

Executive Summary

The Middle Project prepares ethical leaders for a just society. It is an institute that convenes leaders from many disciplines, professions, and fields who are committed to pursuing the common good from a progressive perspective, motivated by a sense of justice and concern for those on the margins: the poor, the working poor, and those who are marginalized by race, class, or gender/sexual injustice.

The Middle Project unites progressive leaders who are ready for a revolutionary and prophetic way of using power, information, and resources to act locally and think globally to heal the human family. The Middle Project takes its strength and approach from the progressive faith traditions that have played a major role in this nation's greatest democratic achievements: the abolition of slavery, civil rights, universal suffrage, the anti-war movement. It seeks to use this strength to bring together in a common enterprise progressives, who have tended to work in independent silos of thought and action, to develop and support a network of scholars, practitioners, and leaders who are committed to, and capable of, creating and acting on a deeper understanding of what constitutes the common good.

The Middle Project provides:

Research that engages faculty in such fields as ethics, law, economics, education, health, political science, sociology, theology, community planning, and the media in scholarship that transforms these disciplines by breaking the frame of current thinking and reflecting the perspective of the marginalized.

Education and training through conferences for clergy and seminarians, a "leadership laboratory" for young people from many fields who are early in their careers, and a summer leadership camp for older adolescents — that through a combination of academic learning and direct engagement with issues affecting the marginalized will develop leaders' capacity to advance the cause of social justice in their congregations, communities, and places of work from a progressive perspective. These learning events will equip leaders in such competencies as:

- Leading with Vision for a Just Society
- Understanding Race, Culture, and the Dynamics of Power and Privilege
- Negotiating Difference and Conflict
- Understanding the Dynamics of Change
- Understanding Leadership Styles and Building a Team
- Exerting Ethical Leadership in the Public Square

Resources such as websites, articles, books, curricula, blogs, shared best practices, and other Internet tools that enable leaders to advocate effectively for a progressive social agenda.

Communications and networking activities that build relationships and share knowledge, ideas, and strategies, using a variety of communications vehicles. Networking progressive leaders and congregations will promote best practices and build over time a movement that shapes local and national policies that are ethical and just.

Every component of The Middle Project focuses on theological reflection from the perspective of the marginalized, the integration of progressive thinking from many disciplines, an interaction between scholarly exploration and on-the-ground experience and effort, the use of the arts and the building of networks and partnerships among diverse leaders who share a commitment to create a world in which the needs and strengths of all people are accorded equal respect and support.

The Middle Project is incubating in a progressive Christian community, Middle Collegiate Church, which for two decades has served as a laboratory and national model for the practice of inclusive, faith-based ethics. The diversity and inclusiveness of its membership, and its commitment to education and social action to achieve justice and reconciliation, are deeply-rooted principles that inform the creation and approach of The Middle Project. The Middle Project is led by a team that includes Middle Collegiate Church's Senior Minister, the Reverend Jacqueline Lewis, Ph.D.; the Reverend John Janka, consultant to congregations; and Associate Minister Tricia Sheffield, Ph.D. We are supported by advisors and partners from diverse fields who have helped shaped the purposes, approaches, pedagogy, and structure of this endeavor.



The Middle Project unites progressive leaders who are ready for a revolutionary and prophetic way of using power, information, and resources. It has the vision, commitment, and capacity to bring together the best of the academy with the best of grassroots wisdom to create — through relationships, research, education, advocacy, activism and the arts — a human resource pool that is poised to strengthen the infrastructure of a progressive religious and political movement.

Mission

The Middle Project prepares ethical leaders for a just society in which all people are welcomed and endowed with equal rights. We are an institute that convenes leaders from many disciplines, professions, and fields who are committed to the common good from a progressive perspective. Bound together in a multicultural, multiethnic, learning community, these leaders care deeply about the world, seek to expand their leadership effectiveness, and endeavor to understand complex social issues through the lens of generosity rather than greed, community building rather than divisive self-interest, reconciliation rather than alienation.

The Middle Project unites progressive leaders who are ready for a revolutionary and prophetic way of using power, information, and resources to act locally and think globally to heal the human family, to create The Beloved Community, and to advocate for those on the margins: the poor, the working poor, the diminishing middle class, and those who are marginalized by racial and gender/sexual injustice. The Middle Project is incubating in a progressive Christian community, Middle Collegiate Church, which believes faith should be a creative, life-fulfilling spiritual resource that supports the human quest for understanding, reconciliation, and the development of the common good. We bring together the best of the academy with the best of grassroots wisdom to create — through relationships, research, education, advocacy, activism and the arts — a human resource pool poised to strengthen the infrastructure of a progressive religious and political agenda.

The Middle Project's Vision

All human community functions on the basis of relationships and on how those personal relationships impact community life as a whole. This is the essence of the practice of politics. When politics is motivated by a powerful sense of justice and concern for those on the margins, it is our belief that the result is an approximation of the common good. When the practice of politics is essentially and fundamentally guided by the self-interest of those in power to protect their position, it is our belief that the first casualty is the common good. We believe that all of life is political — the personal and the public — and that each personal decision impacts the whole of humanity. Given the complexities of the moral and social issues facing this society and the world, it is clear that we can no longer advance human community through independent efforts in siloed categories of thought and action. It is essential that thoughtful, committed leaders join forces in interdisciplinary generativity, challenge the inherent injustice and ideological assumptions of current systems, and imagine innovations that break the frame of the *status quo*. Leaders need to be equipped with a core ethical commitment, with a theoretical understanding of justice tied to lived experience, and with practical competencies to effect meaningful change.

Informed by the fundamentals of a theology of liberation — the belief that God is on the side of the marginalized, the belief that truth is pursued in solidarity with the marginalized, and the belief in a holistic sense of healing — and deeply rooted in the hope that human beings can work together to heal the world, The Middle Project is an interdisciplinary learning community that creates a “value chain” from theological, philosophical, and ethical progressive foundations to the cultivation and equipping of leaders for social change. This is done through developing a deeper understanding and critical evaluation of the dynamics of social structures as containers for the *status quo*; research that creates a progressive political-religious discourse; the engagement of academics, activists, artists, clergy, and practitioners in a broad range of professions in mutual learning and in theological and philosophical reflection; advocacy and activism that take into account the plight of those on the margins of society; and the creation of a network of progressive leaders and institutions.

The Middle Project is a unique space in a publicly engaged congregation where academic research is translated into social justice and informs social action. It is a space where the pursuit of social justice by activists and practitioners informs and enriches academic research. It is a laboratory that forges new socio-political languages and concepts that cut across class boundaries and sexual orientations. It is multi-cultural, multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and interdisciplinary.

The Development of The Middle Project

Religion remains one of humankind's primary motivational forces and a viable source for transforming lives and systems. Any viable movement for change must harness religion's capacity to fuel action. In recent years, however, that capacity has been harnessed most successfully by conservative — at times fanatical — forces. One consequence of this is that religion is now often seen as a source of conflict to be managed rather than as a potential source of solutions.

Today we see the stirrings of a new religious and political landscape. Progressive Christianity, an undercurrent in U.S. religious history responsible for some of this nation's greatest democratic achievements, is re-emerging, as evidenced by the creation of organizations such as the Network of Spiritual Progressives and The Beatitude Society and by the research presented by Robert P. Jones in *Progressive & Religious: How Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, and Muslim Leaders Are Moving Beyond the Culture Wars and Transforming American Public Life*. Additionally, a new generation of evangelicals has begun to tackle traditionally progressive causes such as the eradication of poverty, increased access to HIV medications, and climate change. These stirrings represent an opening for the development of a progressive discourse that can alter the terms of religious and political debate. The development of such a discourse requires bringing together scholars and practitioners from many disciplines with religious leaders, politicians, media strategists, social activists, community organizers, and members of the marginalized communities themselves, to create a progressive understanding of the common good, and the strategies needed to achieve it.

The progressive movement, by its own assessment, has had difficulty organizing itself for unified effort in changing public policy to better address the needs of the poor and marginalized. It has also tended to limit itself to promoting changes in policy and practice that address a long list of social issues — health care, education, women's rights, economics, the media, community planning, criminal justice, LGBTI rights, and others — in siloed interest groups. While this work is good and necessary, the disparate voices of the progressive movement seem weakened in the absence of a unifying core of essential similarities. Progressives have, moreover, been largely unable to bring together the academic with the practitioner, the ethicist and theologian with the corporate world, the grassroots activist with the theorist.

The Middle Project has been created to address these challenges by (a) equipping progressive leaders in faith communities and secular organizations with the competencies necessary to affect deep change, (b) facilitating the development of relational learning networks that cut across silos and create a web of influence to promote the common good from a progressive perspective, and (c) conducting research that informs advocacy and activism to advance a progressive social agenda. Standing on neutral territory, in no particular silo, and girded by a thriving, progressive congregation, The Middle Project provides a structure and an approach through which progressive leaders from many fields can access their own theo-ethics and commitment to a progressive social agenda as a powerful resource for social change.

Progressive faith communities have been at the forefront of every progressive cause in this nation's history. Essentially, a progressive faith community is one committed to compassion, mercy, and social and political transformation so as to more fully embody the values of justice, equity, full inclusion, equal rights, and access to power by even the most disadvantaged of the society. A progressive religious orientation has an emphasis on social justice, a rigorous and critical engagement with tradition, and a belief in the unity of all humanity. Progressive religion has little stake in the *status quo* and thus can move in the world differently from a university, seminary, or purely secular think tank or institute.

A more progressive expression of the Christian faith recognizes life's complexities, affirms the search for truth as a life-long process, and is committed to behaving the hope for which the human spirit longs. It is this progressive Christian faith that has been at the forefront of such movements as the abolition of slavery, workers' rights,

universal suffrage, civil rights, the anti-war movement, the war on poverty, gay equality, and the protection of the environment. It is this story that stands alongside, and is distinctly different from, the conservative, evangelical, and/or fundamentalist story of Christianity in this country. For more than two decades, Middle Church has been a laboratory for the practice of inclusive, progressive, faith-based ethics and politics, where not only new knowledge, but also a new way of knowing, is created. Rooted in Christian tradition as the oldest continuous Protestant Church in North America, Middle Church is a culturally and racially diverse, inclusive community of faith, committed not only to celebrative, artistic, hope-filled, community-building, truth-telling worship which casts the gospel as a source of social transformation, but also to education and social action for the purpose of justice and reconciliation. We believe that the culture and ethic unique to Middle Church and core to the “DNA” of the Middle Project gives it a strong position in the progressive universe. Middle Church is a national leader in training clergy for ministry in multicultural/multiracial congregations, in organizing Gulf Coast relief efforts, and in caring for the marginalized in its home base in New York City’s East Village. It is unique in the broad diversity of its members and in the radical inclusiveness of its message — a place where African Americans, Latinos and Latinas, whites, Asians, straight folk, gay folk, transgender folk, artists, academics, yuppies, agnostics, atheists, the wealthy, and the homeless successfully, consistently, and prayerfully come together in community to celebrate a shared humanity and a commitment to social justice. Middle Church has a history of fostering learning communities through a rigorous adult education program, conferences on worship and the arts for seminarians, convocations for laity in the LGBTI community, and leadership training summits on human sexuality, race, the spirituality of leadership, and advocacy for the common good. This commitment to be a teaching/learning community has led to three successful national conferences for clergy and other congregational leaders in multiracial/multicultural congregations that have focused on leadership development and worship as tools to form congregations ready to work for social justice and reconciliation.

The Middle Project inherits strong leadership from Middle Church. The Reverend Jacqueline J. Lewis, Ph.D., Middle Church’s charismatic visionary Senior Minister, is acting Executive Director of The Middle Project. She is a nationally recognized speaker and professor on developing multiracial/multicultural congregations and the author of *The Power of Story: A Guide for Leaders in Multiracial/Multicultural Congregations* (Abingdon, 2007). The Reverend John Janka, Project Consultant, is a member of Middle Church and an ordained United Methodist Clergy with more than 35 years of experience in training leaders, developing curricular materials, teaching on developing multiracial congregations, and managing change. Tricia Sheffield, Ph.D., is Associate Minister at Middle Church and Research Consultant to The Middle Project. Dr. Sheffield is a published author and university professor in the field of religion and gender theory.

In December 2008, 24 leaders — theologians, seminary presidents, sociologists, researchers, political activists, funders, prominent clergy, and heads of grassroots community organizations — were convened by Dr. Ivan Petrella and our staff for a summit, “A Bridge to Somewhere: Building a Progressive Think/Act Tank,” to review and critique the planning document for The Middle Project and to affirm the need for such an institute (see [Appendix E](#) for a list of participants). These leaders represented the vast array of organizations that are currently working to move a progressive agenda forward. The gathered participants unanimously affirmed a unique role for The Middle Project in shaping a progressive agenda, in part because of its incubation in a thriving multiracial, multicultural, multiclass congregation that is committed both to personal spiritual development and to social justice as a spiritual discipline.

This summit, our ongoing research into the complementary and competitive universe, our continued networking with summit participants, and additional focused conversations with clergy, seminarians, emerging young leaders in many fields, and funders have led us to clarify our entry point in the movement: The “product” we bring to the table is a network of prophetic leaders from many professions and disciplines resourced with outstanding research informed by the perspective of the marginalized. We are ready to take the next steps to make this vision a reality. Through relationships, research, education, advocacy and activism, The Middle Project will create a human resource pool that is poised to strengthen the infrastructure of a progressive religious and political movement.

Overview of Middle Project Goals and Activities

The Middle Project prepares ethical leaders for a just society. We are an institute that convenes leaders from many disciplines and fields who are committed to the common good from a progressive perspective.

The Middle Project seeks to:

- Transform academic disciplines, professional fields, and public discourse to reflect the perspective of the marginalized.
- Forge a progressive political-religious discourse within the United States and across the globe.
- Draw from the best humanistic and social science research to develop responses to issues posed by globalization, class, racism, sexism, and violence.
- Populate the world of ideas with alternatives to the *status quo*.
- Build a broad-based network of progressive congregational leaders, young people in a range of fields who are early in their careers, and youth who are committed to addressing social justice issues as part of their work and who possess the competencies necessary to do so.
- Create a wealth of resources — including an interactive website, publications, and research — that enable community leaders, politicians, and activists to advocate effectively for a progressive social agenda.

The Middle Project comprises five principal components:

- Research: The Middle Project will engage faculty fellows — both resident and virtual — in research that places the perspective of those at the margins at the center of corporate and community ethics, addressing such issues as economics, education, health care, the media, community planning, and the legal system.
- Resource development: The Middle Project will develop diverse resources — a website, articles, books, curricula, blogs, and other Internet tools — that shift public discourse and action to reflect and respect the perspective of the marginalized.
- Education and training: The Middle Project will convene conferences, long-term programs, and summer educational activities for several cohorts — clergy, older adolescents, and younger people from many fields who are in the early stages of their careers — that build their understanding of contemporary issues from the perspective of the marginalized and their capacity to advance the cause of social justice in their congregations, communities, and places of work. The Middle Project's educational offerings combine academic learning with direct engagement with marginalized groups and individuals in experiential educational settings.
- Theological and Ethical reflection: The Middle Project will encourage leaders to engage their own theo-ethics in dialog with various theological traditions as a resource for enacting a progressive agenda.
- Communications and Networking: The Middle Project will infuse an emphasis on building relationships and on sharing knowledge, ideas, and strategies in each component, using a variety of communications vehicles and social networks, in order to create a broad-based web of progressive leadership.

Every facet of The Middle Project reflects a focus on the perspective of the marginalized, the integration of progressive thinking from many disciplines, an infusion of the arts in our learning and praxis, and an interaction between scholarly exploration and real-life, “on the ground” experience and effort.

Research and Resources for Change

The Middle Project provides a space where faculty fellows undertake research that transforms such disciplines as ethics, law, economics, political science, sociology, and theology to reflect the perspective of the marginalized: the poor, the working poor, the diminishing middle class and those marginalized by racial and gender/sexual injustice. No discipline possesses a neutral framework of analysis, and each usually encounters the world with a set of preconceptions that are biased toward the wealthy. Redirecting academic research to reflect the perspective of the marginalized will give activists and decision-makers more effective tools to bring about social and political change.

In the field of health care, for example, Dr. Paul Farmer, anthropologist, founder of Partners in Health, and the newly named Chair of Harvard Medical School's Department of Global Health and Social Medicine, argues for such a transformation in thinking in his critique of medical ethics:

What is defined these days as an ethical issue? End-of-life decisions, questions of brain death and organ transplantation, and medical disclosure issues dominate the published literature. The question, "When is life worth preserving?" is asked largely of lives one click of the switch away from extinction, lives wholly at the mercy of the technology that works to preserve some. The countless people whose life is shortened by unequal access to health care are not topics of discussion (*Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights and the New War on the Poor*, 2003).

Farmer argues that medical ethics, as taught in the curriculum of medical schools throughout the United States, is implicitly built around the concerns of the few and the wealthy. Given this framework and the power academic experts possess to shape public policy; it comes as no surprise that millions wallow in inadequate — or nonexistent — health care. Farmer took a discipline that deemed itself neutral in perspective, showed that the discipline in fact was based on the perspective of the wealthy — i.e., those with access to cutting-edge health care technology — and recast the discipline from the standpoint of those lacking such access. From this new perspective, unequal access to health care is an ethical issue to which the standard medical ethics curriculum is blind. Such a shift in perspective can and must be made in many disciplines including economics, law, political science, sociology, ethics, and theology. We recognize that if academic disciplines have hope of transforming the world, they must first be transformed, as well.

Middle Project fellows, some in physical residence and others in virtual residence, will work for such transformation. All will engage in research and serve as faculty in our clergy conferences, our Leadership Laboratory, and our programs to train youth leaders.

As an example, Dr. Robert P. Jones will be a faculty fellow whose research will shape the curricula for the Leadership Laboratory. He will also serve as a faculty member in the program. A leading scholar and pollster in both the academy and in public policy arenas, Dr. Jones is president and founder of Public Religion Research. He is the author of numerous articles and two books on religion and public life, including his recent book, *Progressive & Religious: How Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, and Muslim Leaders Are Moving Beyond the Culture Wars and Transforming American Public Life*. Dr. Jones holds a Ph.D. in religion from Emory University, where he specialized in religion, social ethics, and politics, and a M.Div. from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Beginning in January 2010, Dr. Jones will undertake a foundational ethnographic study of emerging leaders — Christian, Jewish, and Muslim clergy as well as secular professionals in the fields of law, economics, sociology, economics, banking, social policy, education, and the media — who identify as politically, socially, and religiously progressive and who integrate their faith into their work. His study will explore the world view these young leaders bring to their work and identify the "vocabulary" they invoke in the course of their work. This initial ethnographic mapping should provide a window into a worldview that The Middle Project wants to uphold and foster, and may also identify places where the connections between religion and social justice need to be strengthened. How do these emerging leaders think and talk about their faith? What sustains them as they make decisions in the marketplace that promote the common good? Where do they encounter conflict and difficulty? Where does their faith fail to connect? What resources can The Middle Project offer them as they advocate for the common good? Dr. Jones will collaborate with Middle Project leadership in developing criteria for identifying participating leaders. His findings will be presented in a paper that will be delivered at The Middle Project's conference for clergy, "The Leading Edge: A National Conference for Leaders Committed to a Multicultural/Multiracial Future," in April 2010.

Dr. Traci West will be a Middle Project faculty fellow whose research will also help shape the "Leading Edge" conference for clergy. Dr. West is Associate Professor of Ethics and African American Studies at Drew University and the author of *Wounds of the Spirit: Black Women, Violence and Resistance Ethics* and *Disruptive Christian Ethics: When Racism and Women's Lives Matter*. Professor West's ongoing research on the role Christian ethics plays in disrupting the *status quo* will shape her plenary at the conference. Her engagement with interviewees on the margins informs her research and methodology. Her interaction with the clergy and seminarians at the conference will provide an opportunity for further research.

The Middle Project will draw additional research fellows and teaching faculty from universities and seminaries in New York City with which it maintains established relationships, such as Columbia University, New York University, Union Theological Seminary, Auburn Theological Seminary, and New York Theological Seminary.

Anticipated products of Middle Project faculty research include:

- Position papers, syllabi, training designs, and curricular materials that build competencies for a progressive social agenda
- New texts representative of the cross-disciplinary, multi-cultural/multi-racial, on-the-border global reality in which we live
- New models, methodologies, and strategies for building a more just society that realizes a greater common good
- Internet-based and social networking tools for disseminating new learning.

Education and Capacity Building for Change

A core purpose of The Middle Project is to build the capacity of progressive leaders by providing opportunities for them to come together in learning communities through which they can deepen their understanding of the issues and develop their competencies through contact with experts in many disciplines, with those who experience marginalization first-hand, and with one another. Toward this end, The Middle Project will offer programs that bring emerging leaders together to enrich their understanding of issues and approaches through academic explorations founded on the best current research and teaching, coupled with experiential activities that engage them in real-world challenges in the community.

The Middle Project will build progressive leaders' knowledge and competency through programs tailored to the needs of several cohorts: clergy serving congregations; seminarians; young professionals in such fields as education, law, media, sociology, urban planning, economics, community organizing, and banking and finance; and older adolescents. These programs will train congregational leaders to equip members of their congregations to work and live informed by the ethics of social justice; equip young people who are early in their careers to access their own ethical core values as a resource for decision making in the marketplace and advocating for the common good; and build the capacity of older adolescents to lead their generation in working for change.

The Middle Project's educational programs will address six key elements of leadership competency:

- Leading with vision for a just society
- Understanding race, culture, and the dynamics of power and privilege
- Negotiating difference and conflict
- Understanding the dynamics of change
- Leadership styles and building the team
- Exerting ethical leadership in the public square

The work of Gloria Anzaldua, Peter Block, Daniel Goleman, Ronald Heifetz, Robert Jones, John Kotter, Ivan Petrella, Kevin Phillips, Cornel West, and Traci West, among others, substantiates these capacities as essential for effective, visionary, and progressive leadership.

The curricula will be tailored to each cohort in content and delivery, led by subject-area experts who are familiar with experiential learning techniques. Each program will serve as an active learning laboratory which emphasizes collaboration, learning that builds on and creates new learning, and the development of a model for building leadership competencies that is replicable within, and transferable to, other settings.

Each participant will be part of a learning community. Working in teams, participants will process the learning experience and design projects that apply and test what they have learned, in a hands-on manner, to address real issues in the laboratory setting of New York City's East Village — issues such as housing, homelessness, youth issues, welfare, legal justice, education, access to health care, or the needs of single parents.

Each participant in The Middle Project's educational and training programs will be expected to:

- Become familiar with current literature related to each area of focus
- Conduct research related to a social justice issue of their choosing
- Use what they have learned to create a plan to address a justice issue in their own setting
- Work in a team with others in the program
- Receive coaching in the implementation of learning in their setting
- Provide feedback and evaluation of the training model

The Middle Project will offer three major educational programs in 2010–2012:

The Annual Conference for Progressive Clergy, Seminarians, and Congregational Leaders

The Leading Edge: A National Conference for Leaders Committed to a Multicultural/Multiracial Future

April 2010

Building on the success of three annual national conferences for leadership in multicultural congregations at the Middle Church, The Middle Project will assume responsibility for these three-day conferences for clergy, seminarians, and other congregational leaders. The conferences educate and equip leaders with practical tools for growing and sustaining prophetic, inclusive, and just communities in which congregants rehearse a vision for a just society and the common good.

The conference curriculum focuses on deepening participants' understanding of systems and on developing their abilities to teach competencies to congregational leaders; create a vision for a just society; lead change; manage conflict, difference, and resistance; embrace and navigate cultural diversity; access current literature and resources; and impact the discourse in the public square.

Appendix A provides an outline of the core components these conferences address

Appendix B provides the design of the April 2010 conference

Leadership Laboratory

January 2011–January 2013

Convening 20–25 young leaders from many fields and settings in a culturally diverse learning community, the Leadership Laboratory will encourage and equip them to use their own spiritual and ethical commitments as a resource to transform institutions and influence decision-making in the marketplace, as well as building their capacity to navigate an increasingly multicultural, multiethnic world. These young people will represent a growing network of informed, progressive leaders from many fields who possess the necessary skills and tools to enhance their value in the workplace and make them assets for social change.

The young leaders who come together in the Leadership Laboratory represent a broad range of disciplines and occupations, but they share a deep faith and a commitment to the congregations in which they are active members — and, in many cases, leaders. Building their leadership capacities will strengthen not only these young men and women but also the faith communities of which they are a part by enabling them to guide these communities in understanding, and living, a more progressive understanding of the world.

The Leadership Laboratory will be conducted in three-day sessions held quarterly over a two-year period, with ongoing networking, research, and mentoring occurring between sessions. It will be led by in-house and virtual faculty in collaboration with experts drawn from the wider New York City area.

The Leadership Laboratory is designed to contribute to forging a generation of leaders who will possess, and can disseminate, a progressive understanding of social change, religion and politics. For this reason, it is far from a strictly academic enterprise. It includes an applied component in which academic pursuits are coupled with practical application of tactics and strategies. With the setting of the East Village of New York City as a backdrop,

participants will be given reflection/action assignments that require group cooperation and active engagement in the culturally, racially, and economically diverse community out of which Middle Church rises.

Appendix C contains an outline of the core components of the Leadership Laboratory.

Each learning component will present the work of an academic and a practitioner to provide the underpinnings as well as the “boots on the ground” possibilities of leadership capacities. As an example, during a workshop on “Dynamics of Change,” students will learn theories presented by John Kotter and others and participate in sessions of Geoffrey Canada’s Harlem Project.

By the conclusion of the program, participants will possess a multi-disciplinary theoretical basis for their emerging leadership styles as well as practical experience and expert mentoring that have contributed to the development of their leadership capabilities. Rather than work toward the idea of “graduating” from the Leadership Laboratory, participants will work individually with faculty mentors to document their growing leadership capacities in their places of work and in their communities. Our hope is that many participants will return to teach practical sessions at future Leadership Laboratories.

This interactive, interdisciplinary learning laboratory will provide young leaders with a deep understanding of complex social issues through the lens of generosity, community building and reconciliation. They will be mentored by the best in the academy, activist world, grassroots organizing community, social sciences, and media to inform them at each decision-making table.

Units of this curriculum will be designed and tested in 2009–2010.

Summer Leadership Camp for Youth

Summer 2011

The Middle Project will host 20 high school students in the summer of 2011 in a pilot program to train young leaders of promise for community service and activism from a progressive perspective. Offered in a summer camp style within an urban setting, the three-week program will engage participants in learning about and practicing such key components of leadership as listening and communicating, managing conflict and difference, and community organizing. Appendix D contains a general overview of the curriculum.

Reflecting the diversity of the East Village community, participants in the leadership camp will be young men and women who have shown their concern for the community through volunteer service in church or community groups and have been identified by teachers and mentors as demonstrating particular leadership potential. We will partner in this endeavor with two high schools and the Lower East Side Girls Club.

The program will follow an experiential approach that includes simulations, listening and communication exercises, and hands-on team projects in the local community. Interactive learning methodologies will include use of the visual arts, music, drama, and the media. The on-site program will be followed by long-term mentoring by youth leaders and adult volunteers from Middle Collegiate Church and the larger community.

Faculty for the program will be drawn from a diverse cadre of researcher-practitioners such as Paul Tough, *New York Times* editor and author of *Whatever It Takes: Geoffrey Canada’s Quest to Change Harlem and America* (2008); Dr. Emma Jordan-Simpson, Director of the New York Chapter of the Children’s Defense Fund; and Lyn Pentecost, Ph.D., an anthropologist who is the Executive Director of the Lower East Side Girls Club.

Dissemination and Replication

Because The Middle Project’s overarching goal is to build and advance a broad-based progressive movement that engages diverse leaders throughout the country, replication and dissemination of the knowledge, ideas, and strategies that emerge from the institute are critical to its success. We hope to use our developing relationships with academic, organizational, and philanthropic partners as vehicles to share and replicate what we have learned and what we have developed.

The Internet presents an extraordinary resource for disseminating information and mobilizing leaders around a more progressive agenda for change. We will explore and exploit the possibilities presented by modern technology to create an exponentially enlarging web of leaders who are engaged in spreading and advancing the ideas and approaches that emerge within The Middle Project.

Research undertaken by faculty fellows will be disseminated through publications, at conferences and other events that bring leaders together at Middle Church and across the country, and online through websites maintained by The Middle Project, by other progressive organizations, and by academic and other institutions, as well as through social and professional networking sites.

The educational components developed for the Leadership Laboratory and other Middle Project training programs will be continually assessed and refined with an eye toward producing “turn-key” curricula that can be readily adopted and adapted in a variety of settings. Particular consideration will be given to the way that conceptual learning can be integrated with experiential learning in cities across the country, using as a model the approach The Middle Project is implementing in New York City.

Participants in our educational programs will be encouraged and guided to engage in social networking with others within and outside of Middle Project programs.

Evaluation

Evaluation of The Middle Project will focus on both the process and the outcomes of the various components of the institute’s work. We will develop benchmarks and a methodology that involves The Middle Project’s leadership, its participants — faculty, students, and advisors — and independent evaluators in continual assessments that gauge how effectively the institute’s activities are building the desired competencies, shifting the tone of academic research and public discourse, and enlarging the universe of progressives who are learning about, and acting on, strategies that promote the common good.

Because the value of The Middle Project’s educational programs will rest in good part on the degree to which they are broadly replicable, evaluation and refinement of these programs will be a focus of attention, with an eye toward developing curricula that can be readily adapted for use by other institutions and in other settings.

Project Timeline

2009–2010	Development phase
January 2010	Research by faculty fellows begins
April 2010	Annual Clergy and Seminarian Conference
January 2011–January 2013	Leadership Laboratory
Summer 2011	Leadership Camp for Youth

Middle Project Leadership

The Middle Project is led by a three-member staff consisting of Middle Church’s Senior Minister, Dr. Jacqueline Lewis, the Rev. John Janka, and Dr. Tricia Sheffield. They are supported by a 12-member board of directors, currently the Middle Church consistory.

The staff is assisted by a 10-member interdisciplinary advisory board that includes Erica Hunt and Peter Teague (funders who advise on content), Macky Alston (a media professional), Robert Chase (the Executive Director of a nonprofit corporation), Christina Fleming (a media professional), Dean Hubbard (an activist and attorney), Dale Irvin (a seminary president), Robert Jones (a researcher), Mark Lewis Taylor (an activist and theologian), and Adriene Thorne (a minister and a 20 year professional in the performing arts).

Twenty nationally-recognized clergy and lay leaders and 11 young leaders from a variety of fields serve as additional consultants, particularly to our development of the education and training components.

Partnerships

The Middle Project relies on a foundation of multi-disciplinary sharing for the purposes of research, education, advocacy, and action. The development of partnerships with other institutions engaged in progressive work is therefore a priority. We seek to connect the best of the academy with the best practitioners of social change.

The Middle Project will:

- Network with faith communities to expand and deepen conversations on critical progressive concerns.
- Draw together leaders of progressive organizations and institutions for shared learning and strategy building on issues of common concern.
- Provide the theological framework that can infuse passion into other organizations' movements. We have the ability to transform this theology into philosophical and ethical language, which may make it more accessible to a secular world.
- Draw upon issue-specific research from partner organizations as resource material as we build leadership capacities.
- Share its leadership capacity building framework with other organizations and their constituents
- Mentor, and be mentored by, other organizations.

We are exploring partnerships with a number of complementary religious, secular, and philanthropic institutions, including:

- Auburn Media: Will collaborate with The Middle Project in training leaders to clarify their message through the use of media skills and video tools.
- Young People For: Will collaborate with The Middle Project in creating the Leadership Laboratory. We may draw 50 percent of the participants in the training cohort from this group.
- Intersections: Will work with The Middle Project to develop the youth component of our educational programming.
- Partner congregations across the United States: Will collaborate with The Middle Project in an ongoing learning community that prepares progressive clergy and interns for social justice.
- Judson Memorial Church and Intersections, International: Will collaborate with The Middle Project to develop a coalition of progressive clergy and interns for social justice within New York City.
- The Beatitudes Society: Will collaborate with The Middle Project in preparing educational programs and shared faculty for seminarians and clergy leaders.
- Progressive Christians United: Peter Laarman and other like-minded leaders of progressive religious institutions will partner with The Middle Project to help build a powerful national movement.

Conclusion

With our record of successful social justice, educational, and spiritual programs at Middle Collegiate Church, and the leadership and conviction provided by our staff and expert advisors, The Middle Project possesses the vision, commitment, and capacity to create an institution that can gather, build, and disseminate resources — including new leadership — to effect a national transformation that reflects and respects the perspective of the marginalized. Our multicultural, multiethnic, multi-vocal approach to ministry, our foundation in a progressive faith that believes that to be Christian is to affirm all faith traditions and our hopeful sense of humanity's ability to heal the world are strengths we bring to the progressive movement. We welcome, and would be grateful for, your support of and partnership in this endeavor.

APPENDIX A

The Annual Conference for Progressive Clergy, Seminarians, and Congregational Leaders

Core Components

1. **Leading with Vision for a Just Society**

This component will explore the theological and ethical framework for decision-making from the perspective of the marginalized and deal with the ethical dilemmas posed by competing values in complex systems.
2. **Understanding Narrative Leadership Theory: Using “Story” to Communicate Vision**

Recognizing that individuals, congregations, and places are texts, participants will learn and practice weaving their congregation’s story with the biblical and other holy narratives in order to communicate a vision for a just society. Review of case studies will be a part of this session.
3. **Structured Story-telling**

Participants will share their current congregational narrative and the “preferred future narrative” that is their goal.
4. **Deepening Understanding of Systemic Injustice and Congregational Ethics as Speaking Truth to Power**

Participants will engage in an analysis of systemic racism, classism, and gender injustice and explore the ways a progressive theo-ethics can empower congregations to address justice issues in public ministry.
5. **Worship through the Lens of Learning**

Worship will focus on congregations as instruments for justice.
6. **Understanding the Dynamics of Change**

Participants will examine the nature of change and explore tools to assess readiness for change in their context. They will create a change process that supports the emerging vision of the system.
7. **Managing Change and Embracing Conflict**

Using case studies they have brought from home, participants will be coached and will coach one another other in triads on a plan for change and a strategy for dealing with resistance and conflict.
8. **Leading Social Justice in the Public Square**

Participants will be challenged to explore their skills in the service of the common good, to explore a focus for social engagement, to apply a personal ethic to view social justice from the perspective of the marginalized, and to create an action plan that gathers information, organizes resources and people, and uses power constructively to create change.
9. **Leadership Styles and Building the Team**

Participants will examine concepts of group process, group decision-making and team building and explore leadership and communication styles and facilitation of multicultural groups and power sharing. Concepts like emotional and social intelligence will be explored.

APPENDIX C

The Middle Project Leadership Laboratory

Core Components

1. Leading with Vision for a Just Society

This component will explore the ethical and philosophical framework for decision-making from the perspective of the marginalized and deal with the ethical dilemmas posed by competing values in complex systems.

Participants will:

- Discuss case studies from their own professional settings.
- Engage in simulation experiences that challenge current norms.
- Deepen their understanding of systemic injustice.
- Read relevant current literature by ethicists, theologians, and philosophers.
- Understand narrative leadership theory, using “story” to communicate vision.

2. Understanding Race, Culture, and the Dynamics of Power and Privilege

This component will examine the dynamics of power and privilege in an increasingly multicultural society and explore varieties of leadership styles, differences in values, and interaction and communication.

Participants will:

- Learn the principles of power dynamics in a multicultural group or system.
- Deepen their cultural competencies in cross-cultural communication.
- Apply theory to practicing effective behaviors in a laboratory setting.
- Learn how to create multicultural teams that share power.
- Explore sources of power in groups.

3. Negotiating Difference and Conflict

This component will introduce theory and provide tools for managing conflict and difference in an organization or system, explore personal styles of behavior in conflict situations, and consider how to set norms in conflict situations.

Participants will:

- Learn how to assess the sources of conflict.
- Learn appropriate responses at different levels of conflict.
- Explore their behavior in conflict situations.
- Discover when to generate conflict to achieve desired outcomes.
- Explore when to collaborate and when to compete.

4. Understanding the Dynamics of Change

This component will explore the nature of change, provide tools to assess readiness for change, and create a change process that supports the vision of the organization. This will include the application of learning the issues of leadership for just outcomes.

Participants will:

- Explore the nature of human systems.
- Learn to create and nurture a climate for change.
- Identify areas of change desired in their system.
- Develop a plan of action to initiate strategic change.
- Discover tools for dealing with stress, resistance, and grief.

5. Leadership Styles and Building the Team

This component will examine concepts of group process, effective group decision-making, and team building. Leadership and communication styles and facilitation of multicultural groups and power sharing will be explored here.

Participants will:

- Explore effective communication in multicultural groups.
- Learn methods for maximizing a group's potential.
- Develop skills to identify obstacles to achieving group objectives.
- Learn group theory and practice facilitating groups.
- Learn how to set group norms, establish agreements and build consensus.

6. Exerting Ethical Leadership in the Public Square

This component will challenge young leaders to explore their passions and use their skills in the service of the common good, to explore a focus for social engagement, to apply a personal ethic to view justice from the perspective of the marginalized, and to create an action plan that gathers information, organizes resources and people, and uses power constructively to create change.

Participants will:

- Learn the principles of community organizing.
- Perform a demographic profile and social assessment.
- Learn asset based planning.
- Understand the political undercurrents of an issue.
- Learn to use the media in support of their cause.
- Work in teams to develop a model for influencing public policy.

Appendix D

Summer Leadership Camp for Youth

Overview of Core Components

- Group process
- Values clarification
- Listening and communications skills
- The dynamics of power
- Basics of community organizing
- Handling difficult conversations
- Managing conflict and change
- Negotiating cultural boundaries

APPENDIX E

The Middle Project:

“A Bridge to Somewhere: Building a Progressive Think/Act Tank”

December 7, 2008

List of Participants

Maxine Beach – Dean, Drew Theological School

Shaun Casey – Associate Professor of Christian Ethics, Wesley Theological Seminary (and National Evangelical Outreach Coordinator for Barack Obama’s presidential campaign)

Robert Chase – Director, Intersections, a faith-based global initiative of the Collegiate Church of New York

Dalton Conley – University Professor of the Social Sciences and Chair of Sociology at New York University

Kate Farrell – Media Producer, and Co-Director of Programming for The Middle Project

Sheila Greeve Davaney – Program Officer for Religion, The Ford Foundation

Erica Hunt – President, The Twenty-First Century Foundation

Dale T. Irvin – President and Professor of World Christianity, New York Theological Seminary

John Janka – Co-Director of Programming for The Middle Project

Robert P. Jones – President, Public Religion Research

Jacqueline Lewis – Senior Minister, Middle Collegiate Church, and Director of The Middle Project

Ellen Matlach – Incoming Chair of The Middle Project Board

Ivan Petrella – Associate Professor of Religious Studies, University of Miami and Interim Director of The Middle Project

Lyn Pentecost – Co-founder Executive Director, Lower East Side Girls Club

Thomas C. Smucker – Chair of the Middle Church Consistory and Interim Chair of The Middle Project Board of Directors

Ron Steif – Director of Organizing Strategy, Faith in Public Life

Mark Lewis Taylor – Maxwell M. Upson Professor of Theology and Culture, Princeton Theological Seminary

Peter Teague – Program Director for Environmental/ Contemplative Practice, Nathan Cummings Foundation

Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite – Professor of Theology, Chicago Theological Seminary and Senior Fellow, Center for American Progress

Emilie Townes – President, American Academy of Religion and Andrew W. Mellon Professor of African American Religion and Theology, Yale University

Benjamin Valentin – Professor of Theology and Culture and Director of the Orlando Costas Latino/a Studies Program at Andover Newton Theological School

Mara Vanderslice – Founder, the Matthew 25 Network

Traci C. West – Professor of Ethics and African American Studies, Drew University Theological School