

Enneagram: Exploring a Plurality of Perspectives

Unitarian Universalist Church of Vancouver

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Reflection on the Theme© by Rev. Kathryn A. Bert

We are always learning, aren't we? One thing I love about the Enneagram is what it teaches me about myself and others – mostly that we don't all see the world the same way. I can get so caught up in my own worldview that I don't understand why others don't see it my way! In fact, I often read the first draft of my sermon to my spouse who has to ask a lot of questions about what I mean, because I've failed to connect the ideas for others. I jump from one idea to its logical next idea but it turns out the logic connecting the two ideas is in my head only and not actually apparent to someone not in my head.

I am grateful to people who have different worldviews and observe my actions from a different perspective. Even when we share a worldview or goal, it is helpful to have someone else reflect my own values back to me. I am still learning.

Last week, after preaching what I thought was a pretty good sermon about my delight in movement, despite the cultural pressures which shame us in our bodies, I met with the Coming of Age youth and their families. I was nervous about the meeting because I hadn't met all the youth and parents, so I didn't know them all, and I was delivering news that had the potential to be upsetting – that we were stopping the program for now, and re-starting in January.

As the Enneagram would tell you, I don't know if they actually say that my type is "socially awkward" but it does say we prefer to spend time alone. I have always thought of myself as socially awkward. I prefer having a role – minister works – or a task – a message to convey in a meeting – or a structure. But when it comes to small talk, I flail or am often just silent. So I flailed last Sunday. I had finally relaxed because the meeting, from my perspective, had gone really well, and Lacey Stokes had made this amazing, delicious soup which I enjoyed. And I asked Lacey's son if he got this kind of vegan deliciousness all the time, and he replied that he ate so much! Then, I asked if eating vegan was the secret to his being so skinny..... as if skinny were an aspiration we all had. I said that, in front of a bunch of coming of age youth and their parents after just having led a service in which I proudly read Lucille Clifton's poem about hips that don't fit into petty places. I repeated the cultural message we receive day in and day out about our bodies – that reductionist binary that skinny is good and fat is bad – and, I'm sorry I said that in front of growing youth who are challenged every day by these unhealthy cultural messages. Oops. It took an observer to that conversation gently pointing out the contradiction to me to notice what I had done – reinforced the message I had sought to counteract just an hour before in worship.

Fortunately, I am still learning. I am grateful to others for my learning, and grateful to the Enneagram for understanding my motivations so that I can do better next time.

A Plurality of Perspectives© by Dale Rhodes (Dale goes off script a bit, so you may prefer to listen to this sermon rather than read it!)

In this pluralistic world where we so often seem to be different than one another in our perceptions and values:

Is there a map to help you understand and articulate what makes you tick, in a good way? Is there a map that helps you understand “the why” around what ticks you off? Is there a map that helps you understand that same content in others? What about a map that points to understanding all our inherent values, ethics, gifts, strengths, challenges and even spiritual perspectives? Have you ever wanted to just give someone your operating instructions, and it didn’t work? Have you ever wanted to get someone’s operating instructions but it looked like directions for an IKEA DINING ROOM SET? Likely you have had this experience in relationships: at work, in family, in partnerships, all throughout life, yes!

Today I want to offer you an introduction to what I have found is one of the best maps to help navigate the actual territory of difference, diversity and pluralism amongst us all — I’ve been searching for a map like this my entire life. I was a young gay kid in Chicago in the 60s 70s 80s constantly being told that I saw the world the way others did, but on the inside I knew it wasn’t true. I saw things differently, and I hoped there were others like me in a tribe. I searched for years about what makes us different and how can we understand one another. After searching in undergraduate schooling in Interpersonal Communications and Feminist Theory, and Graduate work in Social Justice/Social Work, and another graduate degree in Spiritual Traditions and Ethics, I found a very useful map to understand our differences in perspective that can help us bridge the gaps and be closer to one another. I have focused the last 25 years of my professional work as a mentor, spiritual director and community facilitator on this content: The Enneagram Personality System, a psychology and communications system that describes nine major points of view and nine major personality preferences and styles.... Ennea is greek for 9: 9 Personality Styles, one of them is ours as primary, and all of them relate to us.

One of these nine lenses seems to be primary in us and develops a very clear and skilled view in one direction and about specific content and values; but that view also inhibits reality from being seen from another direction. It’s a sort of preferred attention, which means if we’re not careful it can cause a sometimes selective in-attention. The Enneagram is the best resource I have found for personal and spiritual growth, and I am doing a workshop on it here next Saturday afternoon. Today I want to just tell you about the system and link it to the Unitarian Universalist Statement of Values, in light of Rev Kathryn’s current theme on Pluralism.

As religious liberals, we are called to Love at the Center, taking into account the diverse ways of being that we bring to the community. The UU Statement of Values reads: “Love is the power that holds us together and is at the center of our shared values.” I believe the Enneagram shows 9 ways of love at its center, and it can empower all of us to a deeper Love of one another through curiosity, understanding, and a respect of many shared values. “Pluralism. We celebrate that we are all sacred beings, diverse in culture, experience, and theology. We covenant to learn from one another in our free and responsible search for truth and meaning. We embrace our differences and commonalities with Love, curiosity, and respect.”

This UU Principle: It’s a tall order, but learning about our own and others’ preferred worldview through understanding the Enneagram personality styles can give us the understanding to honor one another’s backgrounds and world views. It can give us a framework to have a safe dialogue so there is mutual respect, compassion and even Love. And finally the Enneagram can give you the framework and

structure to encourage one another's individual spiritual growth, which will frequently look different than your own. Let me put a little flesh on it for you.

> Dad Story— I never really understood my dad, who was a Korean War Vet loyal to his country and a loyal union laborer. He was the kind of guy who would tuck you in at night so tight like you were in an army bunk and tell you that you were safe and would never be homeless; I loved the special attention, not really needing the assurance of safety. When older, he'd buy you an air compressor as a birthday gift, anonymously fill your gas tank, and even when I came out of the closet and we were not speaking, he'd deliver parkas and gloves anonymously to my apartment door steps bc although he didn't want me to be gay, he wanted me to be safe and warm. I never understood my dad's personality style until I opened up the trunk of his car after his funeral: two air compressors, 17 cans of fix a flat, a battery recharger, prestone, oil, windshield wiper fluid, rags, flares, blankets, battery cables, even the sun shield was an advertisement of care bears putting up smoke alarms and the words said "always protect your family from house fires"... my dad even had a clean pair of underwear in a plastic bag inside a Folgers Coffee Can— bc you never know when you'll have an accident and need clean underwear on before the ambulance arrives... BE PREPARED and BE LOYAL were his primary values, and he wanted kids who knew how to work on cars, work on houses, and be able to build lean-tos and know what to eat during the zombie apocalypse ; he was a union carpenter who knew there was safety in numbers against corruption; I finally saw at his death that his high value and his gift was Safety and Security, someone who matches what the Enneagram Personality System calls a Type Six Loyal Skeptic. He made an easy and good laborer and boy scout dad teaching preparedness; but he was not generally relaxed or warm in the way I wanted. Most of my life: I missed him and what he had to offer! You can probably guess by listening to me for a short time today that I am a fairly emotional softie who be "supporting you" anytime as a counselor, but what you may want at times are folks like my dad assessing if you have a "supporting wall" if your house or garage is in danger of falling. Dad and I had different gifts and no one really taught us to understand the goodness enough to share easily. Now I know. Now it's all I teach in my private practice and workshops.

> Mom Story — My Mom offered very different values than my dad. While he lived in a world he saw as dangerous and requiring safety and loyalty, my mom lives in a cheery Disney movie and wakes up singing to this day at age 91. If you are old enough to know who Doris Day is: that typifies my mom. She is a self-professed "border collie", whose high value is love; what she wanted was not safety-oriented children, but LOVING children who performed service in their families and communities. As kids we visited people with polio, we visited seniors, we hosted large family events, and this woman truly believes that a stranger is a friend she hasn't made yet. She's the woman driving who lets you go ahead into the next lane and waves at you hoping you wave back (and she comments to her passenger if you don't). She made a good mom who taught her kids how to care: of her five kids there's me a spiritual director, two sisters and a brother are nurses, and another brother who is the world's best single dad. Like Jesus who was probably also the Enneagram Style known as Type Two The Giver Connector, my mom knows we should all probably love our neighbor and the world would be a kinder place .

Two very different personalities that had many values, but those values were prioritized differently; one value topped them all. Loyalty vs. Kindness. Likely if you examine yourself and the people closest to you, you'll see that is happening there as well. We use many values, but they are prioritized differently. One is a driver.

Here is what the Enneagram looks like.... Nine personality styles that make assumptions on how the world works... and we over rely on that assumption, that strategy... and cocreate a world around us with

that useful but limited worldview. I'll make it easy for you to remember by grouping those nine types into three groups of three, who prioritize certain values and methods over others.

There are three types that have an intuition and values preferences that start from the heart, EMOTIONS, Connection, Relating

2 The Connector: HELPING, BEING NICE, KIND, OF ASSISTANCE (Dolly Parton and the main characters in the film: I Love You Man, my mom) The main value is KINDNESS, SERVICE, LOVE

3 The Performer: SUCCESS, DOING, GETTING THINGS DONE (Will Smith Always Playing a Coach, and Oprah Winfrey raising folks up;) The main value is OVERCOMING FAILURE

4 The Romantic: BEING UNIQUE, EMOTIONALLY MET, REMEMBERING THE FORGOTTEN (Princess Diana, Nicholas Cage in everything he does and every character he plays, Me) The main value is HONORING AUTHENTICITY

There are three types that have an intuition and values that start from the HEAD, mental processing, and seeking understanding and predictability

5 The Observer: OBSERVING, GETTING DATA, PLANNING AND REMEMBERING (The Buddha, Ryan Gosling and The Wise Owl from Winnie the Pooh) The main value is WISDOM

6. The Loyal Skeptic: SAFETY AND SECURITY AND LOYALTY (Woody Allen, Sally Field in the Union Organizer Film Norma Rae, Piglet, and the teen novel Divergent, my dad) The main value is PREPARATION IN DANGER, LOYALTY TO ALLIES in ADVERSITY

7. The Epicure/Adventurer: POTENTIAL, MULTIPLE OPTIONS, AVOIDING OR RELIEVING PAIN AND RESTRICTION (Goldie Hawn, Anthony Bourdain and the 1st openly gay city official in the US, Harvey Milk) The main value is POTENTIAL AND FREEDOM FOR ALL

There are three types that have an intuition that starts in the BODY BRAIN concerned with power, self-control, other control, environmental control, you might know them as people who shoot from the hip

8 The Protector: JUSTICE AND VENGEANCE, INFLUENCE AND IMPACT: Calling a Spade a Spade, these are mack trucks filled with marshmallows (Awkwafina, John McCain, Kamala Harris) The main value is PROTECTION

9 The Peacemaker Mediator: PEACE AND HARMONY, CONSENSUS (Gloria Steinem, Mr. Rogers, likely Winnie the Pooh and Taoism) The main value is HARMONY

1 The Idealist/Perfectionist: INTEGRITY, RIGHTNESS, AND FAIRNESS (Hillary Clinton, Michelle Obama and Martha Stewart) The main value is TO BE USEFUL

These are nine intuitions, nine styles of motivation and behavior, nine strategies for getting through life, nine lenses, nine worldviews. They are also the source of our ethics, values, and spiritual understandings.... Find yourself, find another, and start with curiosity while you listen. THE LANGUAGES OF LOVE have gotten a lot of attention this last decade. When we talk about Love, we are not saying the same thing. We assume we are, but what is often going on is an assumption that we are seeing the same world and interpreting it the same way, and expressing the same way. But our languages of love (how we express love and care and how we receive love and care) are VERY DIFFERENT. This is true of our languages of work and service; and our languages around spiritual experience and growth. When someone like my dad buys you an air compressor, or when someone like

my mom tells you that it is better to be loving than to be right: it may be their core value and their expression of love. Listen.

UUs are a spiritual community. Do we really listen to one another's spiritual experiences and needs? We're often trying to express the same thing about the Spirit of Life amongst each other, but we're not saying the same thing. (2x) Zen has taught us about pointing to the moon. The moon is Ultimate Reality, the Spirit of Life, the Ground of Being. We can point to it, but what happens is that we then fall in love with our own finger that is pointing to that moon, and we forget the moon. We are pointing, all of us, at the same thing, but we are not saying the same thing. Different fingers, different perspectives. We are speaking of the same thing, but we are not saying the same thing. Nothing wrong, we just have different vantage points, different fingers, right? This is why the mystic St. Therese of Lisieux said that it may be better to speak to God than about God, because she knew that we get into trouble with assumptions that we are speaking of the same thing. Then what can we know of the moon even more fully? We can know through listening to one another, understanding one another's differences and languages and motivations, and then offering a broad patient field of support. I think the Enneagram helps disarm us and listen truly to the other worldview that is in front of us. This is what gets people beyond tolerance of each other, into true compassion, community and pluralism. This helps you live out religious liberal values and principles.

I hope you choose to learn the Enneagram with us next weekend, enjoy the fun process of self discovery and the honest exploration of yourself with others. Learn to understand yourself, one another, learn the other languages of easier communication and even love; and identify the specific ways that you can be of support to another's growth and development. It fits what they say about 12 step programs: There is a map, and it works if you work it. We all have so much to teach one another, and in truth knowing this system just has life make more sense and a whole lot easier to get along. Please broaden yourselves and join us next Saturday. Thank you.