

ASK UNCLE ED 3A

Dear Uncle Ed*,

I'm a moderate Democrat living in a nice suburb of Philadelphia. My family and I are members of XX Presbyterian Church, PCUSA, where I sing in the choir. Quite a few members of the choir are Republicans, and it seems that almost all of them voted for Donald Trump, as did a majority of the non-singing members. This has made me very sad and also angry. I realize we don't have to talk about politics, and really in the past we haven't much, though I wish I had done more. Since the election I can hardly stand to be around them. But I love singing in the choir, and I think the Church does some good in the community. I've been seriously thinking about leaving the Church. What do you think?

Signed, Sad singer.

Dear Sad Singer,

Uncle Ed has twice written responses to people he doesn't know, people he doesn't live near, people whose lives he hasn't lived, people whose education and training and life experience are completely different from Uncle Ed's own life. This one hits close to home. Uncle Ed has similar experiences, though from a different bizarre Presidency, that of Bush 2. Many of the members of the Church at which Uncle Ed sang for over 20 years were business people or professionals; all were well educated, bright, and almost all had money. A solid majority were reasonable Republicans, people whose politics Uncle Ed didn't share but at least could understand. Uncle Ed saw them as friends, if loosely. And they voted for Bush. So this is a tough question for Uncle Ed. There are two possibilities. You could leave, covered in this post. Or you could stay, covered in the next,

This is a common problem. Democrats and Republicans serve in civic groups, volunteer in community service groups, participate in trade groups and professional groups, help out in kid

sports, and live in the same neighborhoods. In the past this hasn't been a real problem. It's easy to serve, as Uncle Ed did, on the board of an opera company with lots of Republicans. We didn't talk about politics. We talked about opera and how to encourage people to come to our productions. In social settings we talked about sports or travels or investments or just about anything besides politics.

That doesn't work any more. Voting for Trump feels like a betrayal of a shared concern with the future of the country and of our children and grand-children. How could anyone vote for that seething pile of ignorance, intolerance and narcissism? How could people you know and respect, people who have benefited from our economic and legal systems, vote for him.

The central question is how you can continue to sing. Are there Churches near enough that sing the kind of music you enjoy and would meet your spiritual needs? Are there other choirs you could join that sing different music but that you would enjoy, so that you could move to another Church that would work for you?

The first step is to get together with other people in the choir and maybe other friends in the Church who have similar concerns. In Uncle Ed's experience, singers as a group are more liberal than other people you know at Church. Maybe you can ignore the Trumpists and hang out with the sane people. What are their thoughts? Are you overreacting? Is there some concerted action you could take that would make staying possible? And if you are leaving, where are you going?

If you decide to leave, the next step is to talk to the Choir Director and explain. You may be surprised by the response. Many Church musicians are much more liberal than the congregations they serve. The leader may be able to help you find another Church or choir, and may have sensible advice based on knowing you and your role in the Church. In any event, you won't want to leave the Choir Director wondering where you

are.

You also must think about the time to leave. You don't want to leave too close to a big service, like Easter or Reformation Sunday or before the choir sings a major work. That wouldn't be fair to the Choir Director and the other singers.

The next question is what you say to your friends and acquaintances at Church. In normal circumstances, Uncle Ed would point out that you shouldn't burn any bridges, that you may need these people in the future and therefore you should go quietly. Later, when they notice you are gone, they may ask, but more likely they won't. Especially if a group of people leave, others can work it out if they care, which they probably don't.

These aren't ordinary times. People who don't see that Trump is a horrid person and a horrifying president, especially after the press conference of February 16, are not fit co-workers. Their judgment cannot be trusted, and their common sense has been overwhelmed by some psychological disturbance. Uncle Ed would rather starve in the street than ask them for anything.

You may not want to, but you have to say something. If you want to be marginally polite you could say something like: I feel awful about what's happening in this country with Trump, and I'll feel more comfortable with people who feel the same way. It's simple and true, and tilts the balance of feelings towards you, so that the other person is unlikely to be too offended.

Uncle Ed would probably be more direct: Trump is everything I despise. It's not his policies, such as they are; policies always change. It's that he is mentally and emotionally unfit to be president. Trump is the is the antithesis of every value I hold. I don't want to offend people who think he's just fine, so I'm leaving.

Uncle Ed is pretty sure he wouldn't say: I don't want to be around Republicans any more. But he'd be thinking that. And he knows some people to whom he would say just that.

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* This is one of an occasional series in which I try to come to grips with the Age of Trump. Sad Singer's letter is based on my personal experience in a volunteer choir at a PCUSA church, and in other singing groups that included a substantial number of conservatives. By extension, it applies to other groups where sane people have to deal with Trump voters.