there ways our worshiping community can ease the tension of the middle spaces we confront in our lives?

**A Prayer**

When near the end of day, life has drained What is being transfigured here is your mind,  
Out of light, and it is too soon And it is difficult and slow to become new.  
For the mind of night to have darkened things, The more faithfully you can endure here,  
  
No place looks like itself, loss of outline The more refined your heart will become  
Makes everything look strangely in-between, For your arrival in the new dawn.  
Unsure of what has been, or what might come.   
  
In this wan light, even trees seem groundless. --“For the Interim Time,”   
In a while it will be night, but nothing From *To Bless the Space Between Us* By

Here seems to believe the relief of dark. John O’Donohue (Irish poet, philosopher

and Catholic scholar)  
You are in this time of the interim   
Where everything seems withheld.   
  
The path you took to get here has washed out;   
The way forward is still concealed from you.   
  
"The old is not old enough to have died away;   
The new is still too young to be born."   
  
You cannot lay claim to anything;   
In this place of dusk,   
Your eyes are blurred;   
And there is no mirror.   
  
Everyone else has lost sight of your heart   
And you can see nowhere to put your trust;   
You know you have to make your own way through.   
  
As far as you can, hold your confidence.   
Do not allow confusion to squander   
This call which is loosening   
Your roots in false ground,   
That you might come free   
From all you have outgrown.