

Unitarian Universalist Church of Bloomington, Indiana

Seeking the Spirit, Building Community, Changing the World



Covenant of Right Relations

The UUA Principles are:

We covenant to affirm and promote

1. The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
2. Justice, equality and compassion in human relations;
3. Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregation;
4. A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
5. The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
6. The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;
7. Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

Thus, we at UUCB covenant to affirm and promote right relations through:

Striving to be genuinely interested in each others' points of view even in disagreement with others.

Striving to deal with differences in compassionate, respectful and non-hurtful ways. We strive to communicate directly with those involved in a disagreement, seeking out the support of the Right Relations Committee (RRC), if needed.

Striving to seek common ground and shared interests, accepting that we will have different perspectives and working to listen to those who disagree with us.

Striving for respectful dialogue and communication with others with whom we differ or disagree. We strive to engage in this conversation either on our own or with the support of the RRC.

Striving to be open to compromise and areas of agreement that move towards resolution. We understand we may not always reach consensus, but can strive for understanding.

Striving to offer and accept apologies and forgiveness to help reach the goal of a peaceful community with healthy relationships.

Striving to communicate our truth without demeaning others, but while holding up their inherent worth and dignity.

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The Right Relations Committee

The Right Relations Committee (RRC) consists of three members of the congregation, appointed by the Board of Directors in consultation with the Senior Minister and the Leadership Cultivation Committee. Each member of the RRC will serve for up to, but no more than, three years. The members names and contact information will be made available to the congregation on the church website and at least 2 times a year in the Prologue.

The RRC members will:

1. Serve as role models in following the Covenant of Right Relations (CRR);
2. Share healthy communication resources with the congregation;
3. Offer support during times of stress in the congregation; and,
4. Respect privacy and confidentiality, as appropriate.

When support is requested by an individual or group, the RRC can:

1. Clarify the CRR and help apply it to the situation at hand;
2. Provide coaching in healthy communication practices;
3. Support individuals in working through conflict;
4. Strive to help those involved in conflict accept mutual responsibility for working through differences constructively;
5. Support individuals in maintaining cooperative intentions; and,
Serve as observers/facilitators/mediators of a discussion if both parties agree.

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Background of the Covenant of Right Relations

We, the members of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Bloomington (UUCB), share a vision of Seeking the Spirit, Building Community, and Changing the World and a mission that follows:

In this liberal religious community of inspiration, love and action:

- we celebrate life
- we nurture one another
- we welcome all
- we care for the earth and
- we work for the common good.

As a member of the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA), each congregation - including UUCB - covenants with other UU congregations and the UUA. Our covenant affirms and promotes The Seven Principles. In every relationship and organization - even in this congregation and the UUA, with our shared mission, vision, and principles - conflict happens.

We developed this Covenant of Right Relations (CRR) as a tool to help us manage conflict in our community, which is diverse in perspectives, ever-changing with each person who enters or leaves our community, and is growing in terms of membership. Taken from the UUA website, a

“Covenant is the silk that joins Unitarian Universalist (UU) congregations, communities, and individuals together in a web of interconnection. The practice of promising to walk together is the precious core of our creedless faith...Developing a Covenant of Right Relations is an important step in clarifying expectations and creating a safe environment for congregations. ‘Covenant’ is Latin for ‘come together’ and means a ‘solemn agreement’ or ‘promise from the heart’ regarding a course of action between parties
[\(<http://www.uua.org/leadership/governance/covenant>\).](http://www.uua.org/leadership/governance/covenant)”

We use the word covenant for two reasons; first, it has historical relevance - Unitarian Universalist congregations are “covenanted communities” rather than “creedal” ones - which means that we are a church based on our relationships, on the promises we make to one another; this is different than “creed”-based communities where the belief and practices of the community define who can be part of the community.

Second, it is a word to explain what we are doing - making promises to one another. We make promises about how we will relate to one another because we know there will be times where we will make a mistake or there will be conflict. It is not a contract, where there are punitive consequences for mistakes or conflict; rather, a covenant focuses on the relationship and how to attend to relationships rather than adjudicate guilt and innocence. Having a covenant with explicit language helps a community know how to juggle the many different parts of a community.

Some UU congregations developed covenants at their very formation; many congregations worked on covenanting together, especially as they grew. A key recommendation for our church is to develop a congregational covenant and process for handling conflict. Acting on this recommendation, the board appointed a committee to draft a covenant on healthy communication, shared draft documents widely with the congregation, and solicited and incorporated feedback from the congregation to develop our covenant. The covenant represents the congregation taking responsibility for managing itself. In conjunction with the development of the CRR, the Right Relations Committee (RRC) was also developed as a resource to our congregation – its members and friends, ministers and staff, children and youth, as individuals or groups. The covenant frames our intentions to be in right relations with others even in conflict, to support each other as we search for truth, and to go forward in community. If further support is needed, the RRC can be called upon for guidance.

Contact the Right Relations Committee:

rightrelations@uubloomington.org