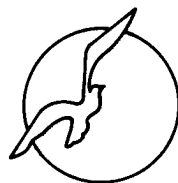


THE FIRST FIVE YEARS

by
Jim Rosemergy



THE FOUNDATION PRINCIPLE

Looking Back

In general, looking back is considered an unhealthy endeavor. At least that is what Lot's wife told me when we last spoke with one another. Then again there is David who, as he prepared to confront Goliath, recalled past successes with the lion and the bear. In viewing these two Bible events, I have chosen to follow David's example because I am going to look back upon the lessons I learned in my first five years of ministry.

The lessons learned sometimes came upon me with ease and comfort in times of stillness, while at other times the insights into ministry showed themselves when I finished my fruitless struggle and had to admit defeat. The foundation principle is an example of the latter experience.

Any structure must have a foundation, and, in fact, ministry is no exception. The choice is whether to build upon sand or rock. I have built upon both substances. I think Jesus pointed out that rock is best. This foundation, by another name, is called consciousness. The ideas I am about to share will not be new to you. There is nothing new under the sun, but it is always good to remind ourselves of the foundation principle.

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The Rock

"Seek first the kingdom. . .and all these things shall be added unto you." This verse of scripture from the Sermon on the Mount is now my rock. You see, all the fruits of ministry that endure are the results of consciousness. Herein lies the minister's work. Too many times during my first five years I focused on the added things and neglected the kingdom. I decided what "added thing" I wanted added to the ministry of my life and proceeded. Sometimes a demonstration occurred, but it was short-lived and collapsed around and upon me, leaving me with a sense of defeat. Sand was my foundation because my focus was upon the "added thing" instead of the kingdom or growth in consciousness.

I now have a different viewpoint. **THE ADDED THING OR DEMONSTRATION IS NONE OF MY BUSINESS.** The Father's business, my business, is an awareness of God. Upon this foundation all else is built. For instance, in a church there are several immensely important areas of consciousness in which to work. When I arrived at my first ministry, the initial purpose was to work toward the unfoldment of a prayer consciousness. The premise was that from this awareness of Spirit all else would come. If you are in the first five years of ministry I strongly suggest a prayer consciousness become a priority.

Begin with prayer services and do not stop. In my early days I often sat alone because no one attended the ser-

vices, but then again my purpose was prayer, not looking at a preordained number of people sitting with me. In fact, my eyes were going to be closed, so numbers were not important. Another aspect of this area of growth in consciousness is holidays. I was tempted to not have prayer services on certain holidays. But I was saying to the people that prayer was paramount, so how could I say, "Well, it's Christmas, and we will have no service." Therefore, services were conducted on holidays and became an example of a strong commitment to prayer.

While these services were being conducted, I did open my eyes afterwards to note who was in attendance. I did so because I was looking for that special person who had captured the vision and who might be a candidate to become a prayer center supervisor. I watched for perhaps six months before I spoke to the person I saw who seemed dedicated to prayer, and then I asked her to join me in developing a prayer center to serve our people and the community. We worked together in developing a prayer center syllabus which helped a person in unfolding writing skills and a prayer consciousness. Another important factor was commitment. The syllabus had to be demanding enough that when a person completed it, they had demonstrated a diligence necessary to serve.

During this time I stressed prayer in Sunday morning talks and conducted classes dealing with prayer. Over an extended period of time the emphasis of the ministry became prayerful. This being the case, nothing was im-

possible for us. That does not mean we then took all our tangible needs to God in prayer. In fact, it meant we could not do such a thing. Instead, our purpose was to experience the presence of God and allow this consciousness to unfold in its unlimited way. We set no goals, but what we called goals emerged from within us. These we pursued with patience, remembering that nothing manifests itself and endures unless its foundation is a consciousness of Spirit.

Let it be remembered that when the foundation principle of seek first the kingdom becomes a ministry's purpose, patience is necessary. **INCREDIBLE PATIENCE.** Consciousness does not develop overnight. It takes what we call years. But then again, what is the rush? If our commitment is to our congregation and serving them, and our work is seeking the kingdom rather than the "added things," there is no impatience. We live in the now, and each moment is a joy and brimming with the presence of God.

LOVE ONE ANOTHER

"Seek first the kingdom. . . and all these things shall be added unto you," is the foundation of a spiritual life and the cornerstone of the thriving ministry. It enjoins us to awaken to the presence of God individualized as us. This realization manifests itself in a variety of ways in a

ministry. We have considered the idea of prayer and its unfoldment in the collection of people we call a church. Our premise was that as this consciousness developed, the ministry would be in step with the onward stride of God. In this section we are going to consider ideas aligning us with Jesus' commandment to "love one another. . ."

It is probably true to say we search for love more than any other quality of Spirit. The truth is our nature is love, and therefore Jesus' commandment is for us to express our spiritual essence. Of course, this is not a matter of words. Action is demanded, and our people will listen with their hearts rather than their ears. They will also want to see expressions of love, and the one they will look to is the minister.

Simple Things

Through the years I have stumbled upon simple activities which compliment the obvious inner work necessary for love to make itself known. One little act we all "stumble upon" is the hug. Books have been written about the art of hugging. They may describe the mechanics of hugging, but what written word can describe the heart's desire to say, "I love you.?" It is a wonderful sight to see people walking up to one another and their arms flying outward to say, "I care."

Whenever I am at church I always take time to hug each staff member or volunteer who is there. In my case

I acquired this delightful habit while I was in the Navy. Realize, of course, I did not hug my men, but I did take time each morning to walk on the flight deck and be with them. It is a simple thing, but it declares, "he cares!"

Also as I speak with people, whether it is in counseling or in casual conversation. I reach out and touch them. The touch is undoubtedly unnoticed by their conscious mind, but at a deeper level the soul knows I care.

Through the years I have written short notes to thousands of people expressing gratitude for their service to the ministry, but also to give thanks for them. I think this is an important distinction. It is not so much what a person does, as what they are, that is appreciated. Also, as a minister I try to stay aware of the things people are experiencing, whether they be challenges or triumphs, and convey the simple message, "I am with you."

Currently, in Spokane, we have a phrase we use to bless our children while they are in the service each Sunday. After a mini-sermon we become still (the kids are as still as kids can be) and we affirm: **YOU ARE LOVED, SPECIAL, AND IMPORTANT.** The phrase is catching and people are using it to express love to one another. We have even had buttons made up declaring this statement.

Essentially, it is important to encourage the congregation to express their loving nature. Joining with the people to bless a lay minister of the month during a Sunday service allows for this divine expression. Flowers are

given and special acknowledgement of their contribution to the ministry is a natural part of this simple act of caring.

Special days are important, too. Birthdays are an opportunity to say to a staff member or key volunteer that the universe celebrates their entry into this earthly plane. No gifts are necessary, only a card and the message, **YOU ARE LOVED, SPECIAL, AND IMPORTANT.**

An appreciation dinner is another way to say love is the way we walk in gratitude. It is a fun and love-filled evening when the board and minister put on a gala dinner for those who have volunteered their services to the ministry during the course of a year. I cannot describe the feelings of love flowing through me while serving spaghetti sauce and then vacuuming the carpet after such an evening. I might add it is also a good idea to single out youth workers for such an affair and have yourself and the youth director, etc., express your appreciation.

Finally (actually there is no finally, for Spirit always illumines us with myriad ways to love one another), I think social get-togethers are important. Specifically, I am speaking of get-togethers with groups of people who work in key areas in the church. I have learned a monthly potluck for receptionists, bookstore workers, etc., is a fun time. After lunch a speaker shares a helpful idea for daily living or a brief training is scheduled. Also, such gatherings are arranged for youth volunteers and prayer

center workers. In addition, it is a good idea for the minister to share some quality time with these workers on a regular basis. In Spokane, I teach a monthly mysticism class for the prayer center and conduct a youth education workshop each quarter. Such activities keep me busy, but isn't the Father's business love?

PURCHASING THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

Each Unity church has a mission to fulfill. Ideas abound, for we are often visionary in our thinking. Through the light shining from within ways to serve emerge, and we can see the bountiful possibilities of helping people. Then there is the realization that funds are necessary for the projects to come to fruition. We look at the current state of our currency and wonder how it can come to be.

If we could only find the pearl of great price, our desire to serve in this new way could be realized. At this point it is good to remember: **THAT WHICH COMES FROM WITHIN COMES COMPLETE.** All the resources necessary to serve our people are present. If volunteers or skilled individuals are needed, they are there. If supply is required, it is present and awaits our willingness to receive. The pearl of great price is the consciousness aware of and open to the infinite, unlimited, unseen Supply God is. This realization, rather than the project, becomes our purpose.

The Source: God or the People, Which?

If the pearl or consciousness of God as Source is to be found and "purchased," we must look within ourselves. Too often our expectation is from the congregation. We think, "Why don't they give more? If we could just grow beyond the dollar consciousness." Nothing restricts a church's experience of well being like a minister and board looking to the people as the Source. How tempting it is to write a letter asking the people to give more. This is to be avoided. Our expectation rests in Spirit.

However, we may write letters informing the people of special projects such as the purchase of a new church site. This correspondence is an opportunity to express our giving nature. We can write a letter extending an invitation to pray together in knowing our Source, but we cannot do anything which states we look to the people as the source of supply. Actually, the letter is not the issue. It is the consciousness which writes the letter. The expectation of this consciousness either invites security and well being or shuns it.

We have found it is best that the ministry not develop a reactive approach to prosperity. In other words, there is a crisis and we begin to expand our awareness of the infinite supply. Instead, let there be a period of time each year in which the people open themselves to deepen their realization that God is Source.

An Agenda for Prosperity

During this time dedicated to knowing Spirit as Source no tangible goals are established. Remember, our articles are giving allegiance to seeking the kingdom. All else is an added thing. Our goal is a relationship with Spirit, for God is enough.

A certain month is declared prosperity month. Each Sunday the lesson addresses some phase of awakening to the truth God is our Source. Perhaps the series begins with the minister holding up a \$100 bill and asking who deserves this sum of money. (You will be surprised how few hands are raised.) The person who raises his or her hand first comes forth and receives the gift. The point is made, prosperity is a function of receptivity. Not so much a willingness to experience tangible things, as an openness to an awareness of God.

Perhaps during this same lesson a proposed circulation day is announced, and the people are invited to cleanse their outer and inner lives of that which is no longer useful or necessary. Also the circulation day will give the church the opportunity to give with no thought of return, an important ingredient in developing a prosperity consciousness.

In a later lesson prosperity banks are offered as a daily reminder that Spirit is the supply. In this same series a talent project is initiated and each person in attendance is given \$10 which will be the stimulus to come to realize

all formed prosperity begins with an unbirthed, yet pregnant idea.

Still another phase of the agenda includes the sending of a letter to the mailing list inviting the people to specific times of prayer in which those present, including the board and staff, join in simply acknowledging the Source. These prayer services illustrate our desire to experience the Presence rather than to acquire something from God. After all, what greater gift is there than the Presence?

The lessons include the idea of tithing, not so much as giving ten percent of one's income to a church as an attitude of God first. Also it is important that the ministry be receptive to new ways in which it can "give." An example might be the appreciation dinner for volunteers we discussed earlier. Letters of thanksgiving acknowledging services rendered and gifts given are also a reflection of a prosperity consciousness.

After the circulation day, the return of the prosperity banks, and the completion of the talent project, a follow-up prosperity class to consider the principles in depth might be offered. Somewhere in the midst of these activities the pearl of great price is "purchased." With it all things are possible.

WHERE TWO OR THREE ARE GATHERED TOGETHER...

Board Relations

Where two or three are gathered together in the name of the Christ, there is harmony and evidence of the presence of God. In a ministry in which Spirit is active, the board of trustees is a focal point for the expression of God, or at least there is diligent progress being made toward such harmony. In the Association of Unity Churches our suggested bylaws allow for this special gathering of "two or three."

Basically, the board of the church is legally responsible for the ministry and its actions. Personally, I believe the members of the board express this responsibility through policies which govern a wide variety of ministry functions. The minister, as executive director, carries out these policies. The conception of these policies results from an understanding of spiritual principles and the minister and board working in concert with one another.

Good management begins with these basic points, but there are other ideas to understand and express if "two or three" are truly gathered together. The members of the board must unite in the name or nature of the Christ. For me this means a spiritual focus everyone is aware of and committed to fulfill. In the ministry I serve, our Unity of purpose is spiritual awakening. Our "method" is prayer. It is that simple and that complex. Everyone is

aware of this focus and a vast majority have this vision. The focus in your church may vary, but single-mindedness is a necessity.

However you describe your Unity of purpose, it must be applied to the functioning of the board. This is an appropriate way to carry on the ministry's business, and at the same time it allows the opportunity to teach board members that are often too busy to fully participate in the educational phase of the ministry. However, if you discover the principles upon which the ministry is based cannot be applied to the daily affairs of the church, it is time for a change.

Letting Decisions Be Made

Consistency in what is taught and applied at the board level is paramount. For instance, let's assume a major decision is to be made. It is the board's responsibility to make the decision and the choice cannot and should not be passed to the congregation. Remember our purpose is spiritual awakening, and prayer is our "method." We proceed in the following fashion.

1. We acknowledge the need for a decision, and then put the choice aside. It is no longer the issue.
2. The issue is always spiritual awareness and awakening to the Presence.
3. We pause and recall that our purpose in this case is

to experience the Presence of God as Wisdom. We don't ask God to tell us what to do. Our quest is to "know God as Light." Out of this consciousness a decision emerges. It is actually erroneous to say we make the choice. It is "made" for us. It is an expression of the awareness of God as Wisdom.

4. Our eye is single and upon God as Light. I, as the minister, usually lead this quiet time in which we acknowledge we have the mind of the Christ.
5. Prayer/Silence follows.
6. Afterwards, each board member shares his/her feelings or guidance.
7. Often the decision is blatant. No vote, other than a formal vote for the minutes, is required.

Living the Life

If the board is to be a gathering in which the Christ Spirit is evident, our Unity way of life must be practiced. This is particularly true in human relationships. Seldom is our interaction with the essence of another person. In far too many cases, we relate to our concept of the other person rather than his/her spiritual identity. Harmony, our normal state, is ours when we understand this principle and do our inner work so as to have our vision of the

other person restored. Once there is peace in "our household," there is peace on the board.

Retreating Together So We Can Advance Together

Consider for a moment trying to establish a viable, loving, working relationship with someone you meet with once a month for several hours. In actuality you probably say less than one hundred words directly to this individual, and seldom do you ask him/her what he/she is feeling. Do you think harmony develops easily under these circumstances? The reply is usually, "It's a challenge." The truth is it is difficult to evolve a workable, loving relationship under these time constraints.

However, there is an answer. **RETREAT TOGETHER SO YOU CAN ADVANCE TOGETHER.** Make a commitment once or twice a year for the board, staff, and minister to come a part awhile. Let someone else conduct the Sunday service and rediscover your Unity of purpose. Pray together, learn together, play together and by all means **BE TOGETHER.** The retreat might consist of several parts. Administration and management principles might be focused upon, and then spiritual principles can be discussed as they apply to some area of daily living. This retreating together is an assurance that where two or three are gathered together in the nature of the I Am, the Christ Spirit is in the midst of them.

OUR GREATEST SERVICE

Letting Your Light Shine

Unity builds people. Actually, this is not true. Unity assists people in discovering how they are built. This is not a matter of the wonders of anatomy. It is an insight into spiritual identity. This comes not so much with the realization God is IN us as with the understanding, Spirit expresses Itself AS us. Intuitively, we sense the depth of us, but do not really grasp our spiritual nature until we see it expressed.

Usually our first exposure to spirituality is reading about spiritual giants. Next, we observe the people around us and see individuals who mirror the best we can be. We aspire to be like them and then the light, the "imprisoned splendor," begins to dimly shine.

In ministry congregations look to the minister as an example of a spiritual life lived. For instance, they match the Sunday lesson words with the words uttered during a board meeting. If there is a match, the validity of truths spoken during a Sunday lesson is authenticated, and the people dedicate themselves to living this truth. There is a joy that comes from this approach to life, but it is not the joy that is full. These individuals are drinking the water, but not the wine.

The Joy That Is Full

The water is changed to wine if the center leader encourages people to serve in the ministry. This service, yielding the joy that is full, is not folding bulletins and spearheading such activities as circulation day. It is serving the spiritual needs of people in the ministry.

An immensely important aspect of a dynamic church is identifying people with a strong commitment to the spiritual life, and who love people. No ministry fulfills its potential for service unless leadership develops from within. The varieties of service are simply too great for any one or two persons to fulfill. Besides, everyone is called to let their light shine.

Oddly enough, the first step in developing leadership from within is not responding to those who seem eager to serve. Motivation is not always as pure as it appears. Therefore, experience has taught me to watch (for long months) for commitment to a spiritual life and a genuine concern for people. If a person has these two soul qualities, the skills of ministry develop easily.

Once these individuals are identified, I gently nudge them into what they affectionately call the "briar patch." Here people stretch and discover their hidden gifts of Spirit.

The Briar Patch

The "patch" contains opportunities to let the light shine. Perhaps the beginnings of a home study program

for prisoners or shut-ins reveals writing talents. Or a light may shine as a person assists on the platform. Maybe a number of people gather to develop a course of study for prospective prayer center workers. Then again, others may aspire to serve in an emerging counseling center. These are not the programs of the large church. They are expressions of Spirit in a dynamic ministry. Each ministry will have its unique expressions which declare to the people that the church is a center of service.

The licensed Unity teacher program (USRS-CEP) fans many a spark of divinity, if it has the support of the minister. This does not mean discovering a person had graduated from CEP and now has to teach in the ministry in order to be licensed. Success in this program means a hands-on commitment on the part of a minister to a person who wants to become a licensed Unity teacher. Sometimes the minister may feel a person is not suited to lead in this fashion. I say, let's find out. I usually put the person to work behind the scene (where the ego is not stroked, but where commitment can be determined), so both of us can ascertain if the program is to be pursued.

Remember commitment and love of people are chief ingredients for a teacher. If these qualities are present, then I ask the person to prepare a Unity truth class to be taught in the ministry. This person might also conduct a seminar for a study group and as time progresses may give a Sunday lesson when the minister is out of town.

Some ministers might shudder to think of a "rookie" doing such things, but I don't. I just think back to my first service and class. What balance it provides. Also, I realize outstanding delivery is not the issue. Those attuned to Spirit are not impressed by delivery. They sense something called consciousness. This is what is shared with the congregation, and it is appreciated.

In summary, I say let the people who are committed to service, people, and the spiritual life serve in the ministry. This is the way they discover the "imprisoned splendor." The revelation does not come via the intellect by reading about truth or even by observing it. **SPECTATORSHIP IS NOT DISCIPLESHIP.** Reading and observation serve only to quicken our desire, actually Spirit's desire, to let the light shine. Only as we allow God to **EXPRESS AS US** will we experience what we are. The fostering of this discovery is our greatest service to our people.