

February 18, 2016

Jim Key

*Moderator, Unitarian Universalist Association*

Manish Mishra-Marzetti

*Chair, Election Campaign Practices Committee*

Dear Jim and Manish,

The very best part of the first weeks of my Presidential campaign has been talking to Unitarian Universalists all over the country about our beloved faith. I have loved every minute of these conversations.

I have engaged these conversations alongside my ongoing effort to fulfill my responsibilities as our UUA's Regional Lead for New England. To my great disappointment, it has become clear that I cannot serve as Regional Lead and mount a campaign for President of the size, complexity, duration, and cost required to compete within the demands of our uniquely UU brand of democracy. I find myself in an agonizing ethical bind: I can run an effective campaign or serve as Regional Lead. I cannot faithfully do both and also protect my personal well-being.

On top of this stark realization, I have experienced an irredeemable role conflict. As Regional Lead I am privileged to provide direct services every day to congregations and their leaders. As part of my work I preach, attend meetings of religious professionals, speak at district assemblies, coach and counsel people. My candidacy introduced distress into many interactions with the people I serve. At best, this manifested as confusion about what role I was playing in any given conversation. At worst, it introduced role conflict which in turn made the people I serve feel as though they must navigate complicated ethical waters. I believe this confusion would have become increasingly problematic as my campaign evolved and I had to intentionally seek these same people's political support.

Serving as Regional Lead requires very clear boundaries with a large number of colleagues and lay leaders - in fact my role is often to help restore people's blurred or troubled boundaries. As a religious professional I am absolutely clear that it is my responsibility to resolve the tension between my role as a candidate and my role as Regional Lead. My integrity requires it.

I take the call from our Presidential Search Committee very seriously. I am profoundly honored to have been selected as a candidate. At the same time, I know that my first responsibility is to serve our congregations in New England and the devoted New England Regional staff team. As a result, after gut-wrenching discernment, I respectfully withdraw as a candidate for UUA President.

Mine is a deeply personal decision for which I accept full responsibility. And I pray that this situation opens up an opportunity for Unitarian Universalism and our people to reckon with institutional anxiety about leadership. This is a chance for us to look hard at our collective

suspicion of leadership and to heal systemic fragility that is so anxious about avoiding the *appearance* of conflicts of interest that it cannot see *actual* conflicts. I hope together we might ask if the figurative and literal cost of leadership in our movement excludes our most promising leaders. I pray that we will commit ourselves to disrupt assumptions about fairness that disable difference. And I hope that by withdrawing as a candidate I might become a more effective voice for these values. If we do this work together, our movement might be more ready to receive the leadership we long for.

I believe unequivocally in the transforming power of Unitarian Universalism and remain absolutely committed to our faith. I offer deep gratitude to everyone who has supported and encouraged my leadership, and to all those whose hopes and dreams for Unitarian Universalism have become wrapped up with mine.

In faith,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rev. Sue Phillips". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rev. Sue Phillips