



WHAT IS... BELONGING



DEFINITION:

THIS TERM CAN BE VIEWED FROM VARIOUS PERSPECTIVES. As human beings, our innate nature is to belong, to connect, with others at an interpersonal and communal level. Alida Miranda-Wolff in her work, *Cultures of Belonging* provides this succinct perspective: "your sense that you are part of something greater than yourself that you value and need and that values and needs you back." (p. 8) The intentionality of practicing belonging creates a culture that everyone feels a connection, reciprocity, and shared value. This means that everyone has access and can fully participate in the life and structure of the church and/or organization with appreciation.

The field of psychology tells us the self-esteem of human beings stems from a need to belong. What does it feel like for people to belong? Naomi Hattaway, founder of I am Triangle, names three signs people demonstrate when they belong:

- **Vulnerability** – the ability to deeply connect with others through inquiry and sharing stories
- **Shared experiences** – bonding through deep appreciation of a common experience
- **Nurturing bonds** – continuing to care for and tend to connections created through common experiences

Hattaway best summarizes the importance of belonging in this way: "We need others. For completing the patchwork of our identities, with our singular traits and those that we share with kindred and friends." (*"On Belonging,"* Psychology Today).



BIBLICAL/SPIRITUAL/THEOLOGICAL FRAMING OR REFERENCES:

BELONGING, WHEN EXAMINED FROM A THEOLOGICAL AND BIBLICAL FRAMEWORK, is based on a grace-filled invitation from the God of all creation to become co-creators in Jesus' redemptive work in the world. This redemptive work, carried out by Christ's church, invites, and includes all – whether they recognize their value of God and need for God and God's redemptive work in the world or not. Divine belonging, in this way, is characteristically



EXAMPLE(S):

EXAMPLES OF BELONGING INCLUDE:

SPORTS TEAMS - Members of sports teams are appreciated and belong to the team because of a shared skill and interest in the sport being played. Whether members are beginner players or experienced ones, each player is invested in improving the team's overall performance by helping one another improve. Many schools have unified sports teams in which those who have intellectual disabilities and those who do not play together. Teams are organized based on similar skills and abilities. The principle behind Unified Sports is the following: "training together and playing together is a quick path to friendship and understanding."



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different from secular types of belonging because it is predicated on:

- God and God's grace
- Covenant love for all creation
- Continual invitation and inclusion into God's redemptive work in the world through Christ
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Belonging, in the divine sense, rests on God's covenant love for all creation seeing and calling out the inherent value and worth in each of us. Because God made humanity as a diverse, unique people, we belong to God and each other.

REFLECTION QUESTION #1

When have you sensed/felt a deep sense of belonging? When have you sensed/felt a deep sense of isolation? What were the circumstances?

1

REFLECTION QUESTION #2

Human belonging, according to Alida Miranda-Wolff, is based on "mutual reciprocity, access, and a sharing of power and opportunity." Divine belonging has these elements as outcomes but is primarily based on the inherent value and worth of people - especially when the person (or people) may not see it in themselves. What is the role of the Church in fostering divine belonging in people, communities, and the world?

2

REFLECTION QUESTION #3

Is it necessary for people to have similar values and to experience a sense of belonging in a community? If so, why? If not, why not?

3

REFLECTION QUESTION #4

How do you envision creating/fostering belonging in your spheres of influence (family, workplace, faith community, civic organization, etc.)? What do you believe you need to create belonging?

4

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

BOOKS:

- *The Beautiful Community: Unity, Diversity, and the Church at Its Best* by Irwyn L. Ince, Jr.
- *Cultures of Belonging: Building Inclusive Organizations That Last* by Alida Miranda-Wolf

BRIDGING: TOWARDS A SOCIETY BUILT ON BELONGING (FROM BERKELEY.EDU)

<https://belonging.berkeley.edu/bridging-towards-society-built-belonging-animated-video-curriculum>

WHO BELONGS? (FROM THE OTHERING & BELONGING INSTITUTE PODCAST)

<https://belonging.berkeley.edu/whobelongs>

UNIFIED SPORTS (FROM THE SPECIAL OLYMPICS)

<https://www.specialolympics.org/what-we-do/sports/unified-sports>

**These videos & articles also informed the content of this resource.*