

“We Quit” Letter

To: UUMA Board of Trustees

September 15, 2020

From: Disaffected Colleagues

We write to express our profound disappointment with recent developments in the UUMA and its new norms of thought, behavior, and procedure. We highlight below three of the most relevant events of the past year or so.

Public Letters of Condemnation from groups of colleagues (DRUMM, POCI Chapter, ‘White Ministers’) in June 2019 denouncing *The Gadfly Papers* and its author, Todd Eklof.

Of course it is okay to criticize published views – we might not be all of one mind about *The Gadfly Papers* ourselves. But these letters of condemnation are a stain upon our collegiality in several respects, the most prominent of which are:

- * Making charges of racism, ableism, classism, homophobia, transphobia, vitriolic rhetoric, alt-right ideology, and white supremacy culture without citing any particulars.
- * The rejection of reason and logic, calling them expressions of white supremacy.
- * The fact that hundreds of colleagues signed one or more of these letters within 24 hours of the book’s release – few could have read it, much less reflected upon it. Plus, the letters (and therefore the colleagues) preemptively reject the idea that it’s necessary to read something before publicly condemning it and its author.
- * The mob mentality which all this reflects – condemning hurriedly at the urging of others rather than forming one’s own view of the matter. It seemed everybody was eager to get in a kick – a disgraceful scene.

The UUMA Board’s censure of Todd Eklof

The Board’s conduct in issuing censure has been disheartening and relationship-breaking...

- * Violating the disciplinary process defined in our UUMA Code of Conduct – not just minor deviation, but dispensing with the most basic rudiments of fairness, like notification of the charges, presentation of evidence, and the opportunity to respond.
- * Echoing the other letters of condemnation in disavowing logic, calling it a strategy of white supremacy culture.
- * Citing no particulars from the book as evidence of its offense.
- * Disingenuousness about the basis for censure:
 - In response to charges of censorship, claiming the censure was not about the content of the book, although the first sentence of the censure letter states it was about exactly that.
 - Claiming the censure was really about Eklof’s ‘refusal to engage’ with his critics and the Board – implausible because that was never mentioned in the censure letter.
 - Most preposterous, claiming that the public letter of censure was not a disciplinary action, not a professional admonition, and not a formal reprimand (and therefore not subject to the procedures required in the Code).

It is heartbreaking to find the leaders of our professional association engaging in such astonishing deception and double-think. Under these standards of dishonesty, how is any genuine relationship possible, much less ‘covenant’ or ‘beloved community’?

When challenged on its behavior, the Board might have said, *“Upon reflection, we were wrong to censure the way we did. We panicked under pressure. We have re-thought the matter and will [a] rescind the illegitimate censure, and [b] pursue a fresh course of action consistent with our rules and our covenantal values.”* This could have included a genuine discussion of *Gadfly* and its effects (rather than a uni-directional scold), or even a fresh censure process on a legitimate basis. But in the present state of UUMA culture, that was evidently not a viable avenue for the Board. Condemnation must be swift and unquestioning, or one’s status as an ‘ally’ of the oppressed may be in question.

June 2020 Annual Meeting

The most recent and decisive event was the approval by the UUMA membership of an overhaul of our Code of Conduct. The new approach was said to be ‘more covenantal,’ and yet greatly amped up rules and enforcement. Although some features of the new Code have merit, in several important respects it is deeply disturbing...

- * Some of the new offenses outlined in the Code are outrageous, if not patently absurd...
 - It is now Bullying & Emotional Abuse (defined in the Appendix) to exhibit a pattern of:
 - *“challenging a person’s perceptions, opinions, and thoughts.”*
 - *“switching topics”* or
 - *“using words or other means to stop a conversation.”*This is so absurd as to require no further comment.
 - The new offense of Tokenism (defined in the Appendix) includes: *“any superficial gesture”* or *“sense by a member of the dominant group of fulfilling an ethical mandate, of ‘doing the right thing,’ or of avoiding criticism”* in efforts toward diversity, equity, and inclusion. While superficial gestures can indeed be irksome, it is outrageous – perhaps fanatical – to mandate diversity, equity, and inclusion but then make it misconduct to seem to be doing it to fulfill a mandate.
- * Language throughout the new Code conveys the implicit presumption of guilt and places the aggrieved colleague almost entirely in control of the process – an apparent rejection of the very notion of fairness.
- * Perhaps most shocking is the complete elimination of due process in the enforcement of our Code. This is chilling in itself. Further, it is indicative of fanaticism that our colleagues see it as ‘covenantal’ to discipline or expel a member without even specifying the offending behavior and providing opportunity to respond to the allegations.
- * In the amendments debate, ‘con’ statements seldom even addressed the merits of the amendment in question. Most implied that any criticism of the proposed overhaul, no matter how carefully measured and reasoned, was a kind of oppression, inflicting fresh trauma upon marginalized colleagues.

This whole dispiriting episode dispelled for us any remaining doubt that our professional association has become entranced with an illiberal, even anti-liberal, ideology.

Conclusion

Numerous letters have been sent by colleagues to the Board expressing alarm at the growing dogmatism and intolerance in our UUMA. A group from Return to a Democratic Faith met with Board representatives in April 2020 for a detailed discussion of the Board's conduct in issuing censure, and its implications. The discussion was civil, but produced no genuine engagement with the concerns raised. In June 2020, amendments were proposed to mitigate the worst aspects of the Code overhaul, which were not only rejected by 85-90% of the membership but unfairly characterized as hostile.

It is apparent the UUMA leadership and a large majority of members now reject the Enlightenment values which have always been baseline conditions of our faith and have inspired social progress for several centuries. These values have been replaced by a vision of cultural revolution, guided by identity politics and White Supremacy Culture jargon. Ritual confession of identity-based guilt and virtue-signaling are now primary practices. We may be supportive of many of the anti-oppressive *aspirations* of this movement, but find the dogmatism and the unreflective revolutionary fervor repugnant and destructive.

Despite (for many of us) long years of cherished ministerial collegiality, the UUMA has become for us an inhospitable place and an embarrassment. As it has been made clear that genuine dialog on the new orthodoxy will not be tolerated in our ministerial association, we cannot in good faith continue our association with it.

And so, with great sorrow, we withdraw our membership from the UUMA.

Signed,

Rev. Mark Gallagher - 28 years in UU ministry (23 parish)

Rev. Rick Davis - 35 years (all parish) - Good Officer

Rev. Dr. Floyd Vernon Chandler - 44 years (15 parish)

Rev. John Robinson, Jr. - 51 years (40 parish) - UUMA Exec/Board, Good Officer, Settlement Rep

Rev. Rick Hoyt-McDaniels - 22 years (all parish) - Chapter President

Rev. Kenneth W. Phifer - 49 years (38 parish) - Chapter President

Rev. Dr. George Kimmich Beach - 40 years (36 parish) - Chapter President, Commission on Appraisal

Rev. Dr. Charles Gaines - 59 years (17 parish) MFC, UUA staff

Rev. Kathleen Korb - 41 years (33 parish) - Chapter President, Settlement Rep

Rev. Richard Kellaway - 61 years (35 parish)

Social Justice Grants Panel, UUSC Assoc. Director, IARF North American Coordinator

Rev. Beth Marshall - 18 years (all parish)

Rev. Craig Moro - 41 years

Rev. Dr. Vern Barnet - 50 years (14 parish) - Chapter President, Good Officer