

The In Between Times

Small Group Resource for Young Adults

Diocese of Rochester



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Introduction

In my early twenties there was a period of five years when I changed addresses six times. I was quite good at fitting everything I owned into the back of a car. I knew where to get good packing boxes for free and how to shift through my belongings to determine what was so important that it was worthy of my trunk. There was a certain sense of excitement with each move. There were new possibilities, new neighbors, and new ways to configure my two pieces of furniture. But there was always a sense of dread as well. That time of my life was characterized by being unsettled, not only in my address but also in my vocation, my education, and my relationships with family and friends. I often felt like I was constantly juggling bowling pins, throwing the pins up in the air relentlessly and never being able to hold onto one for long. More than once I longed to have a least one thing in my life that was stable and secure.

I learned a great deal about my faith and myself during those years. It took time for me to see my faith as a stable foundation. My understanding of my beliefs and my community was changing rapidly, and sometimes I viewed that growth as one more “unsettled” part of my life. Instead, the desire to constantly grow in my faith became the very stability I sought. It connected my faith to each new, changing aspect of my life and provided a framework for me to integrate my understanding of who God was calling me to become.

Young Adults and Times of Transition

As disciples of Christ we are all in a kind of “in between time,” living and loving in the Kingdom of God begun by Jesus, while we also wait for Him to come again (*Catechism, paragraph 671*). We are called to be a part of bringing about the fullness of the Kingdom through our lives on earth, and sharing the Good News with all those who God places in our paths. Although all of us, then, are in a time of “transition” between the first and second coming of our Lord, the young adult years, from 18 – 40, can be times of transition in very concentrated and particular ways.

Certainly the experience of physically moving is common during these years as education and career changes require new locations. Relationships are often in transition as well. As a young adult becomes more independent, his or her relationship with parents can become strained, or simply changed in unexpected ways. Childhood friends, also in their own times of transition, can be separated by miles as well as by new interests. Discerning a religious vocation or a call to marriage, or the joyful addition of children to a family, can add entirely new dimensions to all aspects of a young adult’s life. Learning to embrace times of transition in our lives is an important part of becoming a whole and holy person. Recognizing God in those times of uncertainty can be a challenge, but one that can be faced together by all of the People of God.

The second movement of *Spirit Alive!* Spiritual Renewal in the Diocese of Rochester, calls us to nourish our relationship with Jesus Christ by deepening our knowledge and love of Scripture. This resource will use passages from the Gospel of Mark, which is the primary gospel proclaimed in this liturgical year from November 30, 2008 to November 22, 2009 and which is also the gospel used for *The Mark Project*. The gospel was the earliest one written, and has an almost breathless pace to it. It is often direct, almost blunt, in its description of the life, death and

resurrection of our Lord. It can be a challenging gospel to read, but it also seems to be an appropriate one for exploring times of uncertainty, which can also seem breathless and blunt!

This resource will explore the wisdom found in Jesus' life and teachings about living as a disciple during times of change through five sessions. It is geared towards young adults, but could be used by anyone. The first session looks at the change in Jesus' relationship with his own family. The second session explores a time of anxiety for the disciples of Jesus while at sea. The third session looks at how the disciples respond to the unexpected description of the passion. The fourth session explores Jesus' teaching on becoming childlike and how that can help in times of change. The fifth session looks at how Jesus himself embraces God's will in the midst of the uncertain.

Each session includes four sections:

Read	A scripture passage is given
Reflect	A brief reflection is offered
Respond	Questions for discussion are given
Represent	Ideas are offered for how to give witness to the Good News as disciples in the world

These sessions can be used as a **small group resource**, or use as part of individual **spiritual journaling**.

Small Group Resource:

Small group faith sharing can be an enriching experience. To ensure that everyone in the group enjoys the sessions, a leader should be designated (this can be the same person for all sessions or rotate from session to session). The leader's role is to create a hospitable environment, help make introductions between participants, maintain the ground rules, invite participants to be readers, keep the conversation moving, and be sure that no one person monopolizes the sharing.

It might be helpful to try "mutual invitation" as a way to welcome people into sharing. In mutual invitation, the first person volunteers to share, then invites someone who has not spoken to share next. That person then invites the next person, and so on. If at any time someone does not want to share they may "pass," and invite someone else.

Before beginning, participants should agree on ground rules for their conversation. Some examples include:

- make it clear that conversations are not considered confidential, unless the whole group would like to make that a ground rule

- no one is required to share and everyone should share only at the level they feel comfortable
- no one should criticize the opinions of others by using derogatory comments. Participants can certainly disagree with others in the group, but should do so by focusing on their own perspectives and not by demeaning others.
- commit to all sessions and to be on time
- commit to ending on time

Other ground rules can be decided upon at the first session by all of the participants.

Spiritual Journaling:

This resource can also be a source for individual spiritual journaling. Spiritual journaling is more than a daily log of the events in your life. It is an opportunity to focus in a particular way on God's presence in your life, where you are being called to grow as a disciple, and discern how moments in your spiritual life are connected. It might include where you saw God in your day, scripture passages that touch your heart in a particular way, prayers that you hold for yourself or others, etc. This resource, for example, could serve as the foundation for spiritual journaling over the period of five weeks.

To begin journaling use the opening prayer offered, or say a prayer for guidance and insight. Use the "respond" questions as the starting point for your journal entry. Be sure to include how you "represented" the Good News since your last entry. At the end of the last session, consider doing a "summary" entry. Share your insights with friends or family.

Session One: All in the Family

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, Son of God,
as we seek your face in the faces of those we love,
we ask for your blessing and your Spirit
that we may come to know you better.

We pray this in your name and through your Spirit. Amen.

Read *Mark 3:31 - 35*

His mother and his brothers arrived. Standing outside they sent word to him and called him. A crowd seated around him told him, "Your mother and your brothers (and your sisters) are outside asking for you." But he said to them in reply, "Who are my mother and (my) brothers?" And looking around at those seated in the circle he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. (For) whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

Reflect

Ouch! Jesus' words about his family here seem pretty harsh! It's important to remember a few things before discussing the passage. First, we must recognize that as a faithful Jew Jesus fully lived the fourth commandment, to honor his mother and father (*Catechism*, 532). This commandment is not just addressed to children, but also, and primarily, to adults who are called to honor their parents until death. Second, Jesus' remark about his mother and brothers¹ is not meant to disown them. Certainly his family continued to be a part of his earthly life throughout the gospel accounts and into the Acts of the Apostles.

So what then can we make of this passage? In Jesus' adult years, as he sought to live out his vocation in the world, he needed to redefine his relationships. He certainly continued his relationships with his family. However, his changing role

¹ Passages such as this one, which refer to Jesus' brothers, can be confusing in light of the Catholic teaching that Mary was "ever virgin." The words "brothers" here is translated from the Greek word *adelphos*, which can have a broader meaning, such as half-brothers or cousins. (see the *Catechism*, paragraph 500 for more).

in his ministry made it necessary to broaden his understanding of himself and others. Jesus entered into a new relationship with others, and as he grew in his ministry that needed to be spoken and acknowledged.

With each new transition in life, young adults must sort out the implications, on us and on our relationships. In order for relationships to grow, they must continue to evolve as the people within them change. Sometimes that means speaking with each other about how our lives have changed and what that might mean to our families and friends.

Respond

How have the transitions in your life changed your relationships with your family?

How have they changed the relationships with your friends?

Have you been able to speak with those you love about those changes? Has that been helpful? Are there things that still need to be said?

Represent

The theme of this session is on transitions and our changing relationships with family and friends. In light of this theme, consider “representing” the Good News in the world by:

- Acting as a bridge for communication between generations in your family or with your friends
- Volunteering with families in crisis transitions, through organizations like the American Red Cross.
- Introducing yourself to new neighbors, or others in transition, and helping them connect with your community

How else could you share the Good News in the world?

Closing Prayer

Holy Spirit, Loving Spirit of God, Spirit of Christ,
Touch our Hearts

Lead us, Guide us, Refresh us, Heal us, Forgive us,
Give us new life.

We make this prayer for ourselves and all the people of our Diocese

Be with us in these months with your life, your love and your encouragement.

Holy Spirit, Touch us, Be with us Always.

We pray, through Christ, our Lord.

Amen.

Prayer for Spirit Alive!

Spiritual Renewal in the Diocese of Rochester



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Session Two: Riding the Waves

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, Prince of Peace,
help us to know you
and to accept the strength and courage
that you offer to us in times of need.

We pray this in your name and through your Spirit. Amen.

Before you begin with this session's reading, take a moment to discuss how you "represented" the Good News in the world since the last session.

Read Mark 4: 35 - 41

On that day, as evening drew on, he said to them, "Let us cross to the other side." Leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat just as he was. And other boats were with him. A violent squall came up and waves were breaking over the boat, so that it was already filling up. Jesus was in the stern, asleep on a cushion. They woke him and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" He woke up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Quiet! Be still!" The wind ceased and there was great calm. Then he asked them, "Why are you terrified? Do you not yet have faith?" They were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this whom even wind and sea obey?"

Reflect

In the Gospel of Mark the disciples regularly "don't get it" about Jesus. Even through to the end of the gospel, after the resurrection, the disciples are regularly described as fearful or afraid. In this passage the disciples are full of anxiety about the storm that surrounds them. It comes well after Jesus has performed numerous healings and spent great lengths of time teaching the disciples. Yet when a moment of turbulence arises, the disciples are once again afraid and call upon Jesus, implying that he does not care for them.

How familiar this sounds! Often when we are in our own turbulent times we can feel anxious and doubtful, unsure if we are truly loved by God. Transitions can feel like a storm around us, unpredictable and dangerous. Our faith can be deeply

challenged by these moments (sometimes long stretches) of uncertainty. The disciples in some ways offer us a bit of comfort. Even they, who had spent so much time with Jesus, were not immune to times of anxiety and fear. Anxiety is a natural response to the uncertain. But Jesus does not tell them they can no longer follow him because of their fears. He continues to teach them, to challenge them, and to comfort and love them. Jesus offers the hope that comes from relationship with God.

As Catholics we believe that the Spirit of God, sent by Christ, transforms us and strengthens us as we lead a life of mission (*United States Catholic Catechism for Adults, p. 103*). To be transformed does not mean that we will stop feeling fear and anxiety during times of uncertainty, but it does broaden our horizons and helps us see the “big picture.” Instead of moments of despair, our transitions can become particular times of intensity when we encounter our Lord in a new way. Our transitions can inspire us to ask the question “Who then is this...” as we explore our relationship with Jesus.

Respond

How do you deal with times of transition or anxiety?

How have your transitions helped you understand something new about Jesus and your relationship with him?

How can being a part of a community of believers help during times of uncertainty?

Represent

This session looks at the reality of anxiety and fear during times of transition, with the hope made possible in Christ. Consider “representing” the Good News in the world by:

- Offering the space and time to listen to others who are struggling with fear and anxiety
- Mentoring those who are going through a transition that you have gotten through successfully
- Volunteering in your community with agencies like Catholic Charities, which supports people in many ways in times of uncertainty

How else could you share the Good News in the world?

Closing Prayer

Holy Spirit, Loving Spirit of God, Spirit of Christ,
Touch our Hearts
Lead us, Guide us, Refresh us, Heal us, Forgive us,
Give us new life.

We make this prayer for ourselves and all the people of our Diocese
Be with us in these months with your life, your love and your encouragement.
Holy Spirit, Touch us, Be with us Always.
We pray, through Christ, our Lord.

Amen.

Prayer for Spirit Alive!
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Session Three: This is Not the Plan

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, Redeemer of the world,
open our minds, our lips and our hearts,
that we may proclaim your goodness
to the entire world.

We ask this in your name and through your Spirit. Amen.

Before you begin with this session's reading, take a moment to discuss how you "represented" the Good News in the world since the last session.

Read Mark 8: 27 - 33

Now Jesus and his disciples set out for the villages of Caesarea Philippi. Along the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" They said in reply, "John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others one of the prophets." And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter said to him in reply, "You are the Messiah." Then he warned them not to tell anyone about him. He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and rise after three days. He spoke this openly. Then Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. At this he turned around and, looking at his disciples, rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do."

Reflect

Poor Peter. He started off so well in this passage! There seems to be no hesitation on Peter's part when Jesus asks his question. Peter is ready to call Jesus the Messiah, the Anointed One. But in Jesus' time the Messiah was often thought of as a political king, who would lead Israel into glory as a leader in the world (*Catechism, 439, 440*). Jesus offers a new understanding of what the Messiah means, one that is revealed through the cross.

This is definitely not the Messiah that Peter, or any of the disciples, planned on or expected! Jesus' rebuke of Peter, calling him Satan, recalls earlier depictions of

Satan tempting Jesus in the desert to become an earthly king (*see Matthew 4:8-11*). It is a kind of temptation again for Jesus, and he uses it to challenge his followers to broaden their thinking about the Messiah and about God. Though again his words seem harsh, the message is one of breaking out of old ways of thinking in order to be open to something all together different and wonderful. There is more to salvation than what they expected, or what they could even imagine!

As young adults enter into new transitions and changes, we often have our own ideas of how things are going to unfold. But life, and God, is full of surprises! Sometimes, like Peter, it can be difficult for us to let go of our expectations and plans. Yet Jesus calls us to be open to the possibility that there is more in our future than just our own plans. There is, in fact, more than we can even imagine! But to see that requires letting go a bit and trying to see as God sees.

Respond

What has been your plan for this time in your life? Has it changed over time?

How has your discipleship changed how you approach surprises in your plan?

What is God calling you to let go of in this time of your life?

Represent

This session looks at our need to let go of some of our expectations in order to be open to God's surprises and changes in our plans. Consider "representing" the Good News in the world by:

- Opening your life to surprises by putting yourself in situations where people are different than you: go to a cultural festival, walk through the public market, or invite someone to dinner who you ordinarily wouldn't invite.
- Trying stretching outside of your comfort zone by volunteering at a shelter or outreach center where people come in with a variety of needs that cannot always be anticipated.
- Invite someone on a walk in a new neighborhood or park and talk about what each of you sees. How do your experiences change what you see compared to your companion?

How else could you share the Good News in the world?

Closing Prayer

Holy Spirit, Loving Spirit of God, Spirit of Christ,
Touch our Hearts

Lead us, Guide us, Refresh us, Heal us, Forgive us,
Give us new life.

We make this prayer for ourselves and all the people of our Diocese

Be with us in these months with your life, your love and your encouragement.

Holy Spirit, Touch us, Be with us Always.

We pray, through Christ, our Lord.

Amen.

Prayer for Spirit Alive!

Spiritual Renewal in the Diocese of Rochester



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Session Four: Simplicity

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, our Messiah,
help us to love like a child of God,
and to live each moment
open to your grace.

We pray this in your name and through your Spirit. Amen.

Before you begin with this session's reading, take a moment to discuss how you "represented" the Good News in the world since the last session.

Read Mark 10: 13 - 16

And people were bringing children to him that he might touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this he became indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not prevent them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Amen, I say to you, whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it." Then he embraced them and blessed them, placing his hands on them.

Reflect

Anyone who has spent time around children can speak to the reasons why Jesus' saying in this passage makes so much sense. There is a certain purity of delight that children possess that comes from their ability to live in the moment and rejoice in the simple wonder of creation. Jesus isn't telling his disciples that they must be childish, or never question anything in their world. In fact, children are *constantly* asking questions because of their natural curiosity! But Jesus is calling his followers to be child-like, open to awe and joy, questioning with an open heart, and able to see God in the simple pleasures of life.

During times of transition becoming child like in this way can be a blessing. Being child like calls us to simplicity of living that can help us stay focused on the joy that surrounds us. We certainly can, and must, continue to question and seek

through our times of change and uncertainty, but simplifying our world can help to develop gratitude for the moments of grace that do abound.

Living a life of simplicity can also help to prioritize what is important to us. A certain amount of healthy detachment from the consumer driven, materialistic society in which we live can help us find the path to happiness (*United States Catechism for Adults, pg. 449*).

Respond

What does becoming child like mean to you?

What are some things that complicate your life right now?

How are you being called to simplify your life?

Represent

This session looks at the gift of living simply, especially during times of transition. Consider “representing” the Good News in the world by:

- Declaring a techno-fast for a week to see how technology has impacted your life. Are there ways of changing your use of technology that might simplify your life?
- Keeping a journal of how you spend your time or your money in the course of a week. Are there changes you could make?
- Volunteering with your parish faith formation so that you can learn to live with the heart of a child.

How else could you share the Good News in the world?

Closing Prayer

Holy Spirit, Loving Spirit of God, Spirit of Christ,
Touch our Hearts
Lead us, Guide us, Refresh us, Heal us, Forgive us,
Give us new life.

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Be with us in these months with your life, your love and your encouragement.
Holy Spirit, Touch us, Be with us Always.
We pray, through Christ, our Lord.

Amen.

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Session Five: In Between Times

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, bearer of the Kingdom,
help us to trust as you trusted
and grant us the strength to carry on
through our own in between times.

We pray this in your name and through your Spirit. Amen.

Before you begin with this session's reading, take a moment to discuss how you "represented" the Good News in the world since the last session.

Read Mark 14: 32 – 36

Then they came to a place named Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." He took with him Peter, James, and John, and began to be troubled and distressed. Then he said to them, "My soul is sorrowful even to death. Remain here and keep watch." He advanced a little and fell to the ground and prayed that if it were possible the hour might pass by him; he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible to you. Take this cup away from me, but not what I will but what you will."

Reflect

It may seem strange that our last session has as its scripture the agony in the garden. Why not the resurrection? As Catholics we believe that Jesus rose from the dead; that through his death we have been set free from sin and through his resurrection new life has been opened to us (*Catechism, 654*). This truth offers us great hope, especially during times of transition and uncertainty. However, it is important to recognize that even as a people of hope, transitions can be difficult. Struggling with the unknown is not easy for anyone, even Jesus.

In the garden Jesus probably doesn't know exactly how the next few hours of his life will unfold, but he knows enough of the events surrounding his ministry that his death is coming. He even asks God that, if possible, he might be spared.

Underlying all of his prayer, however, is the final statement of trust: not what I will, but what God wills.

Times of transition and uncertainty can seem like moments of death for us, and indeed sometimes we are called to die in some way – to our expectations, to our sense of total control, to our pride. During those moments our own “resurrections” (when there is resolution to the uncertainty, when there is some sense of contentment) can seem very far off. Jesus, in his prayer to his Father, shows how fully he understands our struggles. He can walk with us because he knows our fears. We know that our “resurrections” are coming, and that eventually there will be a time of peace for us. Until then, we can find comfort in our Lord and our community, as we help each other to persevere.

Respond

What helps you through your times of transition?

What does resurrection mean for you during time of change?

How do you persevere and find strength in your in between times?

Represent

This session looks at living in trust through our in between times. Consider “representing” the Good News in the world by:

- Intentionally asking people at work or at home who are in times of transition how they are and how you might support them
- Volunteering at a half-way home or with an organization that assists those who have recently left prison
- Starting a support network in your community or online where people can speak about their transitions and pray for each other

How else could you share the Good News in the world?

Closing Prayer

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Touch our Hearts
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Give us new life.

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