

Letter from the Minister, June 2023

“Walls protect and walls limit.  
It is in the nature of walls that they should fall.  
That walls should fall is the consequence of blowing your own trumpet.”  
— **Jeanette Winterson, Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit**

Proverbial walls are going up in all directions - diversity, equity and inclusion be damned! It is extremely apparent here in Florida, but we aren't the only hub of media-celebrated inequity. Texas is moving right along at our heels.

Here's the thing: I can talk about the rising suffering of individuals in the transgender community, women who face difficult decisions related to getting an abortion, people in the BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and Persons Of Color) community, persons who identify as Jewish and individuals incarcerated for minor charges including lapsed auto registrations but that would not lend authenticity to their stories. I am aware of these individual narratives, have heard them with my own ears and witnessed the tears streaming down their faces as they spoke but I cannot authentically speak to the suffering of many who have been and are increasingly being marginalized further.

What I can do, however, is make space for others to tell their stories and to speak about my own experiences related to being “othered.” And to address why our shared commitment to Unitarian Universalist values, such as affirming the importance of diversity, equity and inclusion, is foundational to our faith and to democracy. Our ideals are being tested on a daily basis.

Misguided white men in power are quickly constructing walls that are meant to protect one population of individuals: themselves. Yes, I am a feminist, but I am not anti-men - white men or others. I am beholden to many men who have chosen to serve well when in public office.

However, I am against all who were elected to serve “the greater good” and have chosen to abuse the power they have been granted. Every person has a choice: to seek opportunities to provide hope and healing or to promote divisiveness, death and destruction. I am not naming names. I don't have to, now do I?

This is where I want to speak about my own experiences. When I was in my early forties, I began to ponder my identity. I lived in a small college town in the Midwest and looked everywhere for books that expressed stories about other people who had similar longings to what I felt. One book that I bought and cherished was the story of one woman's affectionate love for her friend. The two women formed an intimate relationship. The setting was in the early pioneer days. I learned two things: maybe I wasn't so strange in that I was sexually attracted to some men *and* to some women and that maybe there were people in history who were like me.

After researching the biographies of writers, artists, composers and others in antiquity, I found out that I was just another human being like people before me. I located research by the Kinsey

group and was comforted to find that science confirmed my bisexual identity was also on a continuum, actually part of a spectrum of the nature of being human. I started dating women and felt happy to be my authentic self.

The challenge was that I worked in a public school where I feared being outed and losing my job. Same-sex marriage wasn't legalized yet, and I had a young son at home who needed food on the table and all the care I could provide. Incidentally, this was also before "Ellen" kissed a woman on television and "Will and Grace" was airing on national broadcasting stations.

Kissing in public by same sex couples was not an option and holding hands was still risky even in the progressive college town where I resided. On one occasion, my son lost a friend when the boy's parents found out he was being raised by two women. The boy could no longer play with my son. Try telling a six-year-old why grown adults could be so hateful to little ones who only wanted to play together.

While I never felt like I was going to be killed for being myself - I did and do recognize the privilege I have as a cisgender woman - I rarely experienced public ridicule. Maybe being a small, unassuming woman had its advantages? However, I once dated and dearly loved a taller person who was very beautiful inside and out. And yet, when we were together, two complete strangers spit on us in passing and on other occasions, men leaned out the car windows to yell slurs at us. I guess my partner's gender-ambiguous appearance was a threat? I have stories of more intense struggle but that is all I want to share for now.

I will close with two points. First, any one person's suffering should not be compared to another's by way of "this is worse" or "that is worse." Hardship and suffering are ugly and for many marginalized individuals including those in the LGBT and Queer community, it is getting more dangerous as the walls go up inhibiting access to care and honorable lives of authenticity.

Finally, know that although some persons in public office are fighting to erase the stories and hide the histories of countless worthy individuals in the United States, we can take pride in remembering others who served well.

Harvey Milk, a visionary and civil rights leader, one of the first openly gay public servants said, "We will not win our rights by staying quietly in our closets." He also said, "I know you can't live on hope alone. But without hope, life is not worth living. So you, and you and you: You got to give them hope. You got to give them hope!"

As Pride month approaches, now more than ever, we need to celebrate diversity and recommit to making the world a more compassionate and just place for all of us.

With you on this journey, Rev. Amy Kindred