Whose Are We?
By
Rev. Dr. Todd F. Eklof
Unitarian Universalist Church of Spokane
October 28, 2011

Whose Are We? That’s the question currently being pondered throughout the UUA. This question, which is now so deeply penetrating our denomination, originates with a Roman Catholic priest. He was sharing his life’s odyssey at an interfaith minister’s gathering in Seattle a few years ago, expressing his disappointment his Church’s conservative leadership is now overturning many of the progressive Vatican II reforms that had so inspired his early ministry. He ended by admitting his ministry had been a disappointment. This puzzled one of the UU ministers present because the old priest still seemed so content. “How can you claim your life was a failure,” he asked, “and yet appear so calm and serene?” The priest replied, “I know whose I am.” The UU minister began sharing the impact this response had on him, and now the question, whose are we, has become the emphasis of UU workshops, curriculum, and a point of theological reflection for UU minister everywhere.

I won’t try answering it myself, for, as Bertrand Russell once wrote, “Philosophy is to be studied, not for the sake of any definite answers to its questions, since no definite answers can, as a rule, be known to be true, but rather for the sake of the questions themselves.”¹ I think this is the case here too. It’s really the question that is meaningful, more so than the variety of responses we are destined to give as individuals.

Firstly, I’d take notice that the question doesn’t ask, whose am I, but, whose are we? It’s a question about community, connection, and responsibility, and, thus, implies part of the answer must be that we belong to each other. We belong to our church, and, I dare say, at least as much to its mission, that is, to the world beyond our sanctuary walls.

It’s also important to take note that the question must be asked at all. The priest was resolute in his response, “I know whose I am.” I doubt this is something most UUs could say with such ease and confidence. That we must ask it at all reflects our openness to mystery and wonder. It’s as an admission that we don’t have all the answers—a response that does flow more easily and confidently from our lips.

In our faith we refer to mysticism as “transcending mystery and wonder.” And so the final point I would make is that this question, like any question, challenges us to go beyond, to transcend our current beliefs and answers. I don’t know the answer to the question, but the question itself takes me beyond myself, into other, into we. It reminds me that I am part of others, part of something greater, something more than my own life and interests.

_Whose we are?_ I’m not sure, but it seems a good question to ask.