

19. Good Disciples

Explanations and disciples are the foundations of an education ministry. They work together to provide people with an understanding of the nature of God and how God operates in their life. According to the scholars we have been following, the existence of committed disciples most highly impacts religious confidence. So the main idea in this insight is that, while the religious explanation may come from the minister, the message is most effectively communicated through disciples.

Why committed disciples are essential.

Disciples are important to ministries because it is disciples who start and support the ministry. It's commonly believed that churches produce disciples; the more churches we have, the more disciples we will see. That's backward.

Churches don't produce disciples. Instead, it is disciples who produce churches. Jesus did not build churches; instead, he mentored disciples. It may appear that St. Paul founded churches, but what he founded were communities of disciples. In the early years of Unity, Charles Fillmore repeatedly claimed that he had no interest in establishing a new sect or church. Unity was, for him, a continuation of the educational program initiated by Jesus Christ to develop disciples.

So ministry in Unity starts with education, and education in Unity ministry begins with both an explanation and a disciple. What is a disciple? A *disciple is not a seeker. Instead, a disciple is a finder.* A disciple has found his or her pathway and makes a practice of it. Having found and practiced his or her pathway, the disciple is said to be confident.

If a Unity church is growing in attendance but dropping in donations, then that church has more seekers than disciples. It needs to convert more seekers into disciples and allow their confidence to grow the ministry.

The cost of Universalist Unity to the church.

As said above, the confidence people have in the explanations taught in a ministry is most highly impacted by the students, who are known as disciples in a religious setting. And disciples are those who practice the teachings. Why then do we have so many seekers in Unity?¹⁴⁹

Unity, to its credit, has opened doors to just about everyone. As one well-respected Unity leader put it, we are an "Inclusive Christianity."¹⁵⁰ That those who come through our doors feel accepted as they are, without judgment, is a genuine greatness of our tradition, directly inherited from the consciousness of love taught by Myrtle and Charles Fillmore.

¹⁴⁹ *Bylaws, Branding and the Bifurcation of Unity*, Part 2. <https://www.truthunity.net/the-human-side-of-unity/bylaws-branding-and-the-bifurcation-of-unity-part-2>

¹⁵⁰ *Inclusive Christianity*. 2019 Unity Banquet.

The challenge is that newcomers who come for acceptance do not necessarily come for the Fillmore teachings. They may subsequently learn and accept the teachings, but many will not, and, more importantly, many will bring in their own spiritual pathways and expect their pathways to be accepted without judgment as well.

This phenomenon can be attributed to the success of the “large funnel” of Unity branding. I agree that the branding has been successful. Still, I believe it has led to “Universalist Unity,” a demographic of “spiritual but not religious” seekers who have little or no commitment to the Fillmore teachings and the institutions they founded.

In the previous insight, I discussed the cost of the spiritual buffet. The spiritual buffet is the diverse and confusing array of workshops, classes, and programs based on New Age that we see in many Unity churches. The cost of the spiritual buffet is the loss of confidence and commitment because the ministry’s explanations are found to be not reliable.

In this insight, I want to highlight another reason the spiritual buffet destroys confidence and commitment: the whole program looks phony when the disciples aren’t committed. A universalist Unity set of explanations and teachings will need to garner the same confidence and commitment that was once garnered by the classic Fillmore teachings. If it doesn’t, the churches will never attain the confidence and commitment they need to grow. I have seen a few Unity ministers attempt to supplant Fillmore teachings with other pathways, such as A

Course in Miracles. But I haven’t seen anywhere that was successful.

The cost of Universalist Unity to the movement.

There is also a cost to the movement, not just individual ministers and churches. Some people are reluctant to acknowledge the Fillmore teachings as a foundation for our movement. In this case, the spiritual buffet kills off Fillmore’s teachings and drives out Fillmore students.

Those in Unity for the Fillmore teachings are left in the minority or, as Paul Ray has taunted, “being on the losing side of history.”¹⁵¹ And it causes all sorts of problems for them. They receive “diluted” teachings and find that Unity no longer teaches what they believe. They have reason to be discouraged.

Here’s how the Universalist infiltration works. Universalist Unity people will want to adjust the brand because they claim that language has changed. But what has happened is that the teachings have not changed to their liking. In other words, changing the language is a shortcut to changing the teaching. That is why we teach *Meditation for Dummies* instead of *Teach Us to Pray*. One by one, the classic Unity texts have been purged from our educational programs.

The cost to the Unity movement is that when those texts are no longer taught, then the students who they

¹⁵¹ *Diversity, Branding and Worldview in Unity*. <https://www.truthunity.net/the-human-side-of-unity/diversity-branding-and-worldview-in-unity>

would have served leave as well. Who are those students who leave? They are what I refer to as *Fillmore Unity*.

The promise of Fillmore Unity.

Besides Universalist Unity, another group of people in our movement are in Unity for learning and practicing the teachings of Charles and Myrtle Fillmore. When people ask me why the material they find on TruthUnity differs from what they hear in some Unity churches, I find it helpful to introduce them to this other group within Unity.

I am hesitant to compare Fillmore Unity beliefs and practices to Universalist Unity except to say that disciples of Fillmore Unity are disciples, not seekers, and they are disciples of the Fillmore teachings. That is to say, they do not pursue an eclectic assortment of spiritual teachings.

The promise Fillmore Unity people bring to the Unity movement is increased confidence and commitment to the teachings of the Fillmores. As Rodney Stark and Roger Finke point out, "We rely on the wisdom and experience of others to help us make good choices." So it may be said that Fillmore Unity drove the growth of Unity in its first 50 years and to the extent that Fillmore Unity teachings are practiced and articulated today, it continues to drive growth.

How to talk about Unity with friends and family.

Here is an example of how the promise of Fillmore Unity might work at a Unity church or even at a

mainstream church where a Fillmore Fellowship¹⁵² has formed. Imagine a conversation at coffee hour conversation where a newcomer asks What are these affirmations? Imagine a member replying by sharing an affirmation they had used earlier that morning. Would that be effective? What might happen if members learned how to share their faith with others effectively? We have so many classes on prosperity and tithing but so few classes on how to share Unity's message with others. Why is that?

So I suggest that the most important class Unity ministers need to teach is *How To Talk About Unity With Friends and Family*.¹⁵³ Congregants should memorize Unity's well-known statement that Unity is a practical, positive and progressive form of Christianity based on the teachings of Jesus and the power of prayer. Here is what I would ask of myself and my fellow Unity students:

Are we confident in Unity's teachings? Are we, as spiritual leaders, teaching our congregants how to share their faith? Are we aware that visitors want to hear members speak about what they truly believe? Do we know that being open about one's beliefs signifies authenticity and embodies confidence and commitment?

If so, Unity ministers will develop and share material that teaches Unity congregants "how to talk about Unity with their friends." This material and the classes that

¹⁵² *Fillmore Fellowships*. <https://www.truthunity.net/fillmore-fellowships>

¹⁵³ *How To Talk About Unity With Friends and Family*. <https://www.truthunity.net/georgetown/how-to-talk-about-unity-with-your-friends>

come from it will be more prevalent than the "prosperity" classes we see in Unity.

The informal branding process in Unity.

I have found that people can quickly identify themselves as coming from a Universalist Unity or Fillmore Unity perspective and are willing to do so in an open and accepting way.

This is a new form of branding: a process of *self-branding* — one which is informal, freely chosen, organic, filled with spiritual insight, and generally free from emotional baggage. It is branding free from grandiose plans for growth, serving no key constituencies, and conveying no privileged social status or authority. It is, to put it bluntly, metaphysical Christianity at its best.

The problem for Fillmore Unity people is how much of that rich heritage is marginalized by shifting the Unity brand to accommodate the new teachings brought into Unity by our Universalist Unity friends. I would like to be confident that Fillmore Unity is big enough to keep its doors open, accommodate people with new and varied understandings, and at the same time can keep its sense of truth and identity. I sincerely desire that Universalist Unity and Fillmore Unity remain one denomination. Why? Because we are rooted in unity and oneness and we are also rooted in tolerance and Truth. And, as was said in Insight 3, Truth transcends culture.

Regardless of how the rebranding of Unity may go, we need to articulate what the original teachings once were and provide them with a recognizable name. That name,

for me, is *Fillmore*. Their teachings are what I call *Fillmore Unity*, the fellowship of disciples who practice those teachings is what I call *Fillmore Fellowships*, and I hope the Bible they use will be called the *Fillmore Study Bible*.

The reason for this book.

While this book is a credo of my beliefs, as a self-declared metaphysical Christian, it is also a manifesto for metaphysical Christianity and Unity as part of that authentic and distinct expression of the historic Christian faith.

While I can and do study the Fillmore teachings and apply them in my life, I also have a deep religious desire for Christian fellowship. That is to say that I find discipleship very difficult without a fellowship of others who share the metaphysical understandings of Unity and the mystical experience of Jesus Christ as a living presence.

Sometimes I have a hard time finding both in the same religious community. So I compensate in several ways. Joyce Kramer recommended that I check out Camps Farthest Out¹⁵⁴, a Christian fellowship started by Glenn Clark, who was inspired by the metaphysical teachings of New Thought. I attended a CFO camp last year and will attend two camps in the summer of 2022. If you write to me, I will send you a free copy of Glenn Clark's second book, *Fishers of Men*,¹⁵⁵ the one I believe to be his best

¹⁵⁴ Camps Farthest Out/Journey Farthest Out. <https://www.truthunity.net/organizations/camps-farthest-out>

¹⁵⁵ *Fishers of Men*. <https://www.truthunity.net/books/glenn-clark-fishers-of-men>

and most metaphysical writing. For religious services, I've been inspired by Richard Billings' experience growing up in Christian Science. I often attend the First Church of Christ, Scientist church in my area, and have read the Christian Science Monitor since college.¹⁵⁶

I have felt welcomed and accepted in both these groups, even though we may differ somewhat in metaphysical understandings. The only Christian group with metaphysical roots that has disappointed me is the Order of St. Luke, a self-proclaimed "ecumenical" healing ministry founded by John Gayner Banks, an Anglican priest who was a one-time student of Emma Curtis Hopkins.¹⁵⁷ Regrettably, the organization has not only cleansed itself of its founder's teachings, but it also cleanses itself from "Unity adherents."¹⁵⁸

So my "rational choice in the religious marketplace" is to attend a Unity church where I find rich and deep metaphysical understanding and to associate with other Christian organizations where I find an exploration of the mystical experience of Jesus. I wish I didn't have to choose. That is why I have written this book.

¹⁵⁶ Christian Science Monitor. <https://www.csmonitor.com/About> "Our aim is to embrace the human family, shedding light with the conviction that understanding the world's problems and possibilities moves us toward solutions."

¹⁵⁷ Manual of Christian Healing, <https://www.truthunity.net/books/john-gayner-banks-manual-of-christian-healing-osl-handbook>

¹⁵⁸ John Gayner Banks profile on TruthUnity. <https://www.truthunity.net/people/john-gayner-banks>