

Who Am I Now?

by *The Rev. Dr. Martin M. Roth '66, H'06*

These three pictures of me—at Thiel, in early career, at retirement—reveal that in certain aspects we change over time and yet, when thinking more deeply, we know that in other respects there is a continuity about who we are over time. Both insights can invite spiritual reflection.

My recent retirement from 38 years in parish ministry and consequent reflections have provided the opportunity to realize anew that identity questions (“Who am I?”) accompany us throughout our earthly journey through time.

Retirement offers another golden opportunity to wrestle with the identity question, now, one hopes, with the benefit of the accumulated wisdom of a lifetime. If one simply settles for clinging to the answer we’ve so often embraced throughout working years—“I am what I do” then retirement will face us with a traumatic sense of loss of identity. We will have given Descartes’ dictum, “I think, therefore I am” a little twist—“I do, therefore I am.” We will likely pay the consequence—depression, loss of hope and purpose. We will have simply exchanged our pre-retirement “to do” list for a post-retirement “to do” list. Consequently, we will find ourselves in “deep do-do.” “Do-do” is not sufficient in itself to provide a continuing and renewed sense of purpose.

If, on the other hand, we can embrace retirement as time to wisely wrestle with the meaning of our being, we are ushered

into a spiritual exploration. We can come to a realization that the question “Who am I?” can be seen in a new light when answered not with what “I do,” but rather with answering the question “Whose am I?” Out of the answer to that question can arise a renewed sense of self-worth, purposeful activity, and time to be in the presence of the Beloved One who has and will continue to sustain us across the journey of our years.

Work is not just what I did for earning a living, but is only one means of expressing my God-given gifts. As God called me—my vocation—so I will in retirement find emerging opportunities for leisure, reflection and continued service, albeit in different forms than previously expressed.

No matter what our academic major was, our education at Thiel—consistent with Dr. William Passavant’s original vision—included the linkage between learning and service. Whether or not we were aware of it at the time of our being at Thiel, we can now look back and track how deeply that vision has shaped us.

Retirement is a time to continue to explore our gifts. Besides continuing, in some altered way, to use our dominant gifts, we can develop other gifts that may have been lying dormant for years. As one wise person said, “Every moment comes to you pregnant with divine purpose.” Savor each new moment of time, knowing it can serve as a doorway to deep meaning, purpose and service.



The Rev. Dr. Martin Roth '66, H'06 retired on his 38th anniversary of ordination (August 1) and after 23 years as pastor of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Greenville, Pa. In his retirement, he is continuing his community involvement and leadership in medical ethics, hospital board and work in ecumenical relations. As a representative from North American Lutherans he has been asked to participate in the “First International Seminar within the Luther Decade” (leading up to the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation in 2017) in Wittenberg, Germany. He is enjoying his “new relationship to time,” which includes spending more time with his wife, Sarah (Fox) Roth '65.