

Unitarian Universalism in Troubling Times

A letter from District Executive Andrea Lerner

Dear friends,

As I was preparing to write a letter to congregational leaders to offer support for you as we pass through these troubling financial times, this letter from Florida District Executive Kenn Hurto came across my computer screen – and it can hardly be improved. I thought I'd share it in its entirety – and ask you the same questions he poses:

- What does an optimistic faith have to offer in times when hope runs thin or when cultural anxiety overwhelms?
- Where is our center?
- What values can we rely on?
- Can we, will we rely on one another?
- How do we minister to each other, practically, now?

I invite the congregational presidents to discuss these questions on their listserve – and the rest of you to send comments to me at alerner@uua.org for compilation and later distribution. We can be a blessing to each other.

In faith,

Andrea

The letter from Kenn:

“May you live in interesting times!” is an ancient curse. And aren't our times interesting?

I have a little joke I tell leaders. Paraphrasing Kipling, “If you can keep your head while all those around you are losing theirs, . . . well, perhaps you don't understand the seriousness of the situation!” The economic jitters spilling throughout the country in recent weeks are spooky and serious. It's not clear anyone quite understands.

Hurricanes of weather or of money-worries merit putting up the shutters. It is understandable when folks hunker down. As faith communities are dependent on the discretionary gifts of our members, many congregational leaders report concern for current budgets and stewardship efforts. None of our congregations is independently wealthy. Leaders rightly worry what's going to happen with our ministries. Cultural anxiety was already high before this surge of money-worry.

It is good, certainly, to be prudent about congregational expenses --- at any time; so, in some sense, this is no news. But how are we being affected spiritually? Faith calls for us not to hunker down, but to step into the wind.

For well over a century, Unitarian Universalism has been an officially optimistic religion. Indeed, our slogan used to be "onward and upward forever." There is both faith and reason for

this. We believe that nothing in life is fated; we humans make our lives. That is a rational assertion. As meaning-makers and value-determiners, it is our faith that we can face the challenges of living. This is true in both up and down times. Ours has been and remains a faith of hope.

The question for spiritual leadership in lean times is to challenge our people to act, not react, to be calm amidst a storm, and to help one another find our way. Practically, congregational leaders should trust that we'll not go under. Better to tend to the spiritual needs --- the fears, the worries, the real money challenges --- our members face. We need to keep faith in hope alive and not succumb to a circling of wagons spirituality of fear.

So, here's my question for you: What does an optimistic faith have to offer in times when hope runs thin or when cultural anxiety overwhelms? Where is our center? What values can we rely on? Can we, will we rely on one another? How do we minister to each other, practically, now?

Let me hear from you. Let's expand this conversation District-wide. I'd love to send an FLD Connections with stories of your ministries in these interesting times. May they be blessed and not cursed.

In faith,

Rev. Kenn