

Serving with Love

Embedding equality, diversity, and inclusion in all that we do



Loida Garcia-Febo

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I was recently asked about what makes me feel hopeful about the future of libraries. My answer is the renewed love I see for the communities we serve.

While hate, authoritarianism, and open oppression are seemingly on the rise worldwide, I am heartened as I travel to various communities across the country and see light, hope, and commitment in each one of you. Library workers are continually empowering one another, and I know we are ready to deepen the difference we make in our communities.

I have witnessed the spirit of diversity, inclusiveness, and relationship-building and how librarians are embracing those values. In the words of many poets, singers, and former President Barack Obama, we are the change we have been waiting for.

Much like our profession's trailblazers—E. J. Josey, Sharad Karkhanis, Hwa-Wei Lee, Virginia Matthews, Lotsee Patterson, and Arnulfo Trejo—whose leadership resulted in the American Library Association's (ALA) ethnic caucuses, we must continue to fight for all people, especially those from vulnerable groups. Our dream remains to create community spaces that reflect equality and respect among people. We have come a long way. But more is needed.

I agree with Michael Stephens, associate professor in the School of Information at San José (Calif.) State University, who has long advocated for connecting one's work to one's heart. Stephens says we should bring our hearts to work, and qualities such as empathy, emotional intelligence, and reflective action are all part of this process. Service steeped in humanism, compassion, and understanding should be the cornerstone of what we do, and why we do it, for all members of our communities, including the underserved.

In a recent collection of essays, Stephens urges librarians to “lead from the heart, learn from the

heart, and play from the heart.” It means we are all-in, all the time: bucking the status quo to do the right thing at the right moment, owning our actions as professionals, and creating institutions that expand minds and open futures.

As a Caribbean woman with Spanish, Greek, African, and Taino blood, I am connected to those vulnerable groups. In my role as ALA president, I share many of the experiences from these groups, and I have a platform to create change and understanding across communities. I know about inequality, struggles, racism, and aggressions because I've lived them and they have touched my soul. I want to confirm that I am with you in the fight for greater equality. In my own professional practice, I am intentional about the work required to counter negative forces that impact our library services.

One of my key presidential efforts is in the area of diversity. My diversity advisory team and I are planning a number of webinars to address the promise and challenges of providing diverse and equitable services within our communities and our libraries. Together with ALA's Office for Diversity, Literacy, and Outreach Services, we are producing videos to help library workers understand how to incorporate the principles of diversity, inclusion, and intersectionality throughout their library services.

I wholeheartedly believe that librarians are enriching the conversation around these topics and must continue to move forward to embed humanity, compassion, empathy, awareness, and understanding into our library services nationwide. It is not an easy task, but as president, it is my intention to serve as a catalyst for this change.

I am confident that together we can continue moving these conversations and, more importantly, these actions forward. **AL**

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