

Controversy Within the UU Ministers Association
A Letter from Rev. Jill McAllister to members of the UU Fellowship of Corvallis
September 17, 2020

Dear Friends -- I feel a need to shed a little more light on this discussion about the controversy within the UUMA, since I am a member of that professional organization, of course.

Let me start by saying that of the very few ministers who have chosen to resign from the UUMA, several of them are cherished colleagues, who I have worked with for years - including Todd Eckloff, Rick Davis, and Mark Gallagher (you may remember that all of them participated in my installation here). I disagree with their stance and their actions in this situation, and also I respect their need to protest.

I have read the book by Todd Eckloff -- The Gadfly Papers. I was one of the original signers of a letter from more than 500 ministers agreeing that it was not in alignment with our efforts, UUA-wide and UUMA-wide, to address long, long-standing habits of patriarchy and white supremacy. I have also now signed a letter affirming that I agree with the changes being made in the UUMA. More than 80% (87%, I think) of the members of the UUMA approved changes to our guidelines in June, to help us keep moving in this direction.

From my perspective, the controversy is both about and part of the anti-racism, anti-oppression efforts of the UUMA. These efforts are related to parallel movements within the UUA. The UUMA is an autonomous organization -- it is not simply part of the UUA.

Too simplistically, but that's where we start, the disagreements are about how anti-racism work is being done. A small minority of ministers, including those who have now chosen to resign, are adamant that these changes go against our whole history of freedom of conscience and free speech. Some of them disagree with some elements and language of current anti-racism movements.

From my perspective, our whole history also includes deeply ingrained patriarchy and white supremacy. Free speech and freedom of conscience worked for those with the most power -- white males - and were often overlooked or denied for all others, including women, blacks and other people of color. This history mirrors the history of our country -- it is not hard to see. Our commitments to black lives matter and to anti-racism in the Fellowship and in Corvallis, commitments that I was expressly charged to uphold and increase in my call to ministry, are parts of trying to learn more about, learn from, and acknowledge these historical biases and the oppression that goes hand-in-hand with those biases.

From my perspective, the changes being made are about dismantling these structures of power and oppression. The changes say that while freedom of conscience and freedom of speech are still important, they are not our highest priority. We must finally also acknowledge the harm they can and do cause, hold each other accountable for

that harm, and stop the actions that cause harm. That is what anti-racism work is about. You can believe what you want to believe, and you can say what you want to say, but if it is hurting someone else, we are no longer going to let that go. A few years ago the UUMA made this clear in a related area: we declared, finally, after decades, a zero-tolerance policy for sexual misconduct by ministers. Does this limit the freedom of some ministers? Yes. It limits their "freedom" to harm others. This is a higher priority, finally.

I gave a sermon about the current controversy in July. I'd be very happy to talk with any of you about it more. I do not think it is a priority for the life of the Fellowship. The business of the UUMA belongs to the members of the UUMA. Having been a member of the UUMA for more than 30 years, having served on the Board of Trustees of the UUA for 8 years, having helped to create the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists, I have seen, experienced and been part of systems which need to be changed. I am very proud of the courageous work of the leaders of the UUMA at the moment -- most of whom are a generation behind me, and I am committed to the direction we are moving in. I am determined to continue to work to dismantle systemic patriarchy, racism and white supremacy which have always been part of the Unitarian Universalist movement.

In good faith --
Jill McAllister