

# Going Integral:

## A New Model of Ministry for the New Thought Movement

By Rima Bonario

Have you noticed that most every system on planet earth seems to be experiencing severe breakdown? From our ecosystems to our financial systems, from our education systems to our religious systems, what was once working, now seems to be out of balance and broken. Though many approaches have been tried to bring these systems back into balance, none have had much long-lasting success. Most often cracks in our systems are treated with “band-aid” solutions. Perhaps now is the time to look at a fundamental shift in our approach to life. The Integral Movement may be one of the most promising new approaches on the horizon, and its application to how we approach ministry is worth exploring.

The Integral Movement (sometimes referred to as the integral approach, integral philosophy, the integral paradigm, or the integral worldview) weaves together scientific and spiritual insights, as well as other disciplines to provide a comprehensive understanding of humans and the universe (Kosmos). Integral thought provides “a new understanding of how evolution affects the development of consciousness and culture.” (Steve McIntosh, *Integral Consciousness and the Future of Evolution*, Paragon House, St Paul Minnesota, 2007, page 2). When used to refer to this movement, the word integral means whole, complete and holistic. Or in other words, it is a body-mind-spirit view that includes both Eastern and Western philosophies.

### A Post-modern Synthesis

The Integral Model is a comprehensive look at human endeavors that synthesizes the arenas of science, spirituality, psychology, business, education, medicine and more. But this alone is not enough to offer a fully integral viewpoint. The model also includes how humans (both individually and collectively) evolve over time. It tracks the evolution of consciousness as evidenced by how humans develop as individuals (body, mind, heart, and soul) and as cultures (institutions, collective knowledge, societies, and collective beliefs).

Integral thought is often called “post-rational” or “post-modern” because it reaches past the thought models of rationalism and materialism, which can ignore or deny the existence of the mystical and the spiritual. Integral thought provides a more universal and holistic view or approach, which incorporates other points of view into a larger synthesis. This parallels the spirituality of New Thought, which sees the beauty in, and honors, all spiritual paths to God.

The Association of Unity Churches International is now pioneering the application of the Integral Model to ministry development. This new application of the integral model is called the Thriving Ministry Model™. It is based on the doctoral research of Rev. Dr. Gary Simmons,

Vice President of Integral Operations for the Association. An article highlighting this work has been published in the Summer issue of the *Journal of Integral Theory and Practice*. The Thriving Ministry Model™ is now being combined with best practices from a wide range of experts, and with wisdom mined from fieldwork into a three-year transformative journey called The Transformation Experience.

### Overview of the Four Quadrants found in the Integral Model

One key aspect of an Integral approach is to understand both the internal and external aspects of life as well as the individual and collective aspects of life. Wilber uses a square with four quadrants to illustrate this:

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Upper-Left (UL) Quadrant</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">“I”</p> <p style="text-align: center;">This quadrant focuses on the interior quality of the individual.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">The key word here is <b>Intentional.</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Upper-Right (UR) Quadrant</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">“It”</p> <p style="text-align: center;">This quadrant focuses on the exterior quality of the individual.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">The key word here is <b>Behavioral.</b></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Lower-Left (LL) Quadrant</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">“We”</p> <p style="text-align: center;">This quadrant focuses on the interior quality of the collective.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">The key word here is <b>Cultural.</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Lower-Right (LR) Quadrant</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">“Its”</p> <p style="text-align: center;">This quadrant focuses on the exterior quality of the collective.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">The key word here is <b>Social.</b></p>

In the past, our ideas about the human experience often focused on only one of these boxes (quadrants) at a time, or on the left versus the right side, or the upper versus the lower quadrants. This does not allow the whole picture to be seen. We think we can make progress by working on just part of the whole, but because the quadrants are interrelated, our efforts do not create lasting change.

For example, we may observe disagreements where one person holds the view that people must take personal responsibility for their life circumstances and “make it” on their own (the upper quadrants), while the other person points to societal barriers keeping even the most responsible and motivated person from having a fair chance to achieve their dreams (the lower quadrants). In Wilber’s model, both these perspectives hold truth. We might also observe disagreements where one person holds that prayer/meditation and a deep internal practice are keys to a successful life (the left hand quadrants), where another might say that it’s time to “get off the cushion” and actually produce practical results in the “real” world (the right hand quadrants). Again in Wilber’s model, both views are needed and valued.

	Interior (subjective)	Exterior (objective)
Individual	I (consciousness)	It (body)
Collective	We (culture)	Its (relationships, social systems)

Notice how the right quadrants depict what is observable or measurable—behaviors, practices and structures of the individual or organization, while the left quadrants relate to the subjective interpretation of experience or the “inner” world, asking the questions, “What does it mean? How and what do I/we feel and think about it?” Wilber believes that in our modern world we have become so over-focused on right quadrants, the external, that many people suffer deeply from a loss of meaning. In New Thought, we do an excellent job of helping people return to the inner world, seeking first the Source of their being. But we must be careful not to make the same mistake of becoming so over focused on the left quadrants, or the internal, that we leave the “outer world” to those who are disconnected from the deeper sense of meaning in life.

### Applying the Integral framework to Ministry

If we understand that every ministry is a living system possessing four domains of development, we can begin to appreciate the evolutionary paths within our spiritual communities. Taking a journey through the quadrants from a ministry perspective will bring this into focus.

Let’s start with the upper right: the organization. This encompasses not only the physical home (or body) of the ministry, but also all the organizational practices and functions that can be observed—such as bylaws, employee policies and procedures, accounting practices, etc. All of these help to create a sense of order and stability for the ministry. We can see how

important it is to have a healthy body for ourselves. This is true for our ministries as well. The items in this quadrant are the “hands and feet” of our ministry that allow us to successfully carry out our work.

Next is the relational quadrant (lower right). Ministry is more than just arriving at church on Sunday. It is about relationships and being with others who share our values and principles. The relationships we have with others add depth to our experience. So for ministry, this quadrant focuses on the quality of the relationships that exists within the ministry. This dimension of ministry is about intimacy, being cared for and caring for others. We can observe our relationships in action. We can even measure certain kinds of interactions that occur. We can get a sense for how healthy or dysfunctional our relationships are.

Remember that both the upper right and lower right represent the exterior elements of the organization. They can be observed directly as well as measured. Next we move to the interior quadrants on the left hand side. These are Culture or congregational identity (lower left) and Consciousness or leadership intentionality (upper left).

While it may be difficult for those of us immersed in our congregational culture to see it clearly, new ministers have an easy time recognizing the culture when they step into a new church. They enter into a cultural field already in existence and as the new minister, they must respond to this culture successfully. Ministers that can attune to this culture find they are accepted, and they, too, become accepting of the culture. Those that don't blend into the culture usually move on or are asked to leave. Changing a culture is a delicate process and is best done from the inside out by leaders within the ministry modeling the desired changes.

And this leads us to the final quadrant: the consciousness quadrant (upper left) where leadership intentionality is the force at work in ministry. This quadrant includes the field of consciousness set by the leadership or core group at the heart of the ministry. This group is often made up of the minister and board of trustees, but can also be a group of founders, key volunteer leaders, or anyone who has an impact on decision-making and is seen as being a leader within the congregation. What is important for ministries to observe is that this group is a “resonant core” that sets a tone or vibration with its consciousness.

Research shows that the group consciousness almost never rises above that of the leadership (as a collective), so when we look to make changes within the ministry, it must first be held in consciousness and demonstrated by the leadership level. Once demonstrated it has the potential to manifest on the congregational level.

## Putting it all together

The key to remember is that these quadrants are completely interrelated. Think of a place where you may have worked or a fictional setting where the attitude or consciousness of the boss/executives sets a negative and cynical tone for the entire department (upper left). Imagine a new employee arrives full of enthusiasm. After some time, that person is finally worn down and also becomes cynical, or eventually quits and moves on, unable to adapt to the cynicism and stress that pervades the culture of the office (lower left). This cultural environment creates a lack of trust within the staff. Now imagine what the relationships might be like in that office (lower right). How well can team members work together if they lack trust? This lack of trust will no doubt affect employee performance, productivity and quality of work (upper right).

The same is true in ministry. You cannot be in relationship without the culture of the church affecting that relationship, without the organization of the church affecting the culture and the social system, or without the consciousness affecting those quadrants as well. For ministries to develop and thrive authentically and sustainably we have to be addressing all four of these quadrants within our ministry. The first step is to become aware of these quadrants and begin noticing how each impacts the other. The next time you have concerns arise in your ministry, consider how they are related to the consciousness, culture, relationships, and the structure of the organization. You will gain new insights on how to proceed when you see the work to do in each quadrant on any given issue.

As New Thought becomes more skilled at taking a whole systems approach to ministry development, we can look forward to having a wealth of thriving ministries within our movement. Perhaps now more than ever the world is hungry for the message of New Thought. The global challenges facing us today provide an unprecedented opportunity to offer our message of peace and love, of personal power and responsibility, of healing and hope to the world. The time has come for us to step forward in a bigger and bolder way. The world is ready. Are we?

For more information on this model, please visit [www.unity.org/success](http://www.unity.org/success). Dr. Gary Simmons offers a weekend workshop for ministry leaders that delves deeply into the integral framework for ministry and offers clear insight into how to shift to a whole-systems approach to ministry development.