



60,000 people
belong to Christie's
ministry.

Roger Christie: A Promotion From God

Roger Christie, the founder of the Hawai'i Cannabis (THC) Ministry, sits in his sea-view office on the Big Island as a tropical storm rolls in. The wind gusts and the sky darkens while Roger, a compassionate and true minister in every sense of the word, discusses the origin of his ministry and how every American already has the right to legally smoke cannabis.

For those of us who don't understand the intersection of cannabis and religion, what is the THC Ministry?

At the THC Ministry, we celebrate cannabis liberation daily—meaning we have the right to cannabis as our religious sacrament now. There's no doctor to beg for a note, no lobbyist to pay for influence, no law to pass—it's all done. You've heard of religious freedom, of course; you grew up in the old US of A? We inherited religious freedom; we inherited the Bill of Rights; we inherited the US Constitution.

In 1971, I saw an ad in *Rolling Stone* that said: "Become a real legal minister." I sent away for an ordainment at the Universal Life Church. When I received it, I thought: "That's \$5 worth of entertainment; that's a novelty." Then I went looking for cannabis liberty for 30 years. At some point, I realized I had it the whole time. That's what freedom of religion means—I get to choose my denomination, sect, practice, belief. And it's available to absolutely everybody.

How did you come to this realization?

I went from being a smoker to being an activist, to learning about all the products that could come from the hemp plant. I started a hemp store—one of the first hemp stores in the world, if not the very first—but kept gravitating to the spiritual side of life. I found the Religious Science church, which helped me reframe my activism. I noticed that if I communicated positively, it was very much more helpful to me and to the cause than if I complained about it negatively.

Cannabis prohibition was like a Rubik's Cube, and I wanted to fix it. So I took my Army training—

thank you, Uncle Sam—and put the word "marijuana" in for "Vietnam," and I became an intelligence analyst on the war on marijuana. And then a great thing happened: I found the Religion of Jesus Church, which was a cannabis-sacrament church here on the island.

[Roger excuses himself briefly to conduct his ministry and provide bags of shake—totally free—to two parishioners who stop by the office. In the last year, he has answered 7,000 phone calls, 4,000 e-mails, 2,800 unexpected knocks on the door and 2,000 visits from ministry visitors.]

I joined that other church, until—at a certain ethical crossroads—I split and thought, "This is my opportunity to walk my own path. I'm done with organized religion; I'm going to create the THC Ministry because I'm licensed, I'm free and I'm so certain of my rights I can run interference for anybody else." And I've been doing it for seven years, having a ball.

Can you explain how it works, legally?

Marriage is where church and state meet. I got my license to marry based on my application, which, under "type of ministry," says very clearly: "Cannabis Sacrament." I'm licensed to marry people—a very legal activity—with cannabis as the sacrament, so I'm certain that I'm allowed to grow it and to acquire it, and I do. And it implies that the people I'm marrying are legal to accept the sacrament. And at any other time, too.

The thing about cannabis liberty is that nobody can really give it to you. I'm okay with that. I'm 100 percent responsible for the good, the bad and the

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ugly that goes on in and around me. When I claimed cannabis liberty, I prayed for it, I worked for it, I blessed it, cursed it, kicked it, kissed it It was such a struggle for such a long time, and then I realized that it was an inheritance: Spiritual, constitutional, religious use is a total solution. I testify under oath in court when called upon—love doing it. I went yesterday to Circuit Court and testified truthfully that I provide the sacraments and services of my ministry—and the sacrament is cannabis.

Extending the certainty that I have with my cannabis liberty to other people is possible. You can become certain of your rights, and as you exercise them, they become stronger. I'm not frustrated anymore that "they" aren't doing something. There is no "they"; there is only me.

So anyone that needs ministering just has to sign up for the card and they can come at any time?

Yes—or not. I don't meet most of the people who belong to the THC Ministry. The church is you—you don't have to go anywhere. There are 60,000 people in 60 countries who belong, and most of these people just signed up for free on the Web site. I'll even ordain you as a minister in the Universal Life Church because it's another layer of protection. The word "minister" simply means "to comfort," and ordainment means we're putting into a document a recognition of your personal, private agreement with creation, spirit, nature, god, goddess—whatever you want to call it. You never have to define it; it's a lifelong journey. It's up to you to figure out. That's where freedom of religion comes in. I call it a promotion from God. It really is!

Have there been instances where people have used this as a defense?

We've had so many successes, I started keeping track. We win impossible cases. We won against the Army last year with just an ID card and the guy's sincere testimony. We've even gotten a couple of people an exemption to smoke cannabis for their religion while they're on probation for marijuana. That's a win! I love that. To me, that's a million bucks.

Has anybody ever lost?

Only, as far as I know, when they've given up. Ninety percent of arrests are for simple possession of under one ounce. The THC Ministry provides a way to never again be without a defense for cannabis your whole life long, if you are a sincere, legitimate person over 21 who grows and uses cannabis in private at home—and if you're not selling your sacrament. It's a very cool thing. I think every community needs a cannabis ministry. I think there's gonna be a revival of religious good stuff—spirituality more than religion—that includes cannabis liberation.—Chiara Luxe

To become a member of the THC Ministry, visit thcministry.org. To become ordained with the Universal Life Church, visit ulc.net.