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**Soul Connections Packet
February 2017**

***What Does It Mean To Be
A Community of Identity?***

Connection*Transformation*Justice*Acceptance

What Does It Mean To Be A Community of Identity?

We say it every single week in worship: “Whoever you are, wherever you are on your life journey, you are welcome here.” I love the ritual of saying (or hearing) some of the same words each week, and I love what those particular words say about us. They say: This is a community of radical acceptance. We want you to come just as you are, whatever that means—whatever your age, your ethnic or racial identity, your gender identity, your sexual orientation, your age, your abilities, your state of mind or emotional center on this particular day. You are who you are, and all of who you are is okay with us. We affirm your inherent worth and dignity. Each and every person is important.

In some ways, it might be more accurate to ask: What does it mean to be a community of identities? Each of us, of course, is a multitude of parts, some of which are ever-changing, some of which are fixed. And part of what we are called to do in our religious communities is to be in relationship both with all of who we are, and all of who those around us are. It’s a tricky and challenging business; after all, it’s more or less a custom for us to answer the question: “How are you?” with an automatic “I’m fine” even when we feel anything but. Sometimes we’re afraid to share how awful we really feel, sometimes we are ashamed to break down crying in the middle of coffee hour, sometimes we feel like we can barely hold it together, and yet this can be part of who we are. AND it is part of the very reason for our religious community to exist: to be with one another in all of who we are, whatever we are feeling. The more and better we do this, the stronger we become.

What I also love about the “whoever you are...” message is something less explicit. It is this: You are on a journey, and we expect you to be on a journey. That is, we accept you for who you are AND we want you to grow and change among us. That’s part of the deal. Our religion calls us to be on a search for truth and meaning, always examining what and how we believe what we believe. It’s both liberating and daunting. Our call of being a community of identities means we need to both be able to claim space for our own journeys, and also make space for others around us so that we can engage together on this shared quest for truth and meaning.

The next time you hear those words: “Whoever you are, wherever you are on your life journey, you are welcome here”, I encourage you to live more fully into them. Ask yourself: Am I bringing all of who I am to this religious community? Am I bringing all of my journey here? How can I encourage others to do so?

May we each truly know that we are welcome in this community of identities.

Emily

Our Spiritual Exercises

Option A:

A Reunion with Your Former Self

A bored sociology student decided he could learn more out in the real world than by sitting in a classroom. So he picked up his camera and took pictures of interesting looking people around town, capturing not only their images but also their stories. Thirty years later he hunted them down to show them those old pictures and give them a reunion with their younger self. Check out pictures of these “reunions” here”:

<http://twistedsifter.com/2016/11/reunions-by-chris-porsz/>

<http://www.upworthy.com/there-are-over-30-years-between-these-amazing-before-and-after-photos?c=upw1&u=41aa6fc0057cfdc850d917bc669deaf216c544e>

This exercise invites you to have a similar reunion with your own former self. Dig through your old photos and find 2 pictures of your “younger self” that best represent your core identity at that time. Then spend some time thinking about what you would say to and ask that younger self if given the chance:

What story would you want to rehash and revisit the most?

How would you thank him or her?

How would you apologize?

What complements would you give?

What secrets would you tell them to keep? Or not keep?

What warnings would you offer? What encouragement would you give?

Bring your two photos to the group and come ready to share which 1-2 of the questions above best helped you re-connect with your younger self.

Here are two videos to inspire you and get you into the mind frame of reunion:

To the Girl I Was: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o9ERUJOpdeU>

The psychology of your future self: https://www.ted.com/talks/dan_gilbert_you_are_always_changing

Option B:
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 C:
Your T-Shirt

Yes some of us may wear our heart on our sleeves, but virtually all of us wear our identities on our chests. Our t-shirts don't just inform the world of our allegiances and accomplishments (alma mater, favorite band or sports team), they also tell the world what we want it to be (<https://libertymaniacs.com>). T-shirts announce our clan (<http://101tees.com/50-funny-state-t-shirts>) as well as our class (think about whether that polo logo on your shirt mattered as a teen).

And here's the most important thing about t-shirts: we keep them around forever. You know the t-shirt that embodies your identity because it's the one that has holes in it! The wording has faded and the sleeve is torn, but you don't care! It's a piece of you. No way is anyone going to throw that away!

So this month, slip your identify over your head and wear it on your chest when you come to your group. Come ready to tell your group why, although the image has faded, you're still holding on. (New found identities and t-shirts are, of course, welcome as well.)

One last note: Show your minister your t-shirt. Help him or her imagine what an awesome Sunday it would be if everyone (adults and kids) came to church wearing their identity on their chest. Maybe it's time for your church to start an annual “T-Shirt Sunday”! ☺

Option D: 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:

- **Keep family history alive through food:**
<http://www.austin360.com/lifestyles/food--cooking/keep-family-history-alive-through-food/iNiOL7jYlifDtjZsu1E24L/>
- **Heritage Comes Alive At My Family's Dinner Table:**
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 theirs.

Your Question

As always, don't treat these questions like "homework" or a list that needs to be covered in its entirety. Instead, simply pick the one question that speaks to you most and let it lead you where you need to go. The goal of these questions is not to help you analyze what Identity means in the abstract, but to figure out what being a part of a community of Identity means for you and your daily living. So, which question is calling to you? Which one contains "your work"?

1. **Which of your contradictions needs 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/oprahs-life/class/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/#.vonq135h-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.

Recommended Resources

As always, this is not required reading. We will not analyze or dissect these pieces in our group. They are simply meant to companion you on your journey this month, get your thinking started, and maybe open you to new ways of thinking about what it means to be *a community of Identity*.

Word Roots

Identity: The set of characteristics by which a person or thing is definitively recognizable or known. from late Latin *identitas*, from Latin *idem* 'same' and *itas* - indicating a state of being

Wise Words

Who am I? My answer: I am everyone whose being-in-the-world affected was affected by mine. I am anything that happens after I've gone which would not have happened if I had not come. Nor am I particularly exceptional in this matter; each 'I', every one of the now-six-hundred-million-plus of us, contains a similar multitude. I repeat for the last time: to understand me, you'll have to swallow the world. ~*Salman Rushdie*

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

It's never been more asked of us to show up as only slices of ourselves in different places. ~*Courtney Martin*

We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be. ~*Kurt Vonnegut*

I can tell a lot about a person by what they choose to see in me ~*Unknown*

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*

I am a frayed and nibbled survivor in a fallen world, and I am getting along. I am aging and eaten and have done my share of eating too. I am not washed and beautiful, in control of a shining world in which everything fits, but instead am wandering awed about on a splintered wreck I've come to care for, whose gnawed trees breathe a delicate air, whose bloodied and scarred creatures are my dearest companions, and whose beauty bats and shines not in its imperfections but overwhelmingly in spite of them. ~*Annie Dillard*

She was the kind of girl that searched for the things that could never be found ~*Unknown*

She was simple like quantum physics ~*Unknown*

I am difficult, but I promise I am worth it ~*Unknown*

There are your fog people and your sun people, he said. I said I wasn't sure which kind I was.

He nodded. Fog'll do that to you, he said. ~
Brian Andreas

Don't let your struggle become your identity.
~*Unknown*

"There is nothing noble in being superior to your fellow man; true nobility is being superior to your former self." ~*Ernest Hemingway*

We are lonesome animals. We spend all our life trying to be less lonesome. ~*John Steinbeck*

When people show you who they are believe them; the first time. ~*Maya Angelou*

When people try to tell you who you are, don't believe them. ~*Maria Popova*

Self-deception remains the most difficult deception. ~*Joan Didion*

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*

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*

To rise through hard earth, be plant
desiring sunlight, believing in water.
To enter fire, be dry.
To enter life, be food.
~*Linda Hogan*

Wrong

I wish to be misunderstood;
that is,
to be understood from your perspective.
~*Bill Knott*

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

and given by our love

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)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VoP0ox_Jw_w

Black: How You See Me

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FO6DADHDPOQ_w

LGBTQ:| How You See Me

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wxHHstcyP4I>

Body Size: How You See Me

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BOF70kAB1-s>

Songs and Music

I am not the clothes I am wearing

True things - JJ Heller

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XEH7zqkRpIg&feature=youtu.be>

We Belong - Namoli Brennet

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rgdzz_UEuMM

What if we are stars? Namoli Brennet

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yV4WNhdta1k>

For Today I Am A Boy - Antony & The Johnsons

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kslkgAX3uAg>

Tell Me A Story - Skylar Kergil

“Strangers stare and they want to be the first to ask
for my life in one word... Am I a boy or a girl?”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nbQDTE2s3dI>

Videos

Arab: How You See Me

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O3ydbIUo0EY>

Asian: How you see me

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OTLtgUGGgN8>

What Kind of Asian Are You

Women: How You See Me

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cFQ6Ce3VpeQ>

HUMAN by Yann Arthus-Bertrand - Genesis of the film

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qUWrdbOEOOQ>

Parts 1 2 & 3

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vdb4XGVTHkE>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ShttAi5xtto>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w0653vsLSqE>

You can always choose who you are

Sapeurs of the Congo in Guinness Ad

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H1fbUbDoGnA>

Lost Voices ~Darius Simpson & Scout Bostley

The problem with speaking up for each other is that everyone is left without a voice.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lpPASWlnZIA&feature=youtu.be>

Angry Black Woman with Porsha O.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bSoITsaSs0M>

You Are Not Your Work

"Normal is getting dressed in clothes that you buy for work, driving through traffic in a car that you are still paying for, in order to get to a job that you need so you can pay for the clothes, car and the house that you leave empty all day in order to afford to live in it." - Ellen Goodman

<http://www.filmsforaction.org/watch/who-are-you-thi-s-breathtaking-video-might-change-your-life/#.vonql35h-3i.facebook>

The art of being yourself - TED Talk

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=veEQQ-N9xWU>

When People Show You Who They Are, Believe Them

Oprah learned the hard way that if a man shows you he's untrustworthy, believe him the first time. Watch Dr. Maya Angelou discuss this important life lesson with Oprah.

<http://www.oprah.com/oprahs-life/class/when-people-show-you-who-they-are-believe-them-video>

Podcasts

The Secret Emotional Life of Clothes

Invisibilia Podcast

<http://www.npr.org/programs/invisibilia/485605882/the-secret-emotional-life-of-clothes>

What it means to be an American: Artists, musicians and activists speak

https://www.mprnews.org/story/2016/10/19/what-it-means-to-be-an-american?=&trent-gilliss-on-being&utm_source=On+Being+News+letter&utm_campaign=a8196e3d1e-20161112_vincent_harding_newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1c66543c2f-a8196e3d1e-69930673&goal=0_1c66543c2f-a8196e3d1e-69930673&mc_cid=a8196e3d1e&mc_eid=1963d8e98f

The beauty of being a misfit

TED Talk~ Lidia Yuknavitch

http://www.ted.com/talks/lidia_yuknavitch_the_beauty_of_being_a_misfit

The psychology of your future self

TED Talk – Dan Gilbert

We somehow imagine that the person we are right now is the person we'll be for the rest of time. Hint: that's not the case.

https://www.ted.com/talks/dan_gilbert_you_are_always_changing

Articles

Our identity changes over time.

There are over 30 years between these amazing before-and-after photos.

<http://www.upworthy.com/there-are-over-30-years-between-these-amazing-before-and-after-photos?c=upw1&u=41aa6fc0057cfdc850d917bc669deaf216c544e>

<http://twistedifter.com/2016/11/reunions-by-chris-porsz/>

I am Transgender

<http://www.transfaithonline.org/tdor/resources/readings/iamt/>

Immigration Stories

<https://myimmigrationstory.com>

The End of Identity Liberalism -New York Times

http://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/20/opinion/sunday/the-end-of-identity-liberalism.html?smid=nytcore-iphone-share&smprod=nytcore-iphone&_r=0

Is Criticism of Identity Politics Racist or Long Overdue?

http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2016/11/23/is-criticism-of-identity-politics-racist-or-long-overdue?emc=edit_th_20161125&nl=todaysheadlines&nliid=62154555

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.

https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0029U1RGA/ref=dp_kindle-redirect?_encoding=UTF8&btcr=1

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.

https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/16241536-tiger-writing?utm_content=title&utm_medium=email&utm_source=friend_updates

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.

https://www.amazon.com/Immortal-Diamond-Search-True-Self-ebook/dp/B00BG4FOA0/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1481133617&sr=1-1&keywords=Immortal+Diamond+%3A+The+Search+for+Our+True+Self

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 van Gogh's sunflowers to the invention of the personal computer.

https://www.amazon.com/Quiet-Power-Introverts-World-Talking/dp/0307352153/ref=as_li_tf_tl?tag=tedideas-20&ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0520271440&linkCode=as2

How To Be Black by Baratunde Thurston

Audacious, cunning, and razor-sharp, *How to Be Black* exposes the mass-media's insidiously racist, monochromatic portrayal of black culture's richness and variety.

https://www.amazon.com/How-Be-Black-Baratunde-Thurston/dp/0062003224/ref=as_li_tf_tl?tag=tedideas-20&ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0520271440&linkCode=as2

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.

https://www.amazon.com/dp/B00HZZ1JD0/ref=dp-kindle-redirect?_encoding=UTF8&btkr=1

Movies and Television

Boyhood

<https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/boyhood>

Girlhood

<https://thedissolve.com/reviews/1344-girlhood/>
https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/girlhood_2015

Tomboy

https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/tomboy_2011

Moonlight

https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/moonlight_2016

Dear White People

<https://thedissolve.com/reviews/1148-dear-white-people/>
https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/dear_white_people

A Borrowed Identity

<https://thedissolve.com/reviews/1682-a-borrowed-identity/>
https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/a_borrowed_identity

Band of Brothers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ehwsOL04og>

Inside-Out

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_MC3XuMvsDI

My Big Fat Greek Wedding

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RfYF3TAST5E>

Testing Your Identity

Your Spiritual Type

<http://prayer-center.upperroom.org/resources/quiz>

16 Personalities

<https://www.16personalities.com/free-personality-test>

What Your Higher Self Wants

<http://www.higherawareness.com/soul-purpose-test.php>

Your Spirit Animal – Come on, have some fun!

<http://www.spiritanimal.info/spirit-animal-quiz/>

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