



A Spiritual Community on a Positive Path of Personal Growth

Founded November 1999

February 2022

Taking the Spiritual Bypass By Rev. Robert Brumet

On the Spiritual journey taking a bypass is usually unwise-- it gives you the illusion of progress, but in reality it just goes around in circles!

Spiritual Bypassing is defined as “The use of spiritual beliefs or practices to avoid dealing with painful feelings, unhealed wounds, and developmental needs.”

An example of this in the Christian tradition is the common practice of avoiding the painful experience of dying to the ego and living as Christ did, by believing that “Christ died for my sins, so all I have to do is believe in him and I will be spared the difficult work of actually living what he taught.”

In the Buddhist tradition we may encounter meditation practitioners that honestly believe they are practicing equanimity, (and they may want you to believe as well) but in reality they are using meditation as way of avoiding painful emotions. They may look very spiritual, but they are actually hiding from themselves. I call this becoming the “Counterfeit Buddha”!

Spiritual Bypassing exists in all traditions and in all spiritual practices. It is not necessarily the failure of the teaching or the teacher; (although a skillful teacher is savvy to this phenomenon) it is simply one example of the myriad (and often quite sophisticated) ways in which we attempt to avoid painful feelings.

The spiritual life does not remove us from the world but leads us deeper into it
Henry Nouwen

Like the moth circling a candle flame, we are “attracted to the light,

but repelled by heat.” We are attracted to the freedom and the power that can be found through spiritual practice, but we are repelled by the pain that must be faced in order to find that freedom. Spiritual Bypassing is one way that we “circle the flame.”

The pain that arises on our spiritual journey is not inflicted upon us by the practice; what we feel is pain that is already there--and probably has been there for a long time. We have found many ways to insulate ourselves from that pain. Spiritual practice penetrates and gradually dissolves that insulation. The insulation

Annual Congregational Meeting

On Sunday, February 6th, Unity Five Cities will hold its annual business meeting, which will be on Zoom immediately after the Sunday Celebration (approx. 11:15am). There will be an election for board members, a report on the current church finances, and a summary of 2021 events, amongst other things. All members are encouraged to attend this important event.



Prayer Chaplain Training

Unity's Prayer Chaplain program is a critical part of our intention to provide prayer support to our community.

We invite you to prayerfully consider becoming a Prayer Chaplain. It is a unique service that differs from many of the other volunteer opportunities in terms of commitment—level and responsibilities. Completing the Prayer Chaplain training and “being” a Prayer Chaplain is transformational soul work. As you unfold your divinity and support others to realize their

divinity, we are here to support you as you make this next step on your spiritual journey.



What is a Prayer Chaplain?

A Prayer Chaplain is:

- Someone who will create and hold a spiritual space with you.
- Someone who will lovingly listen to you
- Someone who will pray with you.
- Someone who holds what is shared in the strictest confidence.

If you are interested in becoming a Prayer Chaplain, contact Pastor Brian.

Celebration of Love

Concert and Sharing

Sunday, Feb 13th, at
1pm in Victorian Garden

*If you would like to participate
with a song, story, poem, dance
or other form of expression,
please be there by 12:30*



Bring a treat to share



*Featuring Mike Smothers
and Shari Fortino*

LET YOUR LOVE
LIGHT SHINE

Love Offering

Spiritual Bypass (Con't)

must be removed because the same insulation that protects us from our pain also obscures our true nature and blocks our experience of real freedom.

How can one avoid the spiritual bypass? The first step recognize when we have started to take it. The ego does not want us to see this. The spiritual bypass can camouflage and shape-shift itself into many forms; we have to stay awake and to be alert.

Begin by looking for some of the “road signs” of the spiritual bypass:

- + Unwillingness or inability to feel your feelings.
- + Feeling “stuck” in your spiritual growth.
- + Goal-seeking; trying to be “successful” in your practice.
- + Gripping your beliefs very tightly.
- + Focusing on appearances.



Look at how you may be holding on to certain beliefs or habits. Those beliefs and practices are not necessarily bad or untrue—but the question is how we are using them? We may be holding on to them as a shield or armor that protects us against some underlying anxiety or discomfort. Ask yourself, “What might I be avoiding? What would I have to feel if I were not gripping this belief so tightly?”

The second step is to relax the grip on your beliefs. You don't have to give up a belief forever—just “put it on the shelf” for now. The issue here is not the veracity of your belief but rather how you are using it. You may be right about something but if you use that belief to avoid some part of yourself then it will not lead you to freedom. A belief can be helpful or harmful depending on how it is used.

The third step is to face and feel the underlying feelings. Feel the physical sensations and feel the emotions that arise when you momentarily let the belief go.

A story from the Zen tradition: The master's child died and he was weeping profusely. His disciples approached him and said, “Master, do you not teach that all is impermanent and that death is an illusion? The master nodded, “Yes.” Then, “Why are you crying?” The master replied, “I am crying because I am sad.”

We often think of spiritual growth as a process of ascension--and in one aspect it is, but it is a process of descending as well. In general, the growth process works like this: we have a taste of expanded awareness, a glimpse of a higher dimension, but before we can

Spiritual Bypass (Con't)

permanently grow into the next stage above we must complete the unfinished business from our past—from the level below where we are now. The journey from Consciousness to Super-consciousness involves a trip thru the Subconscious. As author Ken Wilber might put it: “We may wake up, but before we can fully grow up, we must first cleanup.”

Real growth is not to “transcend and deny” --it is to “transcend and include”. To grow beyond human nature does not mean negating human nature; true growth is inclusive. Transcending ego does not mean negating the ego, but expanding beyond it. You then experience the ego as a functional vehicle rather than being all that you are.

The spiritual bypass is an attempt to grow-up before we clean-up; it doesn't work for very long! True growth is not to “transcend and deny”- it is to “transcend and include”. To grow beyond human nature does not mean negating human nature; it means facing and embracing all the elements of our human nature.

Burning Bowl/White Stone Ceremony

On January 2nd, Pastor Brian, Therese Solimeno, Richard Inman and Janice Lamont led the traditional Unity New Year ritual of the Burning Bowl/White Stone. Participants released whatever they wanted to let go of from 2021 by burning a paper list of items recorded after a meditation. Then white stones, which represent a clean slate and were used in ancient times to signify freedom, were distributed to everyone. There was a second meditation with the intention of hearing Spirit guide you to "name" a quality or symbol, which you would then write on the stone, that would define the upcoming year for you.

Church Financial Summary

December 2021

Total Income \$4,702

Total Expense \$4,034

Net Income \$668

YTD Income \$45,749

YTD Expense \$44,809

YTD Net Income \$940

February Supplement - Rita Conrad

“Sing as though you’re summoning the Heavens; silver your voice and bare your throat.”
- Roshani Chokshi

The first time I heard Rita sing was while riding in her car. She belted out a chorus, harmonizing with her son Alec on a Bruno Mars tune titled “Grenade,” and she’s hitting all the high notes with apparent ease. Then she and Alec sang Disney’s “A Whole New World” from Aladdin and the duo’s rendition transported me straight to Arabia! The third time was as an audience member at Unity Five Cities recent Christmas concert where she performed with “The Mighty Lights” and her solo “All is Well” sounded like that of an angel!



Rita Marie Skowronski was born to first generation Polish-American parents on the Southeast side of Chicago. Rita attended St. Francis de Sales High School in Chicago. She had been singing and playing various musical instruments in elementary school and continued that in high school playing in several bands and singing in choir. When she graduated from high school she not only received academic and musical awards but was named the “Girl Most Likely to Succeed” by her classmates. Bypassing her mother’s tempting offer to “live at home and go to the community college in exchange for a car,” Rita would commence what would become an extraordinary educational and career path that brought her to the very forefront of the burgeoning field of Online Education. Rita would additionally grace the following universities with her extraordinary work ethic and talents: Arizona State University, Florida State University, Duke University and University of California, Berkeley.

One of the perks of working at a university used to be that you could take courses for free and that is how she furthered her education and evolved her career from information technology to online education. While working full-time Rita earned her Master’s Degree in Educational Media and Computers from Arizona State University and her PhD at Florida State University in Instructional Systems, specializing in what was then known as Distance Education. She spent the last 25 years of her career as an online faculty member for various institutions as well as an independent consultant and author of nine books about being an “online educator”!

One evening while coming home late from work, a car crossed the median and hit her little sports car head on. She says that as she watched the hood of her car crumple towards her as if it was aluminum foil she heard a voice say “Well, you’ve been very successful at work but what else do you have to show for your life?” Shortly thereafter Rita met Larry Conrad who she described as “the salt of the earth”, someone who was “easy to talk to and made her laugh all the time”! Because of the auto accident, she was on crutches and he would carry her briefcase to and from her car for her every day.

Rita insisted that they remain “just friends” but one day she lent Larry a talk by Wayne Dyer she had recorded. Larry listened to it on his way home and afterwards called her to say that the talk was great but when the tape automatically flipped to the other side he almost ran his car off the road listening to it. Rita had recorded a song that she had recently heard on the radio, “Somewhere Out There.” He said when he heard the opening words “Somewhere out there, someone’s saying a prayer that we’ll find one another in that great Somewhere out there” he knew they were meant to be more than just friends. After Larry’s proposal at the Grand Canyon, on a “balmy” Arizona

June day where the temperature hit 103 degrees, Larry Conrad and Rita Skowronski lit their Unity candle while the song “Somewhere Out There” was played by the organist at Unity of Mesa in Mesa, Arizona.

After several years of marriage, Rita and Larry fulfilled an item on Rita’s “bucket list” which was to visit Poland, and specifically, her Grandparents’ birthplace. The couple both experienced a deep connection with the country. At this point they were also trying to start a family without much success and were considering adoption. Through a series of events they found the only American agency that specialized in adoption of Polish children. And so their journey towards finding their son began. His name was Arkadeusz, he was 4 years old and was this precocious little Polish boy with whom they felt an instant connection. It was startling how much he looked like Larry! They were ecstatic about the adoption and this precious child who would be completely and whole heartedly embraced by their family. They Americanized his first name, gave him the same middle name as Larry, and after 2 trips to Poland they brought home their son --- Alec Dean Conrad.

In 2019, after decades of two very successful educational and vocational journeys, Rita and Larry decided it was time to retire. They were living in Alameda close to the bay where Larry enjoyed sailing. Larry had also enjoyed navigating his sailboat adjacent to the family’s fabulous beach townhouse in Florida. While both coasts held some appeal to the Conrad’s, they had already discovered that the best regional centers and resources for Special Needs Children were in California. Rita and Larry happened to see an article about a family with a special needs son who had moved to “Monarch Dunes Trilogy” in Nipomo, California. This piqued their interest in an area they had never visited. A primary consideration for this next life chapter was also finding “a church to call home”. On their very first visit to the area they attended Unity Five Cities and the couple heard the song “Let it Be.” As they say “the rest is history”! The Conrad family relocated to their beautiful home at Trilogy in 2020 and are both currently very active with Unity Five Cities, including Larry serving on the Board of Trustees.

Did Rita really retire? Not a chance! These days you will find her making her own custom jewelry and she also officiates weddings. All proceeds from those activities go directly to Camp Krem, a camp for special needs children and adults, that greatly benefitted Alec and was destroyed in the 2020 CZU fire. She and Larry are also involved with Parents Helping Parents in San Luis Obispo. And a little over a year ago she began doing a Sunday Talk at Unity Five Cities every other month --- something she says she never planned on doing in her lifetime and took her completely by surprise. Her first talk centered on her journey with Alec.

Rita has always been and currently still is an advocate, an educator, a specialist and a “therapist”. She is also a loving, supportive wife and an incredible mom to Alec! She speaks the fourth Sunday of every other month at Unity Five Cities. To check out past Sunday talks by Rita and other Unity speakers, please visit Unity Five Cities YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCyfVKHmQDNdi2IOiR0sgefA>



by Nancy Johnson

Board of Trustees & Staff

Rev. Brian Walker, Minister	805-345-0832
Janice Lamont, Facilitator	310-701-1041
Joe Davidson, Treasurer	661-304-5154
Rachel Rodriguez, Trustee	805-904-9882
Larry Conrad, Trustee	805-219-0219
Ethel Landers, Vice Facilitator	805-550-0348
Donna Nisbet, Alternate	805-219-0331
Chris Garey, LUT	805-489-7359
Therese Solimeno, LUT	805-440-9461
Prayer Chaplain - Janice Lamont	310-701-1041
Prayer Chaplain - Claire Mclean	209-606-0444
Prayer Chaplain - Martha Aivaz	805-481-1335
Prayer Chaplain - LaDawn Davis	805-757-7556
Volunteer Coordinator, Chris Garey	805-489-7359

VISION STATEMENT

Aligned in peaceful Oneness, we co-create a world of love, harmony, and abundance through shared spiritual awakening.

MISSION STATEMENT

We are a heart-centered spiritual community dedicated to empowering personal growth and living the unlimited possibilities of Spirit.

Belief Statement

- We believe that prayer works.
- We assist in discovering and living spiritual purpose and potential.
- We facilitate a stronger connection to our highest potential.

We feel we are:

- Empowered Grateful
- Peaceful Inspired
- Accepting Connected
- Loving Affirming

Unity - Five Cities

Sunday Celebration 10:00 am
Meeting at The Victorian
789 Valley Road, Arroyo Grande, CA
805-788-4777
P.O. Box 1005
Arroyo Grande, CA 93421
Email: unitychurch5cities@yahoo.com
Website: www.unity5cities.org

Schedule

<u>Speaker</u>	<u>Music</u>
Feb 6 Amanda Sherlock	Jan Grigsby & Nina Ryne
Feb 13 Rev Jan Limberg Morgan	Gale McNeeley & Bob Moloznik
Feb 20 Kevin Hauber	Steve Kindel & Karen Wilkins
Feb 27 Richard Inman	Richard Inman
Mar 6 Therese Solimeno Licensed Unity Teacher	Jan Grigsby & Nina Ryne
Mar 13 Rev Brian Walker	Gale McNeeley & Bob Moloznik
Mar 20 Timber Hawkeye	Steve Kindel & Karen Wilkins
Mar 27 Rita Conrad	Richard Inman

A Spiritual Community

P. O. Box 1005
Arroyo Grande, CA 93421

