

A man who came to a St. Louis Unity Church where I was minister some years ago. He was living with HIV/AIDS, burdened not only by his diagnosis but also by the heavy stigma that often goes with it. Feeling isolated and alone, he walked into our church seeking hope, a place to belong. Our community embraced him wholeheartedly. Members reached out with love and support, invited him for coffee, welcomed him into their homes, and, most importantly, made him feel seen and valued.

Through Unity's practical spiritual teachings, messages of inherent worth, and divine love, he began to rediscover himself. He attended classes, joined gatherings, and, over time, transformed. He found his voice, shared his story, and inspired others. He discovered a spiritual home where he was defined not by illness but by strength, joy, and his divine essence.

This story epitomizes the power of community Rainn Wilson speaks about in his book *Soul Boom, the Need for a Spiritual Revolution*. Wilson calls for a spiritual revolution rooted in deeper connections, compassion, and meaning. He believes that true answers lie not in material pursuits but in spiritual awakening, individually and collectively. Community is essential in this vision, a fertile ground where we grow together, lift each other up and create space for genuine change to flourish.

### **Vision for Unity on Maui**

I created this vision for Unity on Maui in line with Wilson's vision. *We are a spiritual community where everyone feels valued and accepted regardless of age, background, or orientation. We celebrate wisdom from all spiritual paths, integrate insights from science and psychology, and advocate for social and environmental responsibility. We create a world embodying compassion, understanding, and Unity through teachings and practices that inspire personal growth and collective action.*

### **Why We Need Spiritual Communities**

In today's world, many of us feel disconnected and isolated. Despite being more "*connected*" through technology, face-to-face interactions have become rarer. Spiritual communities are essential because they offer:

- **Belonging and Connection:** A place where people know you by name and genuinely care about your well-being.
- **Emotional Support and Healing:** A compassionate support system to help us navigate life's challenges.
- **Opportunities for Growth:** Encouragement to step out of our comfort zones, learn, and grow through shared experiences.
- **A Space for Joy and Celebration:** Shared moments of laughter, celebration, and creating collective memories.
- **Shared Wisdom:** Tapping into the collective insights of diverse traditions and experiences.
- **Accountability and Encouragement:** Gentle nudges to stay true to our spiritual practices and goals.
- **Collective Impact:** Amplifying our efforts to create meaningful change in the broader world.

### **Building and Nurturing Our Community**

To cultivate such a community, we can:

Show Up Consistently: Be present and connect with others.

Invite Others: Tell your friends about our Unity community.

**Organize Community Activities:** Engage in events that foster connection, like decorating the sanctuary, gardening, or cleaning the church, where deep bonds are formed.

**Create Small Groups:** Form men's or women's groups, book studies, game nights, music sessions, and intergenerational activities to build deeper connections.

**Share Your Skills:** Offer workshops or classes on themes you're passionate about, such as gardening, cooking, meditation, or woodworking.

### **Call to Action**

I challenge each of you to consider: *How will you contribute to this community? What unique gifts can you share to uplift others?*

Every one of us has something unique to offer. Today, take a small but powerful step. After the service, connect with someone you don't know well. Introduce yourself, share a story, and offer a smile.

Remember, not just the big acts make a difference; small, meaningful moments ripple out and transform our world.

### **The Monk's Story**

There's a tale of a monastery that had fallen on hard times. Only five elderly monks remained, and the future seemed bleak. Seeking advice, the Abbot visited a wise Rabbi who told him, "*The Messiah is one of you.*"

Perplexed but hopeful, the monks pondered this revelation. Could it be the Abbot? Brother Thomas? Or perhaps even themselves? This possibility led them to treat each other with extraordinary respect, and likewise, they began to respect each other more deeply. The monastery transformed. Visitors noticed the vibrant energy and outstanding respect among the monks. People started returning, and young men joined the order. The monastery thrived once again, becoming a beacon of light and love, all because they recognized the divine potential within each other.

### **Conclusion**

Today, we've explored the profound impact of building a compassionate, inclusive spiritual community. In a disconnected world, such a community becomes a sanctuary where everyone can belong, heal, and contribute to something greater than themselves.

As Rainn Wilson reminds us in *Soul Boom*: "*Real change starts when small groups of people come together with love and purpose, creating ripples that move out into the wider world.*" We have the power to be that small group, to start those ripples, and to catalyze a more compassionate world.

### **Closing Thought**

Remember, "*The Messiah is in our Unity Community.*" As you interact with others in our community, regard them as the Messiah. And remember that you, too, could be the Messiah. Let's honor the divine within us, nurturing our community with love, respect, and Unity.

Together, we can create a vibrant community that transforms our lives and sends waves of positive change into the world.

**Affirmation:** "*I am helping to build a compassionate, inclusive spiritual community that honors everyone.*"