

June 1, 2019

Rev. Douglas Duerr  
Unity Worldwide Ministries  
Copy to Unity Church of Hawaii  
Copy to Rev. Denese Shellink

**Report of Ministry Support for Unity Church of Hawaii April 5 – May 13, 2019**

Dear Douglas,

Thank you again for the opportunity to serve the Unity Church of Hawaii for six weeks this spring – I'm grateful to be part of this Holy Experiment! I experienced challenge, joy, connection, communion and satisfaction during this engagement. I look forward to serving UWM and other Unity ministries in the future.

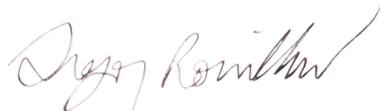
As you requested, I submit this letter and enclosure as a report of my time with this ministry, in service of transparency, clarity, meaning and shared understanding. I am also sending a copy to UCOH as feedback about my experience working with them, and to Rev. Denese Shellink in support of her work with the ministry as their Transitional Minister.

I offer my report in the traditional Buddhist framework of *Ground – Path – Fruition*:

- Ground: the basis from which we started, including my initial observations, impressions, and aims for the work;
- Path: a description of the vehicle and specific methods I employed to move toward realizing the aims, along with some observations about the experience;
- Fruition: the results that arose from the path, including my recommendations for the future.

Please let me know if you have any questions, comments or other feedback for me.

With warm, loving regard,



Gregory Rouillard

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### Ground

**Arrival.** I arrived in Hawaii on April 4 and spent my first week meeting people, observing interactions, “feeling into” the system and participating in group events with the UWM team. During this period I attended six meetings with individuals and small groups with Rev. Douglas and Rev. Cynthia. I also participated in two Sunday worship services, several meetings and events with the Board of Trustees, and two workshops presented by UWM staff.

**Systemic Culture.** My strongest initial impression of the ministry was the presence of a high level of pain, distrust, disconnection and fear. I perceived a lack of the qualities of Safety, Trust and Respect outside of some of the “cliques” or affinity groups we met with. I assessed the systemic culture as grounded in blaming, finger-pointing, gossip and triangulation. There seemed to be a habitual pattern of reaching outside the ministry for rescuing or to access power. For example: During several of the small group meetings, participants seemed to want the UWM staff or me to “do something” about a situation or about a person or persons perceived to be “the problem.” I also heard many reports of threatened or actual calls to the police, lawyers and insurance agents. Interestingly, I heard people on different “sides” of particular issues saying exactly the same things about each other while blaming the “others” for the perceived problems. This was very informative to me and helpful in seeing the situation as systemic rather than based on individual actions or personalities.

**Communication.** The ministry culture of communication seemed attracted to the use of *legalistic* and formal language, mainly attentive to actions and tasks, particularly in written communications. I contrast this to *humanistic* language, which is less formal and more attentive to the quality of connection and relationship. I perceived that individuals generally lacked training and skill in expressing themselves, listening and understanding others as human beings, which impacted the ease and effectiveness of direct interaction. I believe this lack of skill, combined with the fear and distrust present in the system, influenced the use of legalistic / contractual language in written and even verbal communications. I think this has also been a factor in the culture of gossip and triangulating and is an expression of a lack of self-responsibility in the systemic culture.

**Stages of Community.** I assessed the ministry as resting mainly in the *pseudo-community* stage of development described by M. Scott Peck in “A Different Drum.” There also seemed to be a fair amount of *chaos* present; in addition to my own observations I heard many stories about previous chaotic times and events. My perception is that these times of chaos were met with *organizational strategies* that led back into pseudo-community. The ministry system seemed ripe for a *death* of those

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patterns that no longer serve, leading to the stage of *emptiness* on the way to *authentic community*.

**Systemic Addiction to Drama.** One of the main patterns I observed was a state of anxiety and activation among ministry leaders and congregants alike, often manifesting as hyper-vigilance and fear of physical harm. On several occasions I observed people responding to situations I assessed as safe and non-threatening with “fight, flight or freeze” reactions. These responses seem to perpetuate the heightened atmosphere in the ministry that I call the “drama.” Systemically, the drama doesn’t depend on the individual players – they are just playing roles in the system that have been present for decades and filled by many different individuals. The main drama seemed to be an effort to identify and get rid of the “problem people” in order to “solve the problem.” Even if people can be forced to leave the system, the drama continues because there is always someone else to step into the role. The drama can only be resolved by disrupting systemic factors.

One example of this systemic addiction is the pattern I perceived of attracting and installing charismatic, powerful leaders, co-opting them into a particular systemic role, finding them wanting in some way, and then casting them out. From what I heard about the past, this happened more than once with members of the Board of Trustees as well as people in the Senior Minister role.

**Unresolved Pain and Grief.** The final factor I perceived in the ministry culture was the nearly universal pain and grief associated with the death of Rev. Sky St. John. While his death was initially described to me as a suicide, I almost never heard anyone in the ministry describe it as such. Rather I heard people refer to his death, passing, transitioning, etc. There seemed to be an unstated agreement to avoid talking about his death as a choice. I believe this avoidance, as well as a lack of effective grieving, contributes to the systemic patterns I describe above.

**Aims.** Based on my observations and assessments of the ministry’s systemic culture, I formulated the following aims or intentions for my work with the community:

1. Offer the example of someone in a ministerial or leadership role who embodies calm presence and equanimity in service. I intend to *companion* the community rather than rescue it. I aspire to keep to a role of *impeccable neutrality* rather than getting drawn “on stage.” I hope this example will help disrupt the systemic patterns of addiction to drama and attracting, co-opting and then rejecting powerful leaders.
2. Offer a regular space for individual healing where people can reveal what is important to them with *transparency* and experience being received with

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*compassion*. Hold these sessions in a manner that fosters Safety, Trust and Respect.

3. Offer varied large-group opportunities to learn and practice skills for *effective listening* and *self-responsibility*, mainly through the principles and practices of Nonviolent Communication. In these sessions, cultivate direct personal engagement and the experience of connection grounded in Safety, Trust and Respect.
4. Offer a robust framework for individuals to *restore connection and relationship* when it has been damaged or lost. Facilitate conversations that result in increased mutual understanding and the potential for change.

Path

**Vehicle.** By the end of my first week with the ministry, the aims listed above emerged as what I believed I could offer to foster systemic healing in the community. I drew on the *Journey of Transformation* as the vehicle for this healing. This journey is both a personal one and a community one, with three phases analogous to stages in Scott Peck's model of community development:

- *Letting Go: Choose Trust over Fear.* The first step in this journey is to acknowledge fear, disconnection, distrust, projection, by-passing and any other factors that prevent us from being whole as human beings or as a community. It involves the symbolic death of the ego or saying goodbye to those patterns which no longer serve. This phase is analogous to Peck's "death" of what gets in the way of the experience of authentic community.
- *Letting Be: Cultivate Compassion for Self and Others.* Once the symbolic ego death has occurred, the individual or community rests and renews, gaining new energy and capacity for the final stage of the journey. This is also a time of contemplation and recognizing our ability to be with whatever is happening within ourselves and the community, without judgment or reactivity. This phase is analogous to Peck's "emptiness" stage of community.
- *Letting Come: Open to the Yet Unknown Possibilities!* When the time is right, the individual and the community burst forth with new vigor and competence, bringing forth that which wants to be newly born. This new creation may be completely unexpected and unpredictable. This phase is analogous to the beginning of Peck's "authentic community" stage.

**Personal Presence:** I believe my calm presence and example of embodying the principles and practices I was teaching served as an offering in itself. In particular, I did my best to remain neutral and open-minded when invited into taking one particular point of view or another on different topics. I also practiced responding with equanimity to charged situations when others were activated, for example when the police were called at the beginning of one of my sessions. I received feedback that seeing how I remained calm in that situation, rather than engaging in the "drama," was a new experience for many people and contributed to their sense of safety. Finally, I participated in ten meetings with individuals or small groups (not including meetings that were part of the Restorative Conversations described below). To set the stage of neutrality and intention, I invited the other participants to consider the following three questions before we met:

1. What is it you would like me to know?
2. Why do you want me to know it?
3. If this is about another person, what prevents you from talking to them directly?

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**Healing Circles.** In service of the second aim listed above (opportunity for personal healing), I introduced the practice of Healing Circles. I facilitated four such gatherings on consecutive Monday evenings, with a fifth gathering the last Monday I was there that was held by two congregants with my support, coaching and feedback. In preparation for this circle, I offered a brief training attended by about twelve people.

**Mutual Learning.** In service of the third aim listed above (opportunity to learn and practice skills), I offered eleven sessions with a total of 29 hours of engagement. These sessions were on the following topics:

1. *Nonviolent Communication (NVC):* Five sessions introducing the basic principles and practices of NVC, as well as two specialized sessions on Transforming Enemy Images and Mindful Feedback.
2. *Power, Systemic Culture and Leadership:* Two sessions introducing a new view of leadership, a new framework of power in community and creating a Restorative Menu.
3. *Governance and Decision Making:* One large-group session offering a robust exploration of group decision making and introducing decision making by consent. This session was followed by a small-group session building on the results of the first session and using a Sociocratic selection process to help co-create a strategy for continuing the work begun during my visit.

**Restorative Conversations.** In service of the fourth aim listed above (opportunity to restore connection and relationship), I facilitated four Restorative Conversations (RC). This method, adapted from the Restorative Circles framework, includes four steps:

1. One person contacts me to request an RC with one other person. I hold a “pre-circle” meeting with the requestor to help them discover where they would like to start with the conversation and what they would like to restore.
2. I then hold a pre-circle meeting with the other person and offer them the same opportunity to explore the situation named by the requestor and gain clarity on what is important to them.
3. I meet with both people together, holding space for each of them to share what they want the other one to hear and then receive a response reflecting what the other person heard. In most cases this evolved into a dialogue which continued with very little input from me other than time awareness and bringing the participants back to the form if needed. By the end of the session, the participants formulate “agreed upon actions” by making offers and requests.
4. I track the offers and requests made by the participants and check in with them two weeks after their joint meeting to help them assess how well they were fulfilled.

## Fruition

**Perceptions.** Over the course of my five weeks companioning the ministry, I perceived some strong shifts in the systemic culture. Beginning in about the third week of my visit, I sensed a greater degree of calm and peace in people I encountered and started hearing reports of people engaging in more direct communication. I perceived a greater level of calm and equanimity in staff members and leaders, and heard expressions of hope and excitement about the future. I attribute these shifts to a disruption in the systemic pattern of drama, fueled by people learning new skills and capacities for self-responsibility.

**Attendance.** Attendance at my mutual learning offerings was fairly consistent, with an average of about 30 – 35 people. The maximum was 60 at my first offering on Friday, April 11 and the minimum was 20 at one of the Healing Circles. I estimate that about 70 – 80 people attended at least one offering and about 15 – 20 people attended most or all of the offerings.

**Feedback.** I consistently heard from attendees at my offerings that these were the aspects they enjoyed most about the sessions:

- Sitting in a circle, where they could see and hear each other during the session. This in itself created a sense of connection and community that is less likely to arise when sitting in rows.
- Playing games and engaging with each other in an embodied way, so they could have fun while learning.
- Connecting with others in pairs or small groups. People renewed old friendships, formed new connections and experienced meaning, safety, trust, respect and communion.
- Learning new skills and practices, which fueled a sense of hope that they could continue to practice them with others in the community.

**New Practices and Reference Materials.** I introduced the following individual and group processes and attendant materials to the community. Documentation of all of them is available at <https://www.wayofcommunity.net/ucoh-resources/>.

1. *Reframing Difficult Interactions*: An inner framework for identifying and connecting with the three “self-responsible” stances available in any interaction: self-connection, revealing myself and receiving you.
2. *Transforming Enemy Images*: An inner reflection practice or guided meditation for identifying and transforming judgments and negative thoughts about other people. This practice is based in the awareness of Universal Human Needs offered by Nonviolent Communication.

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3. *Mindful Feedback*: A practice for transforming how I hear praise, blame, criticism or anything anyone says to me as an expression of what is important to them.
4. *Restorative Practices*: A generic “menu” of options available within any community when disconnection and difference arise, listed in order of increasing resources required.
5. *Reflection Circles*: A small-group (three or four) practice for sharing with, listening to and witnessing each other.
6. *Healing Circles*: Also known as Sharing Circles, this is a community practice for revealing oneself with transparency and authenticity and being received with compassion and suspension.
7. *Mindful Decision Making*: A simplified adaptation of a consent-based group decision-making process from the Sociocratic Circle-Organization Method (Sociocracy). This practice promotes making effective group decisions efficiently while maximizing participation and connection through equivalence.
8. *Understanding Systemic Culture*: A rigorous exploration of two types of systemic culture – Power-Over (contractual) and Power-With (covenantal).

**Products of UCOH Group Processes.** The following small and large group processes produced outcomes. Some of them are documented and available for download at <https://www.wayofcommunity.net/ucoh-resources/>.

1. Sociocratic process to address the question, “How do we continue the work begun here with Gregory?” Documentation titled “UCOH Moving Forward Notes from May 5” includes a refined version of the outcome of the process and the raw notes.
2. Sociocratic group process selecting people to continue offering Healing Circles and NVC classes / practice. No documentation.
3. UCOH Restorative Menu and other ideas for creating a restorative culture. Documentation titled “UCOH Restorative Menu from May 11” includes the UCOH Restorative Menu as well as all raw notes from the session.

**Recommendations.** Based on my experience of companioning the ministry, I offer the following recommendations for continuing the Journey of Transformation begun during my visit:

1. Integrate simple practices for communication and connection, such as *Reflection Circles*, into all aspects of the ministry.
2. Offer fun and meaningful opportunities for large and small group learning and embodied interaction. *Make time to play together!*
3. Publicize and integrate the *UCOH Restorative Menu* throughout the ministry. Cultivate the resources necessary to sustain every level of this system.

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4. Continue to offer opportunities for self-expression and listening, such as *Sharing (Healing) Circles*.
5. Cultivate resources within and without the ministry to continue to learn and practice the principles of Nonviolent Communication.
6. Prioritize practices of *connection*, such as beginning each meeting with a check-in, in every church committee and the Board of Trustees.

**Future Opportunities.** I really enjoyed my time with the ministry and would love to continue this journey of companionship and mutual learning. Please consider partnering with me in the future to develop these robust ministry systems:

1. *Feedback*: Cultivate a culture of direct communication where people regularly share and receive feedback from each other without fear or anxiety.
2. *Restoration*: Develop a robust system for restoring connection and relationship when they are lost, refining and expanding on the UCOH Restorative Menu. *Restorative Circles* is a community-based system for conflict transformation.
3. *Collaborative Governance*: Implement organizational structures, meeting formats, and decision making / workflow processes to more fully realize the values of Connection, Equivalence and Effectiveness. *Sociocracy* is an integrated governance system that is particularly suited for communities.