

UUCNH Covenantal Relations Team: Purpose and Process

Purpose

The Unitarian Universalist Church of the North Hills (UUCNH) community is voluntarily bound together with a Covenant to one another that concludes with the words *“Needing a safe, healthy environment, I will enter into conflict in a positive way, speaking with people directly, without divisiveness, honoring boundaries, and remaining respectfully engaged.”*

The Congregation and the Board of the Church, desiring to live our Covenant, while recognizing that disagreements are inevitable, and that serious conflict must be addressed before it becomes detrimental to the health of our community, has given authority to the Covenantal Relations Team (CRT) to design a written process to address conflicts that may otherwise escalate.

When conflicts arise which cannot be resolved/managed by communication between the parties involved or through consultation with the Minister, the purpose of the Covenantal Relations Team is to review those conflicts through the lenses of the UUCNH Congregational Relational Covenant, Right Relations (UUA) and good congregational practices.

The Covenantal Relations Team will provide a forum for parties to discuss their dispute, suggest potential solutions, and develop a plan of action to manage/resolve the conflict. Team members are trained in providing a non-adversarial, neutral environment for managing relational challenges in a confidential and respectful manner in keeping with “Our Relational Covenant “ and core UU Principles.

This conflict resolution process is established to facilitate two or more parties in reaching a mutually beneficial agreement or solution to a conflict, resulting in better communication and healthy growth as individuals and as a Congregation.

Living Our Congregational Relational Covenant

As members of the UUCNH faith community, *“we covenant together so that we will remember our mutual responsibilities to ourselves, to each other, and to our community as a whole. We understand that sometimes we will fall short, as will those with whom we are in relationship. We will do our best to bring one another back into covenant in a caring way.”*

In this spirit, we as members, friends, staff and guests of the Unitarian Universalist Church of the North Hills, covenant to:

- Be kind and respectful to one another
- Intentionally allot time to understand differences in views of others
- Actively and compassionately listen to each other
- Seek clarification when needed
- Communicate honestly yet supportively, keeping an open mind, but agreeing to respectfully disagree when needed
- Take turns when speaking, providing everyone an equal opportunity to express ideas
- Recognize that each person’s choices and behaviors affect others

Conflict Resolution/Management Process

When conflict management/resolution is needed, the following steps should be taken:

1. Speak directly with the person(s) with whom you have the disagreement (i.e., face-to-face, via a phone call or a personal e-mail), keeping in mind the covenantal behaviors listed above.
2. If the direct conversation is not successful, make an appointment with the Minister for assistance regarding the issue. If it is agreed by all parties that input from the Minister will be neutral and appropriate, the Minister mediates the concern. If there is not agreement by any party regarding assistance from the Minister, the parties involved or the Minister may refer the matter to the Covenantal Relations Team.
3. When requesting referral to the Covenantal Relations Team, all parties will complete a form explaining the background and nature of the conflict. The Minister will forward this information to the CRT.
4. In order to resolve/manage the conflict, a designated member of the Covenantal Relations Team will arrange a meeting with the parties who have submitted the forms, the Minister, and 2 or more members of the CRT as quickly as possible.
5. The CRT supports the parties in hearing one another and attempts to guide them to a solution that addresses everyone's needs.* If the conflict is mediated, an agreement is written, and a confidential, signed copy containing a set of recommendations will be given to each party and a copy will be sent to the UUCNH Board.
6. If an agreement is not reached, the CRT will refer the matter to the UUCNH Board.

The Covenantal Relations Team, acting as a conversational participant, will strive to create an environment in which the parties can connect, express their needs, understand the other parties and arrive at strategies to meet resolution. * In addition, the CRT will actively engage all parties at every step of the process. Good intentions and confidentiality from the Covenantal Relations Team members during a conflict resolution process can be expected.

The Covenantal Relations Team has the authority to make recommendations and create behavioral contracts. When the Team believes that a situation exists where behaviors are immediately harmful to the good of the Church, the CRT may directly refer the situation to the Executive Committee of the Board. The Team may make referrals to outside resources such as counseling, professional mediators or pastoral care professionals.

The Team may also recommend limits to participation in Church life or other behavior-changing strategies. Should one or both parties refuse to participate in the resolution process, if the behavior(s) remain unchanged and/or if the Team believes that the behavior(s) is a threat to the Church community, the matter will immediately be referred to the UUCNH Board, Minister, Safety Team Chair and/or the DFLD for resolution.

* Based on the language of Marshall B. Rosenberg's "Nonviolent Communication"