

MidAmerica Regional Lead's Report to the MidAmerica Regional Assembly

March 12, 2020

Since September, I have had the honor of returning to the MidAmerica Region as a member of the UUA Congregational Life Staff, and to working with the wonderful Religious and Administrative Professionals of the MidAmerica Region. When I was asked in my interview process to become the MidAmerica Regional Lead why I wished to serve in this role, I named two things... my experience serving as a minister in congregations of the MidAmerica Region, and my desire to serve our faith movement with the amazing staff of MidAmerica Region. I wanted to serve with Nancy Combs-Morgan, Sharon Dittmar, Andrew Zallar, Cameron Young, Phil Lund, Lisa Presley, Kathy Charles, Gretchen Ohmann, Katie Phillips, Christine Purcell, and all of the Adjunct Consultants, who together serve the congregations of MidAmerica. While I am not, and will never be my beloved friend and mentor, Ian Evison, it has been a joy to move into the role of Regional Lead and Congregational Life Consultant with this amazing staff. While we may be fewer in number than any other Regional Staff in our Association, the skill, dedication, wisdom, and humor of this team make that sometimes easy to forget.

I also wish to celebrate the work of the MidAmerica Regional Board, as we look closely at the future of the Region in the changing environment of our faith. I have never seen a Board look more deeply at their own assumptions and interactions, seeking to find the way towards the Beloved Community. These wonderful Leaders of our religious movement have dedicated their time, their talents, and their hearts to inspire the Region to live up to our shared values, to ask necessary and sometimes difficult questions, and to helping me not only to integrate, but to let go of being the "Executive" in a Policy Governance system that became ingrained in me when I was a District Executive, and to move into a governance partnership based on relationship and trust.

I also wish to thank all of the Lay Leaders and Religious Professionals who volunteer of their time and talent as Regional Adjunct Consultants, as members of the Nominating Committee, as staff and leadership for our two Leadership Schools, as volunteers in Regional programming, and as partners in the work of building a healthy and vibrant Unitarian Universalism throughout the MidAmerica Region.

There are some significant questions before the Board and the Regional Staff through this year and into next. One of the transitions of this year involved the integration into the Regional Budget of approximately \$32,000 of new staffing costs in order to support the shared staffing relationships between the MidAmerica Region and the other Regions of our UUA. For the last several years, the MidAmerica Region has benefited from the support of sharing Faith Development, Youth Ministry, and Events Planning staffing with the Southern Region, with significant amounts of the costs of that shared staffing delayed until this year. Also, the MidAmerica Region joined with the other five Regions of our UUA to create a national Transitions Program Manager position, to provide

consistent support to all of our congregations in ministerial search. The integration of these costs this year into the Regional Budget is the reason why your MidAmerica Board approved a deficit budget for next fiscal year. We are grateful to the other Regions of our UUA that have carried the burden of these costs on our behalf these last few years, and it is time for us to integrate those costs into our own budget. A deficit budget is not something we can continue, and so your Regional Staff and your Board are exploring several paths to eliminate this deficit through a fuller integration with our UUA.

But it is not numbers that tell the story of the MidAmerica Region this year... it is you. Our story is told by our two new UU Congregations this year, the Lakeshore Unitarian Universalist Fellowship in Manitowoc, Wisconsin, and the Mt. Vernon Unitarian Universalist Fellowship in Mt. Vernon, Illinois. Our story is told by the Unitarian Universalist Church, in Rockford Illinois, who volunteered their spiritual home not just to host this Regional Assembly, but also to host two gatherings of Religious Professionals, a gathering of UU Social Justice activists hosted by the UU Advocacy Network of Illinois, a Board and Staff Meeting of the MidAmerica Region, and a Get-Out-The-Vote Training by UU the Vote... all in the same weekend! That we needed to shift these events to an online format due to the pandemic in our nation does nothing to lessen the generosity of heart and the living of the covenant of our faith that the Rockford UU's had committed to, and we thank them from the depths of our hearts.

Our story is told by the Faithify campaigns that our congregations have put forward in the past year, and the ways UU's and our own Chalice Lighter Program have helped to fund those campaigns for new staff, youth programming, building expansions and modernizations, our work for Justice, Ordinations, Installations, Retirements, and Internships for Religious Professionals, and so, so much more.

Our story is told by the generosity of our congregations in supporting the Annual Program Fund of the UUA, which funds all of the work of your Regional and National Association Staff and Programs. Every webinar you have attended, every workshop, every phone call with or visit from a Congregational Life Consultant, every good idea or program that you find in your email, every curriculum for faith development, every book from Skinner House, every minister, religious educator, or professional musician who receives fellowship or credentialing, every effort for to build the Beloved Community through the justice programs of our association... all of this and more is funded through your congregation's gifts to the Annual Program Fund of our Association.

Our story is told by the difficult work of looking at ourselves, to see where the cultural assumptions of ourselves, our congregations, our Region, and our Association prevent us from living the Beloved Community and cause us to foster harm to those who hold identities outside of the white dominated and cis-gender dominated cultural paradigms of our country. In seeking to dismantle white supremacy culture in ourselves, in our congregations, in our Region, and in our Association, we seek to lay the foundation and learn how we might, one day, dismantle the white supremacy culture that is endemic to

our country. That work is hard, and not everyone is in the same place in that work at the same time. For some, the changes and the challenging of assumptions appear to be happening so fast that it causes fear and resentment. For others, especially those who have been wounded by the cultural assumptions that privilege the white and the cis-gendered in our movement and in society, the changes and the challenging of assumptions have not come soon enough to prevent the harms they have experienced.

We, your Regional Staff, remain committed to continuing this work of dismantling these cultural assumptions that cause real and ongoing harm, in our own lives and in our work within our shared faith. We also are committed to supporting you and your congregations as you seek to challenge and change those cultural assumptions that privilege dominate culture in our congregations and in our country.

This is our story, and it is one that we tell together. I am honored that I get to tell that story with you.

Rev. David Pyle
Regional Lead
MidAmerica Region of the Unitarian Universalist Association