

When I was invited by Peace United into a year-long collaboration to craft the community's collective future together, I heard words I often hear from ministers and church leadership teams when speaking about their intentions:
words about doing bold, creative things on behalf of its mission,
about respecting but not being beholden to what had been done before,
about directly confronting injustice and inequity in ways that emulated Jesus.

As a veteran minister, consultant, and leadership developer, these are variations on themes I've become quite familiar with. I've also gotten used to the disappointment that often comes when I discover the community isn't really prepared to move from aspiration to incarnation of its values. Despite the best of intentions, they invariably encounter barriers of blind spots, fear, or self-preservation and accept a fine, but ultimately watered-down version of what they might be. That was not my experience with Peace United. At every turn, I was surprised by their courage and creativity and by their refusal to choose the ministry of least resistance.

They are a fearless, joy-fueled, relationally centered, vision-led community that is the product of passionate clergy, empowered lay leaders, and inspired human beings working in concert to craft something that is truly unique. In my travels to hundreds of faith communities over the last decade, I can count on one hand those that have been able to embody the lofty words and admirable ideas in the way Peace United has. They have done this by asking difficult questions, by leaning into challenging conversations, and by putting the lives of human beings at the heart of everything they do—not only those already part of their community, but those they might connect with well beyond the building on Sunday.

The minister and leader who seeks to partner with Peace United should be someone who knows that the Church that *must be* is in many ways not the Church that *has been*. It should be someone who truly embraces possibility, welcomes unpredictability, and

loves audaciously. And that person will find willing partners in a loving community of people who know that they too define, shape, and embody Peace, and who will give their pastor permission to be authentic and to bring their true selves to this difficult but beautiful work.

It has been my true honor and joy to partner with them and I would welcome any conversation on my experience.

In gratitude.

John Pavlovitz

Pastor, Author, Activist