February 2017

What Does It Mean To Be A Community Of Identity?

Afraid that our inner light will be extinguished or our inner darkness exposed, we hide our true identities from each other. In the process, we become separated from our own souls. We end up living divided lives, so far removed from the truth we hold within that we cannot know the "integrity that comes from being what you are." ~Parker Palmer

Do I contradict myself? Very well, then I contradict myself, I am large, I contain multitudes. ~Walt Whitman

It's one thing for a religion to offer you an identity; it's quite another for a religion to celebrate your identity. At our best, we UUs seek both.

Our entire Soul Matters program is about UU identity. Each month, we lift up a unique value or human quality that our faith calls us to live and lean into. Together, our themes tell us who UUs uniquely are. But that's only half of the equation. In addition to "UU identity," there's also "your identity." And our faith communities are just as committed to that.

In a sense, every UU congregation hangs two signs on their front doors: One that reads “Hidden Parts Allowed in the Open!” And another that says “Contradictions Welcome!”

We agree with Parker Palmer that our society has separated us from our souls. Indeed, the only relevant religions today are the ones that take this seriously. Hell certainly exists: it’s the state of having to hide ourselves. And we also cheer on Walt Whitman’s celebration of messiness and contradiction. We don’t just want people to be honest about their contradictions; we want them to see those contradictions as great gifts! Bottom line: we want our congregations to be places where you don’t have to pretend.

And it’s not just the pressure to pretend that breaks our hearts. Our faith also worries about the way our culture urges us to live small. As social critic, Courtney Martin, points out, “It’s never been more asked of us to show up as only slices of ourselves.” The risk of this, of course, is that if we live too long only in our “slices,” they become all that we are. There is no greater spiritual warning than one Kurt Vonnegut lifted up: “We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be.” Friends, this identity work isn’t a game or merely a pastime. It’s unquestionably life and death stuff.

And here’s the kicker: our faith wants you to stop hiding and live fully, not just for your sake, but for our sake as well. We are all struggling to escape our slices and connect to our hidden wholeness. Seeing you be real gives us permission to be let our true self out of the dark! Your brave honesty about your contradictions allows us to proudly strut around in our multitudes! We save each other by being true to ourselves.

So this month, maybe these signs need to be hung on your own personal door—Hidden Parts Allowed Out in the Open! Contradictions Welcome! No More Pretending!—for all of our sakes.
QUESTIONS TO WALK WITH

Below is a list of questions to open the mind's gateway to reveal the wisdom that is right below the surface of our ordinary, everyday lives. Pick one question, any, the one that grabs you and won't let go, then walk with it. Let your mind wander and wonder. Let the question percolate. Listen curiously to what surfaces. Live into the answers.

Be surprised by what is discovered. Share what you learn with someone.

1. Which of your contradictions needs to be celebrated as a wonderful multitude?! (“Do I contradict myself? Very well, then I contradict myself, I am large, I contain multitudes.” ~Walt Whitman)
2. Is it time to pick a new group to tell you who you are? (“Who we are is a direct function of who we are with. We are relational creatures.” ~Rev. Kenn Hurto)
3. Has your struggle become your identity? (“Don’t let your struggle become your identity.” ~Unknown)
4. Is your identity longing for more alone time? (“Privacy is crucial to the sense of self.” ~Oliver Stone)
5. Have you thanked your wounds for making you-you?
6. Have you become who you pretend to be? (“We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be.” ~Kurt Vonnegut)
7. Are you living only a slice of yourself? (“It’s never been more asked of us to show up as only slices of ourselves in different places.” ~Courtney Martin)
8. Are you not listening when people tell you who they are? (http://www.oprah.com/oprahslifeclass/when-people-show-you-who-they-are-believe-them-video)
9. What are you besides your work? (http://www.filmsforaction.org/watch/who-are-you-this-breathtaking-video-might-change-your-life/#.vonql35h-3i.facebook)
10. Are your Valentine’s Day plans about more than filling your sweetheart’s stomach with good food? Did you remember to make sure they also celebrate the part of their identity you love the most?
11. What’s your question? Your question may not be listed above. As always, if the above questions don’t include what life is asking from you, spend the month listening to your days to hear it.

Opening Words
worship of all things good and right.
~Daniel Kanter “to Love Life”

Closing Words
[Blessed be the listeners]
~Richard Stone, The Healing Art of Storytelling
Spiritual Practice - Deepening Experiences
A new way of being for all ages

Option A:
The Artist Who Helped You Find You

“Artists are always in the vanguard of social change...The music proclaimed our identity; it made every statement we truly wanted to make.” ~Dizzy Gillespie

Art and artists help us find our way. They provide mirrors and containers for our identity. Seeing their work, we see ourselves. Hearing and reading their work, we remember who we are. So hunt down and bring into your group one of the books, songs, paintings, photos or movies that has helped you find (and hold onto) yourself. Come ready to share the story of your first encounter with that piece of art.

Option B:
Bring Your Identity to Dinner

Identities love to come to dinner! Great grandma’s German pot roast. Aunt Audrey’s pie crust recipe. Norwegian family Christmas and that awful lutefisk. The requirement that great-grandpa’s knife with the ivory handle be used to cut the turkey. And with these dinner table traditions, the old stories come out and we are able to tell ourselves into being once again.

So this month, you are invited to concoct an “Identity Dinner.” Do it with your wider family and make it a way to pass on your traditions to the kids. Pull together your neighbors or even your Soul Matters group. Simply, ask everyone to bring a dish, an heirloom and a story that celebrates a piece of your heritage and informs who you are to this day.

Here’s some inspiration to help you get started:


- **Heritage Comes Alive At My Family's Dinner Table**: [http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/abigail-esteireiro/cultural-food-traditions_b_12558520.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/abigail-esteireiro/cultural-food-traditions_b_12558520.html)

One important note: For many of us, our heritage and identity now feels under threat. Gathering around a table as a Hispanic or Muslim doesn’t feel as safe or celebratory as it should. This is part of the exercise as well. Find a way for the dinner to honor the way our identities are under threat; make sure the dinner involves a commitment to help others feel safe as they embody their identities.
Other Wise Words...

Each of Us Has A Name

Each of us has a name given by God and given by our parents.

Each of us has a name given by our stature and our smile and given by what we wear.

Each of us has a name given by the mountains and given by our walls.

Each of us has a name given by the stars and given by our neighbors.

Each of us has a name given by our sins and given by our longing.

Each of us has a name given by our enemies.

Each of us has a name given by our celebrations and given by our work.

Each of us has a name given by the seasons and given by our blindness.

Each of us has a name given by the sea and given by our death.

~Zelda (translated by Marcia Falk)

The earth is our mother. Whatever befalls the earth, befalls the sons [and daughters] of the earth. If [we] spit upon the ground, [we] spit upon [our]selves. This we know. The earth does not belong to [us]; [we] belong to the earth. This we know. All things are connected like the blood which unites one family. All things are connected. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves.

~Chief Seattle

One of the major shifts in human understanding has been a move away from seeing ourselves as solitary, independent agents in charge of our destiny toward a more complex awareness that who we are is a direct function of who we are with. We are relational creatures. Everything about us is shaped by our connections (or disconnections) with those around us.

~Rev. Kenn Hurto

If you will think of yourself as coming out of the earth, rather than having been thrown in here from somewhere else, you see that we are the earth, we are the consciousness of the earth. These are the eyes of the earth. And this is the voice of the earth.

~Joseph Campbell

The nitrogen in our DNA, the calcium in our teeth, the iron in our blood, the carbon in our apple pies were made in the interiors of collapsing stars. We are made of stardust.

~Carl Sagan

Books

A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life by Parker Palmer
An ennobling field guide to living with the grace and integrity of being your whole self, where soul and role join.

Tiger Writing: Art, Culture, and the Interdependent Self by Jen Gish
Explores the aesthetic and psychic roots of the independent and interdependent self, each yielding a distinct way of observing, remembering, and narrating the world.

Immortal Diamond: The Search for Our True Self by Richard Rohr
Likens True Self to a diamond, buried deep within us, formed under the intense pressure of our lives that must be searched for and uncovered.

Waking Up White: And Finding Myself in the Story of Race by Debby Irving
How easy it is for a white person to just wake up and go about in a world that was constructed for them.

Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can’t Stop Talking by Susan Cain
Although they are often labeled "quiet," it is to introverts that we owe many of the great contributions to society- from Vincent van Gogh’s sunflowers to the invention of the personal computer.