

UUCUV Covenant of Right Relations

We covenant with each other to act with honesty and kindness, in a framework of Right Relations, to sustain a community which nurtures human connections, renews spirit and inspires action.

Right Relations are the foundation of a welcoming, safe, and vibrant congregation. In practicing Right Relations, people can disagree and still treat each other respectfully and learn from each other.

By accepting the responsibilities of Right Relations, we affirm our intent to keep our community grounded in the Principles of Unitarian Universalism.

As members of the UUCUV, we agree to practice Right Relations as fully as we are able by:

- Welcoming all people, including members of groups which have been marginalized, such as people of various abilities, ages, genders, races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, religions and classes.
- Participating in the life of our community.
- Engaging members, friends and visitors, encouraging them to join in congregational activities.
- Bringing love, humor and creativity to our activities.
- Expressing gratitude.
- Listening, with open heart and mind, so others feel heard.
- Questioning our assumptions, and taking responsibility to ask for clarification.
- Accepting that people will experience the range of human emotions.
- Acknowledging differences while staying engaged.
- Speaking directly and kindly *with* one another, rather than *about* one another.
- Praising others for their efforts and successes.
- Asking for support when needed, and providing it in turn.
- Taking responsibility for our mistakes.
- Being open to forgiving.
- Following the *Procedure for Resolving Conflict and Addressing Inappropriate or Distressing Behavior*.

This covenant is a living document. The congregation can review it at any time and adapt it to fit changing needs and circumstances.

Procedure for Resolving Conflict and Addressing Inappropriate or Distressing Behavior

Note: Any of these situations could be a symptom of an overarching problem in the organizational system. If so, the Staff and the Board should examine current patterns and outcomes, and put into place new rules, expectations and/or structures.

STEP ONE: If individuals in the congregation experience or perceive a conflict or behavior not in the spirit of the Covenant, they should consider speaking directly with the person or persons involved.

STEP TWO: If addressing the person or people directly does not seem like a viable option, or does not sufficiently resolve the conflict, the concerned party should speak with any of the following: the Minister, the DRE, or a Restorative Circle Team member who can potentially give helpful advice, offer to accompany the person when they address the other person, or refer them directly to the Restorative Circle Team.

STEP THREE: If anyone involved is not satisfied, at this point, they should contact the Restorative Circle Team. Anyone can request or be called to a Restorative Circle, including ministers and staff.

A Restorative Circle is a process of interaction, for a group of people, which enables participants to be heard and to resolve conflict through greater mutual understanding. The goal is to return the people involved to a mutually functional relationship, not to determine right or wrong. The basic skill is reflective listening. With a facilitator present to keep people on track, people can learn and use reflective listening with minimal guidance after a few minutes.

A trained facilitator is key to the process. The facilitator takes a position, not of impartiality, but of *multipartiality*, which is, as founder Dominic Barter puts it, being “outrageously biased on the side of every person on the planet.” The facilitator prevents people from succumbing to the temptation to teach, fix, counsel, or solve. Restorative Circles are about listening deeply, and then responding in such a way that the speaker can know if the listener understood them.

A Restorative Circle can be called any time someone believes a facilitated process would better enable a conflict resolution.

Step 3.1: One person contacts a facilitator. The facilitator has a conversation so that they have a preliminary understanding of that person's difficulty with a given event. The facilitator explains the Restorative Circle process, and the person who is thinking of calling the Circle opts to do so, or not.

Step 3.2: The facilitator enlists a co-facilitator, and then reaches out to the other people who are involved in the event, or who might be helpful to have present in the Circle. Part of that process of reaching out is explaining and modeling reflective listening, so that all participants have the basics of the skill in hand. Each of those people chooses whether or not to participate. If they choose not to, or can't, then the facilitator may enlist another co-facilitator to stand in as the absent person's surrogate (without this mechanism, any single person could make a Circle impossible).

Step 3.3: At the Circle, the facilitator guides the discussion with a set of specifically-worded questions which invite everyone to speak who needs to be heard. Each question brings out another aspect of the circumstances which prompted the Circle.

Step 3.4: When everyone has been heard to their satisfaction, the participants plan next steps, and a follow-up meeting to determine if the issues behind the Circle are resolved or need further work.

Step 3.5: The participants attend the follow-up Circle, which follows a similar format of specifically-worded questions which enable everyone to be heard. If necessary, there can be another follow-up Circle.

A Circle takes anywhere from an hour to several hours. Making the arrangements usually takes a few days or a week or so, depending on the circumstances (number of people involved, scheduling logistics, etc).

STEP FOUR: Unsafe or Chronically Disruptive Behavior

In order to protect the safety and well-being of the congregation, if an individual is unwilling or unable to abide by the Covenant of Right Relations and its Guidelines, the Board may need to suspend them from Membership until such time as they can be in Right Relations with the community. Suspension of Membership is the purview of the Board, after consulting with the minister, Restorative Circle members, and/or UUA staff and advisors.

Whenever possible, pastoral care and support should be extended to the suspended member.

If a person who has been suspended continues to refuse to participate in a reconciliation process or to abide by a specifically designed safety agreement, the Board shall consider termination of membership. Termination of Membership is the purview of the Board. The Board should seek input from the congregation before making the decision final.

Attempts to keep such deliberations secret, even when intended to protect the offender, *are almost always deleterious to the health of the congregation as a whole*. Without a specific, compelling reason, the Board should not keep such proceedings confidential.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS: If the situation involves or reveals abuse, neglect, potential for violence, and/or sexual misconduct, people who are aware of the situation should take immediate action, as follows.

Abuse or Neglect of Children or Elders

People who are aware of the situation must bring their concern immediately to the Minister, DRE and/or Board President. The Minister and DRE are mandated reporters who are legally bound to report abuse or neglect to the State in which it happened.

Sexual Assault, Sexual Harassment, or Other Sexual Misconduct

People who are aware of the situation must bring their concern immediately to the Minister, DRE and/or Board President.

Risk of Abuse or Violence to Others or Violence to Self

People who are concerned about the situation should consult immediately with the Minister, DRE, or President of the Board. If the risk cannot be mitigated sufficiently, the Minister, DRE or President may need to consult with an outside mental health professional or safety officer or refer the situation to an outside agency.

Immediate Threats to Physical Safety

Attempt to calm the situation: The Minister, DRE or leader of a group where threatening behavior happens should attempt to calm the situation. This may include directing the threatening person to leave or suspending the meeting or activity until such time as it can be resumed safely.

If direct harm may be imminent: The Minister, DRE, Board President, group leader or designee should call 911 and ask for police to be dispatched to the site.

At least one involved person must notify the Board President, DRE, and Minister, who shall ensure that the incident is documented in detail.

If the Board, DRE, or the Minister suspects that the situation is likely to recur, they will hold an emergency meeting to determine what steps are necessary before the threatening person is allowed to return and resume roles in the congregation.