

Unity Leaders Journal

Sharing Ideas

Invitation to Dance



How glorious it is when we practice working together beyond the ideal! We become one in the dance, we hear the rhythm, the beat and yes, move our feet. Sometimes we move easily and gracefully with the flow—and sometimes it feels like our dance floor is covered with marbles. **As we strengthen and further develop our ministry proficiencies in response to a rapidly shifting culture, we can begin to create our internal thought energy of *leadership* to that of *relationship*** and explore the purest state of connection and partnering.

We become vulnerable every time we step onto the dance floor. It may be our first time; we may be with a group, a partner, or dancing solo. All eyes are on us. No matter the experience, we feel the rush of our own heartbeat. We're present in the moment. No time before or after. We're in the now. From two left feet, to the grace and fluidity of a pro. It's vulnerable, that's for sure. We reveal ourselves, agreeing for others to truly see us. There is excitement, freedom and risk. You may see I'm presenting this through my own vulnerabilities as a dancer and from the stories of those in fear of "the dance."

Flexibility in Leadership

Conscious leadership invites everyone to dance recognizing the Christ within all, even on those days when everything is upside down. In my role as Ministry Leadership Coordinator, minister, and my years as a coach and trainer, I **often close the manual and set aside the agenda and listen to the energy of the person or group.** It's quite revealing. Learning the steps support us only so far and then we lean into it and trust Spirit to guide our way. My dance coach often says, "You know the steps, you have the muscle memory, now let go into the expression of the dance." How often do we get into over-thinking it?

Our work in the next level of spiritual maturity is learning new steps, taking methodical actions, and trusting our partners every step of the way. Whoa! Trust?

Conscious leadership, through collaborative relationships, cultivates and maintains a shared vision. Our plans outline shared goals and objectives with our head and heart in balance. Trust is a key factor.

Collaborative teams invite everyone to the dance, yet they are not leaderless. Structure and organizational planning requires multiple voices, and honors the unique focus, time allotment, passion and skill of each individual, yet someone knows the steps and takes the lead. Often it's shared and yet some areas require a diligent and discerning voice of accountability and trust from within the teams.

Prayer chaplains, to me, are models of conscious leadership. They are committed to the powerful tools of affirmative prayer and denials prescribed by our founders. Prayer chaplains also understand how to actively dance with others and with Spirit in the stillness. Holding the high watch is a powerful testament to conscious leadership and collaborative teamwork. All prayer requests require deep listening as does modeling of conscious leadership

Martha Graham, the dancer, was a powerful communicator. She said, "There is a vitality, a life force, an energy, a quickening that is translated through you into action, and because there is only one of you in all time, **this expression is unique. And if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and will be lost.**"

Graham believed the secret emotional world is made visible by a dancer's movement not always expressed in words.

Everyone has a voice and in various safe ways my intention, as I lead trainings and classes, is to create space for the creative genius residing within each person to show up. Yes, I **show up well-prepared with a plan, but always leaving room for Spirit to have its way through the many expressions of God in the room.** Skills and training are vital, but when we give Spirit free expression through us, we discover new ways to process without fear and judgment—we dance with Spirit.

Are we willing to release all we think we know and to leave room for a new way to dance? This kind of openness and vulnerability are essential to conscious leadership. When we peer into tender

movements of a dance we get a glimpse of a commanding, gentle presence without ever saying a word. This is a special kind of discipline: **a discipline of mindful awareness and deep surrender.**

Are you willing to: Suggest and do meetings in a fresh way? Seek new members for board service? Plan holiday or regular services that may be billed as “our new experiment”? or—Switch up the Sunday service? I never recommend doing this without sharing what we’re up to, but it’s good to create areas in which participants feel change together and embrace a new way to dance. When a big change happens without warning, often there’s a crisis response rather than a knowing *by experiment* what it could feel like.

Rev Cynthia Vermillion-Foster, Director of Member Services and a ballet dancer, says: “Conscious leadership invites us to be fully present in the moment, mindful of the energy in the space, and receptive to what the Universe is seeking to give birth to in each situation. This entails deep trust and radical humility. **The moment we believe we have mastered the dance, our steps begin to falter, because the dance cannot be mastered.** We can only give ourselves to it, over and over again.”

I see such an incredible action of Spirit within the Silence; we all know this activity of Spirit. There’s also an incredible silence and contemplation within movement. It all works together to create inner and outer harmony. This is, by nature, how I show up in leadership. My experience as a dancer and yoga teacher, always brings me to the **discipline involved with movement, breath and balance.**

Four Stages of Community

M Scott Peck recognized four stages of community through predictable phases. ***Pseudocommunity*, the first phase, is steeped in conflict avoidance.** Depending on personality types and ministry culture, some groups will do this well, but it will only last so long.

Moving beyond the energies of victim consciousness in pseudocommunity, conscious leaders choose to rise up to experience what can occur in sacred trust on a journey with Spirit. We have awakening opportunities in every moment to remember the truth of who we are. We invite everyone to the global table of our humanity. We’ve all witnessed true community in action and many are in regular practice. **It is a practice.** We each seek to be seen and heard and remind one another that love is our Truth.

Withholding feelings in an attempt to avoid conflict (a hallmark of pseudocommunity) is a safe, self-preservation strategy. This one hits home for many. To move beyond this phase, we’re called to own our feelings, speak our needs, and release the idea that conflict is to be avoided at all costs. It’s a practice and invites everyone to be in agreement that this is how we’re moving forward. It can feel pretty cumbersome and upsetting in the beginning. The desire to retreat to old safe patterns is a first response. I can’t tell you how many times in difficult dance choreography, I’ve thought, “It’s too hard.

Give it up.” Yet, **on the other side of moving through the steps of discomfort, there is a delightful place.** You know it; we’ve all been there many times.

Individual differences may be minimized or ignored in pseudocommunity because this is the heavy lifting portion. **Conscious leadership welcomes and listens, not assuming the “like-minded” approach at every moment is always true.** The fourth agreement, by Don Miguel Ruiz, “Don’t make assumptions,” can powerfully transform our lives.

In the next stage, chaos, our individual differences surface and—Uh, oh! What happens to our unity and diversity values? Culturally we like order. I know I do! By way of the ego, we want to know whom to blame for all the messes. But this is the illusion and trap often revealed when chaos emerges. **It’s the conscious leaders’ invitation to prayerfully stand in Truth and see beyond the storm rather than removing the issues entirely.** Conscious leadership seeks a healthy—healthy being the optimal word—feedback-rich environment.

Chaos is filled with the greatest possibility for growth. Embrace chaos *as possibility*! The recent hurricane in the area I live in Houston revealed such powerful upheaval, distress and fear, and also such powerful joining together. There were no party lines, just people helping people. There was a great listening that occurred, our sweet humanity and Divine potential was revealed in abundance.

Yet, **we so love our bliss states—it’s part of our identity, but also can be a form of the shadow.** If deeply rooted in pseudocommunity, we quickly bury the “stuff,” make it pretty and move on. It’s like a child cleaning their room in less than 5 minutes. It’s all in the closet or under the bed! Holding a vision of true community, **we embrace the value of our stories as *relationships emerging*.** With a unified vision in sight, we get there! I’ve seen this as a teacher, coach and also as a community leader.

Peck refers to the **third stage, emptiness**, as the path through the chaos (2nd stage) into true community (fourth stage). He refers to it as the hardest stage of development. However, I believe this stage can occur rapidly and route us to true community based on affirmative prayer, surrender to Spirit, our Unity principles, and the emotional and spiritual maturity work we do individually and as a community. We know one size does not fit all—and I loosely use Peck’s model in leadership training to have a wide variety of appeal while leaning away from a steadfast rule.

We are each unique and so are our ministries and leaders. I have witnessed a bounty of wisdom teachers and leaders throughout our ministries especially through the lens as a faculty member with UWSI. The students showing up on the path to serve are amazing! Some in our ministries and those yet to show up are beautifully poised to serve in a greater way. Let’s welcome them in. True community invites us to listen to the stories that reveal the path of evolutionary growth. To listen deeply is one of the greatest gifts we may offer, just as loving as a hand inviting one to dance.

The **next stage, true community**, is occurring. Shall we trust in the dance? In ballroom dance, based on gender culture, I am considered the lead. But my partner likes to back-lead and at times it was a

lifesaver when I forgot the steps. We typically have an unspoken rhythm of lead and follow. We share in the dance and the flow of Spirit. **We listen deeply.** Once we think we master one piece, there's this amazing shift that happens and we begin a new dance, but this time from a new vantage point.

Rather than two individual dancers, we merge into one dance. This is what true community requires. We release any space of separateness and embrace the Spirit of Oneness. Here, a new unified group emerges. Is it easy? Is taking a first dance lesson, learning new steps and trying not to step on toes easy? In a humorous visual, you see my point. It's work and also a mindfulness of the practice involved.

Conscious leadership requires us to move into deep listening to the rhythm of the Christ more powerfully now than ever before. In an increasingly noisy world, rather than rush like a hero to impart great wisdom, we're first called to listen and hear the heartbeat, and take thoughtful steps along the way. **We see the Christ within all, and we celebrate the movement of awakening in every step.**

As Rev Paulette Pipe invites us to do in some of her workshops, let's dance beyond the threshold of comfort and into the rhythm of the Divine. **Let's dance.**

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