

## “Rebuilding the Church’s Energy by Discovering Our Personality Within Our Tribe”

Rev. Annie Holmes

### **Church as Healer:**

John and Julie were only married a year and a half when disaster struck their lives. They were out on the town for a night of much needed r & r. When they returned home to their Southside Chicago apartment a man jumped out of the bushes and with a knife forced them into their apartment. John was beaten and tied up and Julie was raped and also badly beaten. The babysitter had seen the man threaten the couple with the knife and with the baby had escaped out the back door and called the police. The attacker had fallen over after the attack in a drug-induced stupor.

The trial was set for 4 months after the attack. John told me he had to go, he had to look this man in the face and see what was going to happen to him. The hatred on this former Jesuit priest’s face was something I never expected to see. He had always been a mentor to me in his willingness to see the holy in all situations. The day of the trial came and John and I attended the scene. The young man didn’t even remember what he had done. He was a veteran, who had been so strung out on drugs; whole months of his life were wiped away. All he did was cry the whole trial. He begged the judge, John anyone who would listen, for forgiveness. John remained hardened with hatred. He wanted justice, no he told me actually he wanted blood, he wanted revenge. But John didn’t get what he wanted, justice, blood or revenge; John got instead a life lesson that changed him and hundreds of others.

One day at the trial, completely by surprise John met the attacker’s daughter. She was playing in the lobby of the courthouse with the attacker’s estranged wife. As John and I sat there, we watched the little 3 year old playing with her Barbie doll. She was not well dressed, and in her faded and shabby jeans and dirty t-shirt the little girl hugged that Barbie doll and cooed to it as if it were a real baby. And the full impact of what had happened to John’s family as paralleled with what had happened to the attacker’s family, hit John square between the eyes. His attacker was also a Father and a husband. John turned to me and with tears in his eyes, for the first time since the attack, he cried, we both cried. There on the bench of the courthouse, with the little girl playing just a few feet away, this man realized that hate, revenge and wanting blood, was not what was going to heal him or his wife. He needed a new way. And a new way was found. We learned that this woman had no idea what her husband had done. She had little money and lived over 100 miles away. The court psychiatrist had said in the trial that the young man was much more open to therapy and knowing he needed help when his wife and child were allowed to visit with him on a regular basis.

So, John, I and 20 others from our church, in an effort to heal John and Julie and ourselves, formed the first ever program in Illinois to help families of inmates visit them, especially those who were too poor to travel to the Chicago prisons and visit their family. After several years it became a state sponsored program aiding people from all over Illinois, not just Chicago. John could have become a hate- filled person for the rest of his life, but instead he became a butterfly that not only found a way to begin the healing in himself, but he went on to heal others. John was transformed. His church taught him how to be different in this extremely volatile situation.

The outcome of the story could have gone many ways, but it went this way, because this church would not let John go in the direction of hate and vengeance. The church body became the healer of their tribe. They believed some purpose; some healing could come out of even a horrible, painful and tragic situation. There were individual healers in the church who I am sure fostered this kind of healing outcome, and the church as a group followed their lead, believing what the healers said. This is the power of the healer in our midst. We honor them, we listen to them, and we respect their gifts.

Richard Bach, the author of the book "Illusions" writes, "The mark of our ignorance is the depth of our belief in injustice and tragedy. What the caterpillar calls the end of the world, the master calls a butterfly." This attitude has more to living in a new way than simply saying, "Boy, I'm glad I made it through that bad time and hope I don't have any more bad times for a long, long while." Rather we learn to believe, that to embrace, clasp, accept, own and even love the situation as a mentor and a friend is a new doorway to a deeper way of living. This process is called transformation, conversion, metamorphosis, metanoia which is Greek for a complete and utter change of heart. To have a metanoia experience means you may have actually been headed in one direction and have been spun around to face a new direction. Healer, teacher, visionary, warrior all create metanoia's and all need each other for balance.

1. Begin to see the burden, the trial, and the trouble you are carrying or suffering through with new eyes. Whether it is a person, place, illness or situation, step back and look at it objectively, outside the confusion you may be feeling at the moment. That can be the role of the teacher in you.
2. Try to see the situation, either in your own life or here at church as part of the ongoing lessons in life, an experience of all people of all time. We may feel like we suffer alone, but we are truly a strand of the timeless web of suffering and learning. That can be the role of the healer in your life.
3. Begin to accept your life in all its manifestations, knowing it may be the beginning of deep - lasting wisdom. This could be the role of the visionary for you.
4. Not in spite of - but through your life you can learn valuable lessons. These lessons help you move from the place of feeling like a victim to a place of strength and peace. And who else but the warrior can move you from a place of feeling like a victim to a place of strength.

### **Church as Teacher:**

I was attending the District Annual meeting of the Central Midwest District. There was a woman there in her 60's who had suffered a massive stroke. She was in a wheelchair that had all the bells and whistles of a real set up. She could talk through a microphone near her mouth, with one bent and gnarled hand she could push the levers of the machine to go forward or backward. Her mouth was slack; she was drooling all the time. With patience, kindness and love so many people from her church had taken turns throughout the 3-day retreat to feed her, wipe her mouth, and listen to the almost unintelligible speech.

One day I couldn't stand my curiosity any longer, because at least 10 people were sitting close to this woman and listening so intently as she was trying to speak, as if she had been the Dali Lama. So I pulled my chair close to the outside ring of the group and listened. One woman saw me and

moved her chair over to let me in the circle. "What's going on?" I asked. "Oh," the woman said, "Our church president is updating us on the coming workshops and what she thinks we could be attending." "Where is the President?" I asked. "She's the woman in the wheelchair," she answered, distractedly. It was obvious she didn't want to miss a single thing this woman in the wheelchair was saying. I was truly, utterly amazed. The woman in the wheelchair was the President of the congregation! That church had been taught by a woman who would not let her stroke condition stop her from her leadership role.

The Buddhist would call what the church with a President who had had a stroke experienced, a Bardo. Bardos are junctures in life when the possibilities of liberation or enlightenment are heightened. Through Bardo experiences we are able to see more clearly, more distinctly, and positively. The question is - how do we find a way to allow the scales to fall from our eyes and be taught, completely, utterly taught once again by the power of Olympia Brown, Margaret Fuller, Caddie B. Stanton, Starhawk, Margot Adler and many, many others, teachers, healers, visionaries and warriors of our UU faith. The teacher knows there is always so much more to a situation and is ready to do the translation, and then the morale of the story is imparted to others.

### **Church as Visionary:**

Brian Bishop was the financial officer of his church for about four years. It was a small congregation and there never seemed to be enough people to go around for all the jobs, so Brian just seemed to be put back in the treasurer's office each term. A new minister came to the church in Brian's fourth year as treasurer. One night as the minister was ready to sit down to supper, the doorbell rang. It was Peggy the church president. She explained to the minister that she suspected that Brian had been stealing from the church. In fact, she was sure it had to be in the thousands of dollars. Nothing from the immediate church budget, but from the funds that go to the National church office. So much for the new minister's dinner, much less the honeymoon.

The next day they called the national church office and sure enough this church was four years behind in their dues. They said they had called the church treasurer many times and he had always assured them that the dues were coming, or that the church was taking the matter into question. So, after asking in an assessor from the National church headquarters and the bank examiner, the Board realized that Brian had taken a total of \$15,500 in a four-year period. There was shock and silence in the meeting room. Tears and anger rolled around the small group as they met late into the night, as the news really began to hit home. To make matters worse, Brian was married to the former minister's daughter. A minister who had served the congregation for over 30 years. The question was what to do? Do they call the police? Do they call Brian and have him arrested? "If this was a business", the President pointed out, "it would be simple, you would call the authorities and have him put away." They all nodded. "But we are not a regular business," said the Vice-President, "We are a caring and loving church." Somehow, at that moment, that statement, although true, did not feel as good as putting Brian away for a good long time.

In the next couple of days this little group met many times. First they decided to look at the facts. Brian had a construction business with his brother that was not doing well. He was married with three children ranging in ages from 3 to 12. He and his wife had been lifetime members of the church. What a mess. Back and forth the information went. Some in the group wanted blood;

some in the group simply wanted the money back. One person even had an anonymous donor who would simply write a check for a full amount and that would be that. It got worse and harder for the group to know what to do.

I love this story because besides it being true, it could happen in any church and the interesting question is what would you do faced with this dilemma? What this church decided to do, first by a Board vote and then a congregational vote, was to make Brian accountable to the National Church Office for the debt. They set up a payment schedule that Brian could manage on his salary. It was discovered in time, that Brian was also an alcoholic and drug abuser. He got into treatment and last I heard was doing quite well. The most amazing part of this story is what happened on the Sunday morning that this was made public.

You can imagine in a small congregation the news was out and the church was packed. Brian stood up in the front of church with the minister, the church president and a representative from the National church office. As Brian spoke, you could hear a pin drop. He sobbed into the microphone as he asked the congregation for forgiveness. At first no one moved. Then one person slowly rose and went over to Brian and hugged him. Only then one by one the people from the congregation came forward and embraced him. All were in tears by that time. As people were asked to stretch themselves a bit, to go beyond simple justice, an eye for an eye mentality, Brian and being a part of the church community taught everyone there a lesson they would all carry into the rest of their lives. And there was solidarity in that congregation that was never there before. Why was this a church visionary story? I believe because the visionaries see beyond the obvious. They were able to envision a different world where we don't just throw people away because they mess up. Rather the visionaries of that church were able to help people come to a new understanding.

Incarnation acts done by ordinary communities. Savor the power a group of people can have in each other's lives. Feel the difference a group of people can make in the world. You better bet the newspapers got their fill of the Brian story. Some in the town said the church was a fool to let him go. Some said the church should not have gotten into the business of being a collection agency, some said thank the gods and goddesses that there still were institutions that love enough and have vision enough to keep people within community even though they screw up.

### **Church as Warrior:**

Foster Grandparents Program, Hospice and healing energies work, Women in Black, Fish, PFLAG, Mixed Company Board members for the Roseburg gay, lesbian community, mediators for the courts, members of CUPS, attending the Douglas County Homeless coalition, Chair of the Board for Project Literacy, Board members on the Art Center and Half Shell productions, Board members for Phoenix school, workers at the Fish pantry, member of the Interfaith minister's group in Roseburg, answering phones and managing the Democratic party headquarters for Douglas County here in Roseburg, membership in the Green Party. Oh yes, folks, our warriors are out there. This church has a hand in every one of the areas I mentioned.

And did I get it all, where you all serve? Of course not. I know there are organizations I have left out. But these are the ones I hear about and know we are the warriors there. So what? Well,

the so what is...that the warrior has ability to create change and loves action. And when you do these actions in the community, whether you say so or not you are acting out of the UU heritage for wanting a better world. And you do these things not only as individuals but also as representatives of the UU tradition and heritage in our community.

There is so much personal growth information out there these days it is almost mind blowing. Or at least overwhelming. But I took on this task of defining the four personalities of the tribe because I believe the information here is so unique and helpful. Within these four ways of being lies a truth. And that truth says we all are different and unique and that we each bring special and unique gifts to the table of our church community. But finding and defining those gifts has within it a couple of bonuses. One, you could learn which of the 4 personalities may come forward most often in situations and how you react to that being your dominant trait in life. Secondly, there is an opportunity for you to learn how maybe you could strengthen a trait you would like to see within yourself.

Who could you be if you were given the tools and the opportunity? And lastly, to be rewarded, honored and respected for your gifts is a rare and special contribution this church community can give you as we learn more about these personalities. Where else in the world will a visionary receive the honor and respect they deserve if not here? Our society is much more tuned into the teacher and warrior roles than the visionary or the healer. We need to remember to see these personalities as valuable and their abilities as needed and useful. Native peoples have given us these models. They may be a stretch for our post-modern minds to wrap around. But thank you for hanging in there with me all these weeks. And thank you for believing in the power these native understandings of groups participants not only in our church, but also in yourself, your family and your neighborhood.

Whether you knew it or not, as you listened to those stories I just shared, you responded spontaneously in your heart and mind about those situations. And something stirred within you; either the warrior, the visionary, the healer or the teacher. And that is what we want to explore today after the service. Where you feel your dominant strength of personality lies, but also who might you want to be in your life given half a chance. So, let us end this service and begin the business of honoring and discovering, because the challenges of our church's tribe's well being awaits.