

Voices: Where is home for you?

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A common question to ask when first meeting someone is, “Where is home for you?” Or maybe we phrase it, “Where do you live?”

It sounds benign on its surface. Most of the time, we ask this question to discover a little more about a person—where he or she is from or where a person lives now.

Places I call home

I guess I have gotten used to the question. People ask me some form of it all the time. My answer has become, “Well, it all depends on which time of my life we are talking about.”

If I’m asked where I was born, I say in England. If I’m asked where I grew up, I answer something different. I say that my childhood through the end of elementary school was spent growing up in an ethnic enclave in the outskirts of Pittsburgh, Pa. In fact, the Pittsburgh airport now is atop that area.

My teenage, college and seminary years were spent growing up in Texas—in the Houston area, in East Texas and then in the Fort Worth area. My adult years in congregational ministry were spent growing up in Philadelphia, Pa., and its surrounding six counties.

Now, I am in Central Texas and continuing to grow.

Though I consider all of these places to be home, I have found it really does depend on what stage of life I am in as to how I answer that question.

Places others call home

For many years, I ministered in a neighborhood of about 150,000 people, who lived within 10 square blocks. It was a geographic area represented by extreme poverty and many of the stereotypical issues associated with deep urban poverty—sexual abuse, drug and alcohol abuse, houses in disrepair, joblessness, children taking care of siblings, absentee fathers and a church of some kind or other dotted throughout the neighborhood.

Children attended some of the activities we offered through the churches. Most of the children lived in houses with no numbers on the outside. When I asked them where they lived, they told me the street name. They knew where they lived and how to get there and always were my guides through the streets.

For many years now, students, neighbors and numerous professionals in various types of work and ministry have filled my life. I still ask the question about where a person considers home to be.

Some will say the name of the town and then hasten to add they have never been outside of that town. In so many ways, these folks are like the children I worked with in that very enclosed and heavily populated 10-square-block area. To those children, the world—home—looked just like those 10 square blocks.

To others in my life now, the world—home—looks like that very small town or a neighborhood in a sprawling urban area or even international communities in the United States or in other countries.

Is home a place or a connection?

Within the last few years, answers to my question have added new details. Now, students in my college courses say something like, “My parents’ home

is (the name of the place),” often followed by, “I grew up, though, in (the name of the place).”

I don’t hear these responses communicating a sense of loss or, alternatively, a sense of privilege. What I do hear is a sense of connectedness to people—to family, neighborhoods or communities—though not necessarily to a place.

I am curious about these things and am still thinking about them.

The question, if we really consider it, gives us an opportunity to reflect on our roots and our connectedness.

Jesus is our example

Jesus is a strong example. For most of world history, Jesus was right next to God—in proximity, spirit and overall being. Then, Jesus changed places and lived among us to model what both our roots and our connectedness ought to be like according to God’s plan for all of us.

The Scriptures tell us Jesus never lost his rootedness in God or his place as a part of a triune community—God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. After the crucifixion, Jesus stayed for several weeks among members of his earthly community before he ascended to be back with God, where his roots and community have been from the beginning of time and where they will be until the end of time.

Jesus understood it is not in our earthly family, our earthly community or in our earthly places where we have our true home.

Where is home for you?

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