

A Reflection from Rev. Steven
The Path of Belonging

"We long to belong because we feel the lonesomeness of being individuals. Deep within us, we long to come in from separation and be at home again in the embrace of a larger belonging. Our hunger to belong is the longing to find a bridge across the distance from isolation to intimacy."

- John O'Donohue

The Soul Matters theme for September is "The Path of Belonging". What does it mean to belong? It is to be accepted, to be a part of a group, to feel connected, to be a part of something larger than ourselves. It is a fundamental human need. Abraham Maslow created a motivational hierarchy (a pyramid of human needs that range from the basic need to survive to being fulfilled:

<https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>.)

and put the need to belong in between meeting basic physical needs (such as food and getting enough sleep) and our highest needs: self-esteem and being the most one is capable of being.

Here are some thoughts writer Cheyanne Cierpial has collected from people about belonging:

-“I feel like I belong to the world itself -- to nature, my fellow humans, to myself. Not that I owe anything to anyone, but more that I feel connected to the life around me.”

-“I belong to myself a bit more and more each day, and I belong to those I love and who love me in return.”

-“I’m fortunate that I belong to a lot of people and places. My friends, my family, my school communities, my old teams, the west. But the most important place where I feel I belong is a lake in New Hampshire. That’s where I go every year to really recharge, and it’s held so many life changing moments for me.”

-“Belonging is what makes my heart beat. It’s love and support from my family and friends, the smell of fresh cut grass, sunrises and sunsets, working out in the gym, my nieces and nephew, sharing stories, being strong, being healthy, being able to physically breathe and explore. It’s talking to good people, being surrounded by good people, my education, my career, helping people, memories, my career, smelling, touching, tasting.”

(Source: <https://www.towhomibelong.com/musings/belonginginyourwords>)

In this longing to belong, human beings create communities: circles of family and friends, collegial relationships, groups for special interests and leisure activities, churches. Pastor and writer Rick Warren, who created Saddleback Church in California, a megachurch with thousands of members, said: “Everywhere you look there are signs that people are hungering for fellowship, community, and family.” He says when people are looking for a church home they are most often seeking acceptance, friendship, and the chance to feel valued for their contributions. They want to feel like they belong. Was it a longing to belong that brought you to UUCK? No one I’ve talked came to this church because you were looking for a committee to join. 😊 You’ve told me that you were looking for community, for shared values, a place where you can be yourself, somewhere you can find deeper meaning and purpose in life.

As a Unitarian Universalist congregation, our covenant challenges us to create a community of belonging that celebrates diversity and practices inclusivity so that UUCK is a place where you are able to be your fullest and most authentic selves; where you are accepted just as you are and welcomed for the wisdom, the gifts, and the passions you bring; a place that invites us to engage ever more deeply- with ourselves, with one another, with this community, with life, and with what we hold to be Ultimate. This month as we welcome new members, we will reflect on the path of belonging and our shared work to make this a community where people truly feel like they belong.

Here are some questions for reflection:

What does it mean to you to belong?

Is belonging a journey- something we never truly attain but that changes as we change?

Are we open to experiencing the gift of intimacy that comes with belonging (as well as the heartbreak that can come with intimacy)?

How does our faith challenge us to understand that we are a part of the circle and that true belonging means that we seek to “make the circle wider still”?

Journeying with you in our covenant of belonging, mutual love, and respect,

Rev. Steven