

Ministry as Education Consciousness and Skills

Any discussion of ministry as education in Unity must start with Charles Fillmore's well-known assertion about Unity:

Unity is a link in the great educational movement inaugurated by Jesus Christ; our objective is to discern the truth in Christianity and prove it. The truth that we teach is not new, neither do we claim special revelations or discovery of new religious principles. Our purpose is to help and teach mankind to use and prove the eternal Truth taught by the Master.

This quotation from our co-founder brings up two things we need to remember about education in a metaphysical Christian setting: (1) Unity is an educational movement, and (2) what we teach is not based on revelation but instead on demonstration.

An example of ministry as an educational movement.

An example of a very successful Unity ministry that relied almost exclusively on educational consciousness and skills is Eric Butterworth's Unity of New York (Manhattan). Eric Butterworth is arguably Unity's most celebrated minister. He had no Sunday school or any social justice ministry. His ministry was fundamentally an education program, held weekly, with a 45-minute

lesson sandwiched between Olga's meditation and a celebrated song performed by a nearby Broadway singer.¹³⁶ His Sunday education ministry was augmented by the summer programs he led. These were not cruises or interesting excursions but week-long retreats held at a college campus in Allentown, Pennsylvania, where people met in a gymnasium and slept in dorms.

Education was, for Butterworth, the mission of the ministry. It is true that the ministry he established in New York has not had the same attendance since his passing, but the number of people he has helped (and continues to help) over time has been enormous.

This may explain why Unity World Headquarters has been known for nearly all its existence as "Unity school." I will discuss that in the next insight, *Confidence Rests on Understanding*.

Examples of ministries based on demonstration.

TruthUnity has many resources, but the ones that inspire me most are the profiles of those who taught classes in their kitchens, held services in their living rooms, and ventured forth to visit the sick and troubled with words of healing and prosperity. These people are my "cloud of witnesses."¹³⁷ They did not worship Jesus;

¹³⁶ *Eric Butterworth Unity Podcast*. <https://www.truthunity.net/ebup> See the "long tail" of his ministry in the *Podcast* and in his new book, *Practical Metaphysics*. By the way, I have audio tapes of several of his summer retreats. Let me know if there is interest in recreating an Eric Butterworth summer retreat with five days of Zoom gatherings with audio replays followed by interactive discussion.

¹³⁷ *Cloud of Witnesses*. Hebrews 12:1. See: <https://www.truthunity.net/cloud-of-witnesses>

they followed Jesus. They are what Charles Fillmore looked for as collaborators in the great educational movement inaugurated by Jesus Christ.

Look over the list of Unity founders,¹³⁸ particularly at the significant number of women,¹³⁹ and African Americans¹⁴⁰, and spend some time with those who carry on the work of education in Unity today.¹⁴¹ These people do not teach; they demonstrate.

Before you proceed to read Ministry as Education Consciousness and Skills, I encourage you to allow the work of these great metaphysical educators to enter your imagination with gratitude and faith.

¹³⁸ <https://www.truthunity.net/unity-founders>

¹³⁹ <https://www.truthunity.net/people/joyce-kramer>

¹⁴⁰ <https://www.truthunity.net/african-americans-in-unity/gallery>

¹⁴¹ <https://www.truthunity.net/unity-ministers-and-teachers>

17. Confidence Rests on Understanding

Religious confidence is a matter of the mind. Several years ago I and two colleagues were filming a short documentary entitled *Atheism in the Bible Belt*.¹⁴² A gentleman we interviewed remarked, “The heart cannot accept what the mind rejects.” He was an ordained Methodist minister and chaplain at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He was attending a conference on Atheism in Austin, Texas. His spiritual journey had led him to a firm understanding that God does not exist. He had left church ministry and moved into chaplaincy because chaplaincy provided a way for him to serve the religious needs of nonbelievers. This insight is about the nature of religious needs and how we can provide for them without reference our particular creed or confession.

What are religious needs?

The primary reason a ministry is successful is that people are confident that they will find what they seek by participating in the ministry. Their need may be entirely secular, such as the desire for community. It may also be somewhat “spiritual but not religious,” such as relief from existential anxiety. Most people, however, come to a church seeking an understanding and an experience of

¹⁴² For privacy reasons, the film is not publically available. I may show it to you privately, but I can't release a copy.

how God works in the world today and in their life. Confidence rests on understanding.

My sense, however, is that the religious need for understanding is more important than the need for philosophical discussion, community, or even justice. Why is this so? Why should a ministry focus more on God than on a neighbor? What's wrong with serving people's material, psychological and social needs? Is not "faith without works" dead? Did not Jesus feed the multitudes, heal the sick and welcome the outcast?

Yes, Jesus did all those things and more. They are important and valid forms of ministry in today's world. But we now have nonprofits and governmental social service programs that provide many of those things, and Jesus did not have to compete with soccer matches on the Sabbath. We now have psychologists and physicians. People came to hear what Jesus had to say, but they did not fact-check his parables and beatitudes on the Internet either. The bottom line is that we live in a complex world where people can access many resources.

Why do people come to your ministry?

They come for the same reason they came to Jesus. They do so because they can't get their need met any other way. It may be that meeting someone's need requires fostering community and discussing philosophical issues. But these are means to an end, not ends themselves. To the extent that you treat these as end needs and to the extent that these exact needs can be met by other specialists, like psychologists and community organizers, the mission

and vision of your ministry are not truly viable over time. You can't compete with community-based social services in terms of excellence or cost.

Why are people leaving the mainstream church?

Those in the Christian faith who are metaphysical in belief and practice are unlikely to find what they seek in a mainstream Christian church. There are several reasons why this is so.

1. *Orthodox thinking.* Mainstream churches, like well-established businesses, are bound to traditional ways of thinking that limit their understanding of how old problems can be met with more straightforward solutions that help people with little time, money, or education. Offering something that can be understood and applied more quickly, that can be acquired at a lower cost, or that more people can use is not an innovation but a disruption. Churches are generally able to be innovative, but it is nearly impossible for them to be disruptive to their own meat and potato offerings.

2. *Religious authority.* Mainstream Christianity is obsessed with what is known in theology as "authority." The Catholic church says it has "no authority" to ordain women. Protestants place all authority for their beliefs in scripture. Metaphysical Christianity, like all things metaphysical, has no external authority. Charles Fillmore went to headquarters, and Myrtle Fillmore went into the Silence. As Emilie Cady said, the authority for our doctrines and beliefs in metaphysical Christianity is "one

Spirit, even the Father, being made manifest in the Son, ever liv[ing] at the center of all human beings.”¹⁴³

3. *Full-service Christian ministry.* Traditional churches, at least in North America, have evolved to provide a wide range of services for people, including charity for the lost and destitute, advocacy for the victims of social injustice, fellowship for the isolated, and language training and social support for strangers and immigrants who come to this country with no family or friends. Make no mistake — those ministries are important, but they are not essential to the ministry’s success. The leader of a traditional Christian ministry has many concerns besides the doctrinal educational ministry of the church. This is why the educational ministry of Unity and others in metaphysical Christianity is so important.

How metaphysical Christianity can provide better education.

Metaphysical Christianity has always been an upstart movement. Metaphysical Christians have never been able to claim prominence in Christian history, they have never been recognized as authorities, and their ministries have never been able to provide wide-ranging services addressing human needs.

Like Southwest Airlines disrupted the travel business by doing a few things extraordinarily well, metaphysical Christianity in the form of Unity has served millions

through publishing, prayer ministry, and education. Our home office was once known as the Unity School of Christianity. Our way forward may be to let go of worldwide imaginations and return to the educational movement inaugurated by Jesus Christ.

¹⁴³ *Lessons in Truth*, Unity of the Spirit, paragraph 21. <https://www.truthunity.net/books/emilie-cady-lessons-in-truth-study-edition-11>