

# Are you a pastor, or do you just work here? – Wrestling with issues of identity and vocation

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(Notes by Rev. Mark Farmer)

There can be both connection and tension between our pastoral vocation and our identity in Christ. In 1994 during her ministry time in Albania during a difficult period for that nation, she found that the person she was with the people was what counted, not her knowledge and academic qualifications.

Whatever we do or say, it ministers to others according to the person we are, not our degrees, etc. [To what extent do I operate in this awareness in my ministry?]

The list of the reasons why we do what we do always includes pride and ego.

We are often devoid of *presence*.

Richard Foster: Superficiality is the bane of our time.

Conversion is not once for all. Constant transformation is needed.

God *invites* us, nudging, nudging, nudging..., not manipulating.

*We* must respond.

We cannot give to others what we haven't received ourselves.

How do we learn all this? From *failure*. Francesca almost lost her faith. Then she became aware of her disconnect.

Nobody cared about her soul during her studies, only her mind. So she operated out of her head.

We can have all the needed qualifications, but our heart is small.

So she quit for awhile and began spiritual direction under a Benedictine nun.

Your work is not just ministry, it is listening. How can you listen if you're always moving?

All our demons come out when we are in prolonged solitude.

Unless our efforts are an outflow of our being, they will be vain.

When we lose our integrity, it is time to stop; we are hurting others.

If we reconnect with our heritage...

David Benner's *The Gift of Being Yourself*: Our primary vocation is to work on becoming ourselves, which is given to us over and over to share with others.

Julian of Norwich: "I am enough."

It is in us. We need to reconnect with it; that's the problem.

Thomas Merton: We live in a false self.

In all creation, identity is a problem only for humans.

Henri Nouwen always struggled with being enough. See his *The Inner Voice of Love*.

In Nouwen's *Life of the Beloved*, he describes the journey of the Eucharist, which is the journey of each of us:

- The bread is *taken*: God chose us. We rest in this gift.
- The bread is *blessed*: This is the unconditional Yes God has spoken into our lives. Receiving this Yes blocks the devil in our lives.
- The bread is *broken*: We honor and acknowledge our wounds (loneliness, failure, pain), and so grow in realizing our common broken humanity.
- The bread is *given to others*: We need to know our self in order to give it.

*Who* we can *be* to others is more important than *what* we can *do* for them.

This gives us a totally different sense of identity.

It gives us a totally new vision of our pastoral vocation: To love with extravagance out of the knowledge that God has loved us in this way.