

# Covenant Renewal Policy as approved by Board on February 5, 2015

## Introduction

The Covenant of Right Relations is:

- A series of promises, intentions and commitments for how we will be together
- An outgrowth of our shared values
- An acknowledgment of the complexity of community
- The means for becoming aware of our expectations of one another and how we affect one another
- An opportunity to reflect on our relationships with one another and to grow spiritually as individuals and as a congregation
- Common ground in times of conflict

The congregation accepted and established the *Covenant of Right Relations* at its Annual Congregational Meeting in 2012. Since that time we have explored the meaning and implications of the Covenant both formally through programming, and informally through integrating it into congregational life. The Covenant did not outline a procedure or policy around how we renew covenant when members fall out of covenant with one another, or with the congregation. It was necessary to “live” the covenant and understand how it fit into congregational life before making recommendations for covenant renewal.

The Committee on Ministry is recommending that policy be established by the Board of Trustees to guide this process of covenant renewal, and has proposed a draft policy along with the establishment of an integral *Right Relations Team*.

The policy would bind members to a process of covenant renewal, with implications around continued membership should members refuse to engage in the process. The Board of Trustees is recommending that the members accept the following resolution by vote, making clear the congregation’s commitment to both the Covenant and the covenant renewal process.

**Resolved:** We accept that conflict within our church community is both inevitable and healthy. Sometimes members fall out of covenant with one another, or with the congregation. We are guided by the principle that properly managed conflict between people in right relations can be a positive force for creativity, growth and enrichment. Disagreement is not something separate from church life, but is a normal part of beloved community. Members pledge to engage in the Covenant Renewal Process when such members of the congregation are out of covenant with one another, or with the congregation.

## Policy for Covenant Renewal Process

The purpose of this process is to provide clear, written guidelines for managing conflicts and disputes, and for returning members to covenant.

### Step 1

When conflict occurs within the congregation, and members are out of covenant with one another, those persons are encouraged to come together face to face to work through their conflict or disagreements and return to covenant with

one another. When one or more of the disputants refuses to engage in this step, or the interactions are not productive of renewal, the process may move to Step 2.

### Step 2

When needed, those in conflict are encouraged to contact the Right Relations Team (RRT). In some cases, such persons may be referred directly to the RRT by the Board or Minister. Confidentiality parameters and rules for interacting during a RRT-facilitated process are defined and agreed to prior to initiating this step in the process. Based on information about the conflict or disagreement, the RRT will determine whether the request for their involvement is within their scope of practice. If it is, the process will move to Step 3. If it is not, the process will move to step 4.

### Step 3

The RRT will provide a safe and structured environment by facilitating the process. In this environment, the disputants can renew their covenant and return to right relations with one another and with the congregation. If at any time in the process, mediation does not result in mutually agreeable next steps toward covenant renewal, the process will move to Step 4.

### Step 4

The RRT will refer the dispute/conflict to the Board of Trustees and Minister. Action on their part could include calling on the conflict management resources of the UUA, its regional body or of the local cluster of UU churches. Where one or more of the disputants refuses to engage in, or follow through with, the process of renewing their covenant, the Board will take action that could result in temporary or permanent removal of one or more of the disputants from church membership.

## The Right Relations Team

A minimum of three mediators will be jointly selected by the Minister and the President to participate as the Right Relations Team. Members of the team shall be willing and available to respond to congregant disputes and shall have, or agree to obtain, appropriate training.

With appropriate training, members of the Committee on Ministry could become the core of the RRT. Congregation members with professional credentials in counseling, or training and experience in mediation, should also be considered for the RRT.

The RRT members shall serve as neutral parties, holding details around the dispute process in strictest confidence. A minimum of two RRT members shall be involved in every conflict management and covenant renewal process. Mediators are expected to support one another by debriefing after conflicts, and by attending continuing education events as available. The RRT shall meet with the minister at least twice per year.

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