



Dear Unity Colleagues

Ten years ago, a number of Unity ministers and spiritual leaders gathered in Virginia Beach, Virginia out of concern for friends and colleagues who needed support in dealing with some of the challenges of ministry. As we know, ministry can be a lonely profession; this is especially true for Unity ministers who are often isolated with no other Unity ministry or colleague nearby.

As spiritual leaders, each of us has been called to put aside a “previous life” and make a commitment to a life of service. It was out of this understanding and respect for one another that the group in Virginia Beach decided it was time to form a new organization for the purpose of supporting our colleagues and preserving the foundational teachings of Unity, which was a concern expressed by many. In 2009, the Independent Alliance of Ministers and Leaders in Unity was formed (IAMU).

The typical IAMU member tends to be long tenured. Many of our members have 30 years or more in ministry. This year Bill and I celebrate 50 years in Unity, which includes nearly 30 years on the executive staff and board of Unity School and 17 years in field ministry. We bring this background and history as a testament to our love and commitment to the ministries we’ve served and to the whole expression of Unity. And I hasten to add that I have witnessed the same love and commitment from the members of the IAMU.

It is from this place of caring and concern that we continue to seek to fulfill our mission to support you, our colleagues. From time to time, this has expressed in our offering relevant information about systems and/or procedures proposed by the UWM that is or could affect Unity ministers and ministries. For example, we questioned a faulty ministerial review system that was destroying the reputation

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and careers of some of our colleagues, i.e., “CLMRS,” which was finally changed due to our persistent efforts. We also offered information about a tax on ministries proposed several years ago. Because we shared this information, we were considered by some as adversaries to the UWM. Regretfully, that has been the image of the IAMU put forth by the UWM and it has served as a barrier to working together in a cooperative manner, which we have consistently pursued over these years.

Once again, we find ourselves guided to call attention to something proposed by the UWM that will directly affect the governance and control of Unity ministries. What we refer to is the Bylaws Template proposed and passed at the 2019 UWM Convention which requires compliance by all member ministries. If this is not of interest to you, you may want to cease reading now. Otherwise, please continue.

In an article published in the IAMU October Newsletter, we pointed out some concerns expressed at the Convention and by others who have shared them with us. These concerns focus on the addition to the ByLaws that gives the UWM absolute authority over ministry bylaws and, therefore, control over the governance of Unity ministries. Specifically, Article XI-Amendment of ByLaws, states: *“Any amendment(s) to or general revision of these bylaws may be considered after approval of the proposed amendment or revision by UWM. After such approval, the proposal amendment or revision shall be adopted at any annual or special membership meeting provided that written notice setting forth the exact wording of such proposed amendment(s) or general revision has been sent by postal or electronic mail to all members (of the church) at least fifteen (15) days prior to the meeting at which they shall be considered. An affirmative vote of two-thirds (2/3rds) of the members present and voting shall be necessary to adopt any amendment(s) to or general revision of these bylaws.”*

As Mark Hicks aptly points out in an article in *Truth Unity*, the difference in this bylaws template and previous bylaws recommendations is this new template is not “recommended,” it is “required.” This is stated in UWM policy 3.2, approved by the UWM board, which reads: “We have a new policy requiring member

ministries to request pre-approval of bylaws changes from Unity worldwide Ministries. This policy goes into effect January 1, 2020, and ministries will have until January 1, 2023 to bring their bylaws into harmony with the template.”

Some important implications to consider:

**Q. What are the long-term effects of such a change?**

Bylaws are the binding legal document under which each organization operates, consequently, this change gives the UWM authority over the structure and governance of member ministries. AND, once implemented, there is no way out. In other words, there is no provision that allows a ministry to remove itself from the UWM or to cease operating under these bylaws.

**Q. What happens if a Unity ministry decides not to adopt the new template?**

This issue came up repeatedly at the convention and the answers were vague and left many wondering. However, a Unity ministry requesting employment services from the UWM was told in a letter that if the changes in their bylaws were not made, the UWM would “suspend the employment process until the work is complete.” We can discern from those instructions that one penalty for failure to comply is exclusion from the employment process administered by the UWM.

Note: There are other placement options which a number of ministries are now pursuing.

**Q. What is the purpose and benefit of such a change?**

The singular purpose seems to be for the benefit of the UWM in maintaining some measure of control over its members as stated in the written response to the above mentioned ministry and in the published answer which states: “Our intention with this new policy is to work collaboratively with ministries to support good governance and alignment with UWM....” According to Webster, “collaborate” means to work together in partnership. Forced compliance with imposed penalties does not reflect a partnership or a collaborative relationship.

**Q. Who will decide what is “good governance?”**

Apparently, the UWM has determined a need for “good governance” in Unity ministries. Without any specifics as to who will determine what is good governance, we are left to wonder who this might be, i.e., the UWM Board, CEO, other UWM leaders? All of this changes periodically and there is no provision in this new template for accountability and consistency in how this standard will be applied.

**Q. How does the structure proposed in the new template, i.e., the authority given the UWM, reflect the historical and traditional autonomy and diversity of Unity ministries?**

A. You and your board must decide.

These are some of the questions and concerns we are hearing from our colleagues in the field. We offer this information for your thoughtful and prayerful consideration.

This comes with the sincere respect for all of our colleagues who have answered the call to ministry and our hope that the information we have provided here will be helpful in making a decision that best serves your ministry.

In our unity of Spirit,

Rev. Marge Dale, President