

A UU Minister's Appeal to Colleagues

Rev. Richard Trudeau

November 2023

Colleagues, my name is Richard Trudeau. I am a UU minister in full fellowship with the UUA and a member in good standing of the UUMA. I went to seminary in my mid 40s. I graduated at age 48 and over 20 years served two churches and then for several years was a guest preacher in my neighborhood, which is southeastern New England. And then seven years ago, I committed to the Unitarian church in Fall River, Massachusetts. They don't have a minister. I'm just a member. They have guest preachers every week. I'm the guest preacher once a month at no charge to them, just a contribution that I make as a member. I'm also currently the chair of the governing board and I'm also the assistant custodian.

I'm making this video to urge you please to inform yourself about the issues related to the proposed revision of Article II of the UUA bylaws. The final vote will take place at the General Assembly in June of 2024. We ministers are a big voting bloc and this General Assembly will be virtual, so the voting, it seems to me, will necessarily be by secret ballot. So you are free to vote your conscience. I don't ask you to believe me on anything. Please look into this yourself. In the little place for remarks below the video screen on YouTube, I will put the web addresses of two websites that have been created by lay people who are concerned about what's happening. They have a lot of good information. I'll also put the web address of a third organization of which I happen to be the chair. But I'm particularly recommending the first two.

The issues it seems to me are grave. The current national leadership is in the process of turning the UUA from being a service organization to being a social justice collective. So instead of serving congregations, the UUA will be giving orders to congregations. Because as a social justice collective, the national leaders will of course set the policy and then direct UU congregations to carry those policies out. This is a complete inversion of the relationship between the UUA and the congregations. It's a severe threat to congregational independence. It's a severe threat to our freedom of the pulpit.

A related issue is the UUA is and the other national officials are suppressing free speech. They're suppressing free speech. You could see this for yourself if you just reflect on the fact that *UU WORLD* magazine has not had a letters column now for several years. There's been no pushback allowed, not even by the way in the online version where there aren't such severe limitations of space.

We ministers are a big voting bloc, but many of us have not been paying attention. I understand that ministry is demanding and we know that for decades now nothing really that happened at General Assembly has had much of an effect on our congregations. Another reason that perhaps you haven't been paying a lot of attention or have been unwilling to look into it is that is that we ministers tend to be conflict averse and this also is very understandable. The people in our pews do not come to church to get involved in a political fight about the national Association and we are very interested in preserving the unity of our congregations. So we're conflict averse and some of us are afraid. Some of us are afraid. We've heard that at least a couple of ministers have

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been disfellowshipped by the MFC for expressing criticism of UUA policies. Ministers have been thrown out of the UUMA for the same reasons.

This GA matters though. I'm begging you to please take the trouble to inform yourself about the issues. And by the way, not only will your vote be a secret ballot. GA this year will be free, if you want it to be. Anyone can attend the business sessions for free. They ask for a small donation, but you don't you need to make it, or you can contribute whatever you feel is appropriate.

Article II contains the Seven Principles and the Six Sources. The new revision is a kind of a word salad in which you can perceive the fragments, the definite fragments of many of the Seven Principles but not all. The Six Sources are gone. There is no firm commitment to individual freedom of belief.

And something that affects me and maybe this is not relevant to you, but it concerns me very much--that the national leadership of the UUA has been dishonest. Dishonest. They say "Oh, we're going to have a discussion. We have this four-part Wellspring program for congregations to think about the Article II proposal." Well, Wellspring, though they say it's independent of the UUA is not really if you look at the personnel. It's just propaganda. It's just propaganda. The UUA has a stranglehold on communication and no expression of an opposition point of view is allowed and there's something dishonest about it.

At the last GA when there was a preliminary vote on the same proposed revision of Article II, or virtually the same proposed provision, the UUA leaders said to the delegates "Well, if you vote no, you're voting to cut off the conversation. Vote yes to continue the conversation." Well, there's no continuance of the conversation. If you look into what's happening and what the possibilities for a conversation or revision are there are essentially none. It was dishonest of them to say that.

And while I'm at it, UUMA is involved in this, too. I find that ministers meetings, and a lot of people report the same to me, they feel like we're in East Germany before the fall of communism. In East Germany there were 450,000 informants for STASI, the secret police, and if you were in in East Germany in say the 80s, and you were in a group of people, unless it was a group of two or three people whom you knew well, if it was a group of 12 or 20, and you didn't know everybody closely, there was a very good chance that there was a Stasi informer in the meeting. And therefore, people of course censored themselves and were very careful about what they said in gatherings of ministers. And that's going on now in our ministers' gatherings. That's an indication, I think, that something is very wrong. It's an indication that the UUMA, which talks a lot about being a community, actually has policies that have destroyed genuine community. Destroyed the possibility of genuine community.

My message to you is well, in part, please, I'm not asking you to believe me, to take my word for anything. Please look into this. I'm asking you to look into this. I'm saying this year what happens

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at GA matters. Many of us are eligible to cast a vote. The vote will be a secret ballot though. We can really vote our conscience and I urge you to look into this and to do exactly that. And I thank you for watching.