

Belonging - the sense that one is accepted, included, part of a group, safe, and supported. These are wonderful parts of community, and a beautiful part of the experience of church, family, and cultural identity that can promote growth, nurture, and peace. Feeling part of a beloved community can inspire us to want others to know its blessings, to know the joy and love of belonging. A flip side of the sense of community is the cohort mentality. The sense that identity cannot change or include others because belonging risks not being expanded or enhanced but lost. Exclusion, competition, defensiveness, and ego dominate cohort mentality.

The difference between cohort and community lives in our hearts, belief and thoughts, and can be seen in behaviour. The United Church, seeking to find ways to grow and celebrate being a Beloved Community, has continued to work on how well we live out that identity while struggling to resist cohort mentality. In our social action and self-awareness we challenge not only the world but ourselves and one another. We have asked ourselves many questions about who we are and how we live. This week in our worship we will lift up the continuing journey and commitment that the church has made to confront racism within our church and our society.

As we prepare to lift up this journey and the struggle and celebration that it will involve, we can ask ourselves some questions:

- Why must arbitrary markers like the colour of skin influence how we treat one another?
- If we are called/inspired/challenged by our faith to recognize God in all people, the presence of the Divine in all living beings, how can race, culture, sexuality, gender, religion, ethnicity, or ancestry limit how that presence is found?
- If we find ourselves slipping into cohort mentality, how can we remind ourselves of the love that has been shared with us so that we can be motivated to share it with all others?
- How can we continue to nurture the commitment within ourselves and one another to resist cohort mentality?
- Have we seen cohort mentality, clinging to rigid identity that causes exclusion and draws boundaries between who can belong and who cannot, in our journey?
- When we find ourselves and other members of the congregation, our neighbours and fellow members in the church drawing lines about who can belong to what congregation, what resources can be shared between us, where we draw the line on who belongs and who's inclusion is valid, how can the message of Jesus, the experience of the Spirit, and the presence of the Divine help us to act as a beloved community?

Seekers, I look forward to our continued journey of supporting and challenging one another into a world where the truth is known - that all are needed, all are loved.

Peace and hope,

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