



## UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CONGREGATION OF MARIN

March 13, 2020

Dear Ones,

I always get a warm feeling when someone says the part of our mission, “to share life’s journey.” It is reassuring to know we are not alone on the journey, that we travel with companions who share our values, people who will know and care about the shape of our lives. But of course, sharing life’s journey is not always warm and fuzzy. Right now, we are all sharing a journey that involves a great deal of uncertainty as we navigate how to respond to COVID-19 and the public health issue facing our community. While the uncertainties of the situation and the dangers of this virus can cause our monkey minds to swing wildly, I do find solace in remembering this is a journey we share not only with our community here, but with people all over the planet. We are not alone.

Moments of crisis, or even simply perceived crisis, can have many effects on us. Anxiety and fear can cause people to turn against each other, to lose access to compassion in the pursuit of self-preservation. Nervous systems on edge can lead to shallow breathing, racing thoughts, and other physiological responses that undermine our ability to be grounded and clear in our hearts and minds. But crisis can also bring out the best in us. It can heighten our awareness and focus our attention on the present. Remembering our vulnerability and fragility can open our hearts and inspire us to act with care and kindness. May this challenge before us call forth our wise selves, remind us of our power to bless the world in ways large and small.

We’ve spent the last several days preparing for how to hold our worship services while minimizing the possibility of spreading infection. In the first version of this letter, I was writing to let you know about the need for sensible precautions as we continued to operate mostly as normal. However, this afternoon our Unitarian Universalist Association sent a recommendation that all congregations cancel public gatherings of 25 people or more to help slow the spread of the novel coronavirus. You can read a letter from our UUA President here:

<https://www.uua.org/pressroom/press-releases/updated-recommendations-your-congregations-response-covid-19>

After hearing the UUA recommendation and learning that most other UU congregations around the Bay Area have decided to cancel services starting this Sunday, I consulted with the Board and we determined that complying with the UUA recommendation is the best way to protect the health of members of our congregation and live our values in support of public health.

I hope you will join me online or by phone for worship at the normal time on Sunday. Rev. Lynne Scarpa will be working on providing videos and other materials to children and families.

I know that the spiritual and emotional cost of isolation can be very high. Now is a time to get creative in how you reach out! Send me a text or give me a call (510-213-0404), or reach out to the pastoral care team at [pastoralcare@uumarin.org](mailto:pastoralcare@uumarin.org) if you would like to connect. Please reach out especially if you are ill, we want to be there for you. *If you are tested positive for COVID-19, please let me know immediately. Your privacy will be protected and it will allow us to inform our community about possible exposure.*

If you have other ideas of what we might do as we face this challenge together, please be in touch with me. Our shared wisdom is needed to best care for everyone in our community.

David Whyte, the poet and teacher with whom I've been studying, recently wrote of the Coronavirus as a collective test of our shared humanity: "This will be a test and a re-ordering, not only of our health and our political and financial systems, but of our mutual compassion, our willingness to help our neighbours, our willingness to work together and even more perhaps, our willingness to fundamentally change our societies to a more equitable sharing of both rewards and well-being." May this be one more opportunity to inspire joy and justice in an imperfect world. Take care of yourselves, take care of one another. Reach out for support, reach down and feel the good earth still beneath you, holding steady despite all.

With you on the journey,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rev. Marcus Hartlief".

Rev. Marcus Hartlief