

**Wisdom Circle – In-Between**

**October 2016**

**PREPARATION**

**Words of Wisdom**

“When nothing is sure, everything is possible.”

~ Margaret Drabble

“Honor the space between no longer and not yet.”

~ Nancy Levin

“When you get into a tight place and everything goes against you, till it seems as though you could not hang on a minute longer, never give up then, for that is just the place and time that the tide will turn.”

~ Harriet Beecher Stowe

“Between stimulus and response there is a space... in that space is our power to choose our response. In our response, lies our growth and our freedom.”

~ Viktor Frankl

“The moment in between what you once were, and who you are now becoming, is where the dance of life really takes place.”

~ Barbara de Angelis

“Times of transition are strenuous, but I love them. They are an opportunity to purge, and rethink priorities, and be intentional about new habits. We can make our new normal any way we want.”

~ Kristin Armstrong

“It’s a long old road, but I know I’m gonna find the end.”

~ Ntozake Shange

“Are we *there* yet?”

~ Popular Question

## Reading:

*“Don’t be almost a river or almost a sea. Be a river, a sea, or nothing”* said the lyrics of one of my favorite songs growing up. Growing up, I received hundreds of similar messages that warned me about the danger of being in-between. And so I learned at a young age that the in-between was always a space to be avoided. There didn’t seem to be a place in life for such complexity.

One of my many journeys through the in-between began when I started realizing that my Catholic faith was not as strong as it had been. Something was missing and I couldn’t figure out what it was. What followed were months of confusion, loss and grief. I had always been very active in the church and I had many times proclaimed the unconditional love of my God. But suddenly, it felt as if my entire world was collapsing and the God I so much loved and depended upon was quickly slipping away between my fingers. I tried really hard to hold on to something that would still give me meaning, but found absolutely nothing. I looked and tried to reach out to my community, but it was too fading away along with all of my beliefs. I desperately sought old friends, visited new churches and tried to join new groups unsuccessfully. In the back of my mind I kept telling myself that I was “lukewarm”, not cold nor hot. I was in-between and suddenly felt my integrity threatened as I attempted to continue living a faith that no longer fitted me. I was trying too hard to stay on known ground, to stay away from the in-between, and to stop walking towards the unknown. As I struggled for months, the God I knew grew silent and began disappearing gradually from my life.

It was an intense period of time and then, one day, I finally arrived on the other side. I called off my journey and declared myself an atheist. Interestingly enough, admitting that my beliefs had so radically changed was liberating. There was something freeing about naming a new reality for myself. I still longed for the friends and the community I had lost on the way, but I was finally ready to live my life as the person I had become.

As I reflect back, I now know that the isolation, pain, grief, confusion, desperation I felt for months had a name: liminality.

Originally, the word “liminality” was used to describe a disorienting and ambiguous state that those going through rites of passage experienced. Liminality was the space of the “in-between” where the participants had left their pre-ritual state but hadn’t arrived yet at their post-ritual state. Ethnographers noticed that in some tribal communities, participants of rites of passages often experienced a state of confusion and separation from the community as part of the ritual process. This space is what they called liminal space. The challenges faced by participants had a purpose: they were a way to prepare them for the new stage they were going to enter.

However, in modern societies, where we no longer seek to purposely separate individuals as they transition from one stage to another, the only way we often arrive to that same liminal space is through pain; like the pain we experience with loss and unexpected change. In that sense, we have all experienced liminality in our lives: the transition between losing a job and finding another one, between realizing your sexual orientation or gender identity and coming out, and every time we have had to sit in the discomfort of not knowing where we are going.

Our lives are full of in-betweens that happen both as we transition from one life phase to another, from one place to another, from one way of being to another or from recognizing our complex identities. The

experience in the in-between is often uncomfortable and full of uncertainty. It is the space where we recognize what no longer is but are yet to see what it will be. Often times, we try hard to go back to the port we left behind, but that space is no longer available to us. We cannot go back and we cannot yet see the other side in the dark. We're left on the open sea, adrift, and at the mercy of the current that carries us. Swimming upstream becomes useless and it increases the pain even more. In order to arrive to our destination, we must surrender a bit, accept what is, and let go of the idea of how things are supposed to be. It requires that we let the sea carry us to the other shore and that we allow that experience to transform us. This place of transformation requires patience: it is sacred space. We cannot leave it willingly and without having learned anything. Once there, we can only wait and experience it deeply. When we finally arrive on the other side, we can begin making meaning of what we just went through. In the in-between we are transformed and in that process of transformation we also acquire the tools (skills, knowledge, and/or wisdom) that will be necessary to continue living our lives as the person we have become.

### **Spiritual Exercise –**

For the most part, we can usually assess our passage through liminal space in retrospect. That is, it is until we have reached the other side that we can clearly see that we had been in the “in-between”. For this month’s spiritual exercise, you are invited to look back at a period of time in your life where you found yourself in the “in-between”. As you reflect back on it, answer the following questions:

1. How were you transformed by that experience?
2. What did you learn about yourself? About others? About the world?
3. What or who helped you through?
4. What kind of resources or tools did you gain that can help you overcome a similar experience?

Make some notes for yourself and come prepared to share your insights with the group. You may or may not share the specifics of your experience, but you are definitely invited to share your take away from it.

### **Questions for Reflection:**

- What do you understand by “in-between”?
- What is the responsibility, if any, that individuals have towards those who are yet to experience the “in-between”?
- How can a church community support those who find themselves in liminal space?

## Wisdom Circle – In-Between

### Session Plan

*This session plan is a suggested guide, not a rigid set of rules. You may adjust this plan as you feel is appropriate in your group.*

#### **Gathering & Welcome (~5 min)**

#### **Chalice Lighting (~2 min)**

*Optional Chalice Lighting reading:*

*Mostly, heartfelt practice is about keeping the heart open to the world around us — to people, places, ourselves, and the divine. It means coming from a place of empathic attunement. It's about seeing the connections, the interlocking webs of energy among people and things, and residing as much as possible in that place of no separation.*

*— Belleruth Naparstek in Your Sixth Sense*

#### **Check-In (20-30 minutes)**

*As you feel comfortable, take 2-3 minutes to share one thing that is lifting your spirits, and one thing that is weighing you down. This is a time for sharing, but not for discussion.*

#### **Business (10 minutes)**

*Use this time for any new business: Welcoming new members; Scheduling future meetings; Revisiting the Covenant; Answering questions about Wisdom Circle processes; Etc...*

#### **Experience with Spiritual Exercise (15-20 minutes)**

*Invite participants to share any insights gained from the spiritual exercise. Participants can take turns sharing what their experience with the exercise was. Insight can also come in the form of resistance to a particular spiritual exercise or type of spiritual exercise. This is also a time for sharing but not for discussion.*

#### **Discussion (40 minutes)**

*Introduce Topic and invite participants to begin by responding to the following questions.*

- What do you understand by “in-between”?
- What is the responsibility, if any, that individuals have towards those who are yet to experience the “in-between”?
- How can a church community support those who find themselves in liminal space?

*Silent Reflection (~2 minutes)*

*First Responses (Share in the order you feel moved)*

*Cross-Conversation (Ask questions that invite deeper reflection; Speak from personal experience, and use “I statements”; Avoid explaining or judging)*

**Gratitude (5-10 minutes)**

*Share 1-2 things that have been meaningful to you from this session.*

**Closing**

Optional Chalice Extinguishing Song:

**Woyaya** - Hymn 1020 in *Singing the Journey*.

We are going,

Heaven knows where we are going,

But we know within.

And we will get there,

Heaven knows how we will get there,

But we know we will.

It will be hard, we know,

And the road will be muddy and rough,

But we'll get there,

Heaven knows how we will get there,

But we know we will.

Woyaya, woyaya, woyaya, woyaya.