

January 14, 2018 – Knowing Ourselves

Psalm 139: 1-18, 23-24

O God, you have searched me and known me.

You know when I sit down and rise up, you discern my thoughts from afar... You are familiar with all my ways.

Most of us will find it comforting to be known that well, to realize that we are known and loved in ways that are beyond our comprehending. But, at the same time, it can also be disturbing to think that there is nothing we can hide from God.

As the psalmist wrote:

“Where can I escape from your spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?”

Nowhere. God is with us at all times and in all places. But then, what is God but the Ground of our Being, the essence of love, the force of the universe, that still small voice within each one of us. There’s nothing that we can hide from the Holy Mystery, the sacred that is within and around all of us.

And yet, sometimes, we try to hide from ourselves. We try to deny some aspect of who we are. We try to ignore some part of our identity. What are the things that make up who we are? What are things that God knows about us? (*actions, thoughts, feelings, family, personality, intelligence, age, look, how we treat others, values, where we came from, religion*) Today we are going to explore our identities and look at some of the aspects of who we are in the world. We are going to attempt to know ourselves a little better.

The Power Flower is a tool developed in Canada over 25 years ago to assist in educating people about their social identity. It is an attempt to identify who we are (and who we are not) in relation to those who wield power in our society. As you can see in the diagram on the screen, the centre of the flower is divided into 16 segments, each representing one aspect of our social identity. You may have noticed that one segment has been left blank. That has been done deliberately to allow us to identify a category that would be specific to our environment.

<http://www.united-church.ca/sites/default/files/resources/that-all-may-be-one-excerpts.pdf>

This centre is surrounded by double set of petals, out outer and one inner. The first thing we are going to do is work together to fill in the outer petals. You should each have a copy of the power flower that you can fill in and I hope that you also each have a pen or a pencil that you can use as we go along. In the outer petals we are going to write the dominant or powerful identities in our society. Let's start at the bottom left and move clockwise.

1. Ability/Disability – *able-bodied* or those with a disability?
2. Clergy/Lay – *clergy*
3. Geographic Region (origin) – where your family came from? *Europe*
4. Geographic Region (current) – *Saskatchewan, Canada*
5. Sexual Orientation - *heterosexual*, homosexual, bisexual, lesbian, gay
6. Sex (Gender) – male, female, transgender
7. Race - *Caucasian/white*, different coloured skin
8. Ethnic Group – same as geographic region of origin?
9. Language – *English*
10. Religion – *Christianity*. Muslim, Hindu, Jewish, Buddhists

11. Family – single, *mom/dad/kids*, divorced, single parent
12. Social (Economic) Class – *Upper*, middle, working, lower, etc.
13. Age Group – (by decade) – *40/50/60*
14. Denomination – Catholic or *Protestant*, Liberal or *Conservative*
15. Education – high-school, *university*, graduate degrees

Now that we have gone through the list and we have a sense of what each category is, I'm going to give you a minute or two to fill in the inner petals of your own flower. Look at each category and fill in your own identity. If you need help feel free to ask your neighbour a question, and don't worry if you don't finish..., you can always do that later. (*give everyone 1-2 minutes*)

Now, hopefully you have been able to fill in the majority of your flower. What I want you to do is to look at your flower and consider how many of your own inner petals are different from the dominant outer petals? If they are different this means that you do not share in those areas of power that exist in our society. These are areas where you are on the margins. Note that the majority of these categories are not ones that can be easily changed. Some are aspects of you are that were determined before you were even born.

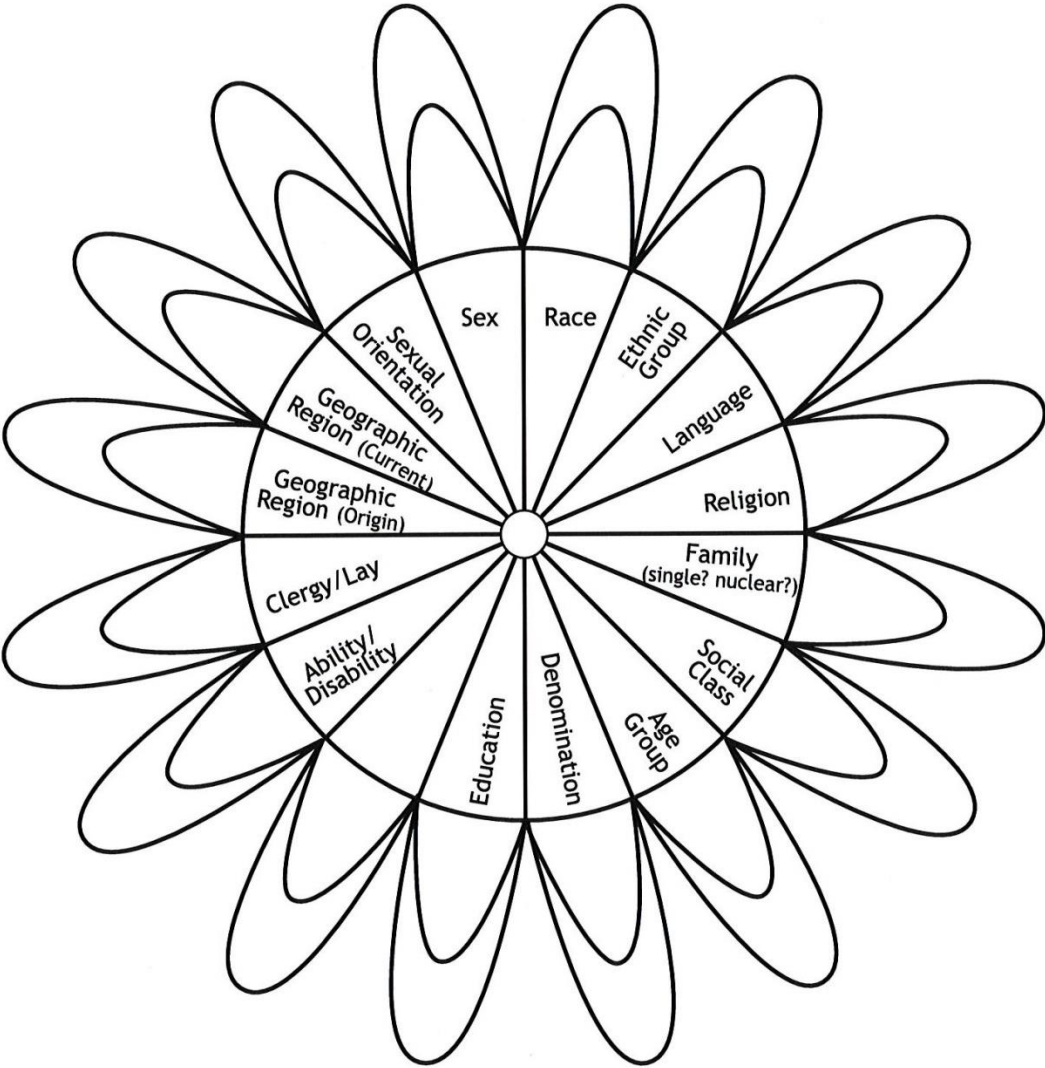
As you reflect on your own flower, think about how your position in society, your privilege or your marginalization has impacted your path in life or your current situation. These aspects of our social identity influence the power and the position that we hold in our society. They may impact how we are perceived or how we are treated by our fellow human beings. Many of us have experienced

an incredible amount of privilege in our lives based solely on the colour of our skin, and the country in which we were born. Others have experienced the pain and isolation that comes from being part of a marginalized group, a powerless minority. And most of us have social identities that are combinations of both.

Our social identity is an important aspect of who we are in this world. But it has nothing to do with our real worth in the eyes of God. The Ground of our Being knows and cares for us no matter how many petals matched. The Holy Mystery knows that we are all “fearfully, wonderfully made.” And God calls us to recognize the power of the sacred that exists within ourselves and within every other person in our world. We are all God’s beloved children.

So as we struggle to know ourselves better may we also see both the humanity and the sacred in each person in our church, our community and our world. And may we work for justice and peace for all.

POWER FLOWER



From: *That All May Be One* — A Resource for Educating toward Racial Justice, page 54.