

May 22, 2020

My name is Greg Nichols, and my pronouns are he/his.

*To say the least, we are living in interesting times here at UCDSM.*

I have asked for a moment today to speak to everyone briefly, both from the perspective of serving as your current board chair, and as a member, as we embark on a period of transition.

The public statement provided Thursday night regarding ministerial decisions was provided to all members and I call your attention to the latter sections addressing where we go from here, related to my message today.

As a reference point, I will be speaking to my reaction to a public statement made yesterday by a fellow long-time member. They expressed clearly and appropriately their views. However, I have a caution as board chair, a concern as a member, and a concern I have heard from other members to voice on this topic as we move forward. I thank my fellow UU for their comments that helped clarify my thoughts at this moment in church history.

My fellow member stated, in part (edits my own), "...disruptor and proud of it...I thought that was what Unitarian Universalism was all about..." My caution as a board member to that statement is that in the days ahead we WILL need to speak at times frankly where we will not initially have shared perspectives or like proposed solutions...but I HOPE we will enter those conversations not with the objective of being "proud disruptors" but as members in a covenant of good will and right relations seeking consensus. The proud disruptor approach I fear also would lead to further burnout and lack of interest in volunteer leadership positions, at just the time volunteer leadership will be needed most.

A related concern I have personally was also alluded to in my friends' statement yesterday. There has been a good deal of conversation over the past months about "...if X doesn't happen or if Y does happen, I may not stay as a member." Of course, we all have free will in that regard.

Here is my personal perspective as one of 382 members, however. I came here and have stayed engaged here for over 20 years because I see UCDSM as a sanctuary for liberal religious seekers...providing me and my family guidance on our spiritual journey, fellowship with like-minded folks, and opportunities for service in causes that matter. Equally important, I saw this church as a place where the contentious and combative features of modern life are toned down through right relations, tolerance for others, and a sense that we were seeking similar objectives.

If, as may be true based on my friends' statement, our future direction and actions are based on the collective view that "disruption" is defined as a UU value we prioritize, then perhaps I am the one that will not fit as a member going forward. I want a place upholding the search for common ground not disruption. And, I might add, a place with patience and grace to volunteers struggling to provide leadership under intense pressure, all while balancing increased church work demands with their daily lives.

As we address our future we will need to engage in some difficult conversations. It is my hope we do so honestly and directly but in calm and respectful tones that help guide us to shared understanding and direction in the end.

Finally, I want to speak to one other concern. Let me be crystal clear about how to obtain factual information from and provide input to discussions about where we go from here to your board of trustees. The simplest and best is to talk to us directly. I will be among the board members here today, at this afternoon's

event, and some of us will be here every Sunday. We also will be planning occasional forums which will be publicized in the coming weeks.

Each Friday at noon the Intercom newsletter is sent to all members via email, and available on demand in print, and we will have updates there weekly. I was disappointed to hear that over this weekend there was speculation on social media about the ministerial transition decision WHICH WAS FULLY EXPLAINED in Friday's Intercom AND in an all-member email sent Thursday night. PLEASE READ these communications **religiously** in the coming weeks. If you have questions you want addressed, forward them to the board via email or voice mail so they can be included in future congregational communications. Please note—social media is NOT the best way to either pose questions or provide feedback to your board members. It is not a venue we will plan to use for any detailed all-members communications. Please utilize the other options mentioned.

Thank you for letting me share my caution and concerns today as our work on the upcoming transitions now begins.