

UUCOD Right Relations PROCEDURE

Updated January 2023

SECTION 1: Overview

We encourage those who view or use these guidelines to adhere to the spirit of the policy—that of open heart, welcomed diversity, and thoughtful engagement—rather than to become focused on particular wording or steps. No two situations are identical and good judgment and wisdom will be necessary to restore right relations between individuals or within groups.

Remember UUCOD is a community built through covenantal relationships where we promise to act in certain ways when we are together with these promises defined in our church covenant, adopted by our congregation in 2017. Note that the full covenant can be found on our webpage in church documents (uucod.org/governance). The main sections of our church covenant state that at UUCOD we will:

- Be mindful of how we communicate with and about others
- Seek a respectful and constructive resolution when conflicts arise
- Enrich our own lives by celebrating the diversity within our community
- Build beloved community.

Group covenants: It is strongly suggested that the ways of being together, the promises members of groups or attendees are making to each other by attending and participating are clearly stated, presented, or built at the beginning of the activity, and made available to those participating.

These guidelines are intended to help congregants reenter right relations with other members of our community through a reconciliation process. The steps in the process may be repetitive, and some steps may need to be revisited. This is not a failure, but rather a sincere effort to rebuild right relations within our congregation.

Conflicts and impaired relations occur for many reasons, but most commonly when one person perceives that another individual is doing something characterized by one or more of these qualities:

- Evaluation: judging or criticizing others
- Control: imposing the will of one person on a group
- Strategy: using hidden agendas
- Indifference: demonstrating apathy
- Superiority: expressing dominance
- Inflexibility: being unwilling to listen to others
- Blaming: putting the onus on others for one's own actions, reactions, or emotions on others

We encourage congregants to revisit Unitarian Universalist Principles and Purposes and the promises we make to each other through our own church covenant as a beginning step toward rebuilding right relations. We encourage members of our community to be accountable for their actions and words. Throughout any reconciliation process we encourage participants to embrace the dignity and inherent worth of all participants and allow for human fallibility.

Right Relations Reconciliation Guiding Principles:

- assume others act from good intentions although the impact may be hurtful
- embrace differences in communication styles that may be culture-, ethnic-, gender, sexual orientation-, or socioeconomically based
- respect boundaries that may differ from our own
- use “I” statements and speaking from personal experience
- forgive mistakes of others as well as our own mistakes
- apologize, when warranted, and seek to make amends
- speak from the heart with respect, honesty, and compassion

SECTION 2: Guidelines

- The suggested general guidance to restoring and rebuilding right relations when a conflict or harm has occurred that follows was developed to assist in creating a process for reconciliation. If successfully conducted, a reconciling process like the one described below will advance our learning and loving community.
- As mentioned above in Section 1, no two situations are identical and thought, discussion, good judgment, and adjustments may need to be considered given unique circumstances.
- Please note that the Committee on Ministry (COM) will only act on anonymous complaints by special exception.

Self-Reflection

- Reflect on our congregational covenant and the covenant of other congregational groups you are part of. Remember that we are striving to live together in a covenantal way, not a legalistic way.
- As part of your self-reflection, think about your own role in the situation.
- Why is this matter important to you?
- Examine your intent and consider the impact from the perspective of the other person(s).
- At this step, and all succeeding steps, own your issue.

Direct Communication between Parties

- Talk directly to the person/people with whom you are experiencing conflict or pain.
- Agree on a mutually acceptable time and place to talk in private and as soon as possible.
- When you begin your conversation, you might choose to remind each other of our congregational covenant or make agreements together in the moment about how you will talk and be with each other, remembering that you are both part of the community.

- If a direct conversation is too difficult, consider putting your thoughts into writing. Make yourself available to hear the response and to begin a dialogue.
- Each of you share what you would need to re-enter right relations with each other and the church community.
- Come to agreements on what each of you will do or how each of you will act to ensure you both still feel welcomed at the church.

Engage Help from the Committee on Ministry

The COM, including the Minister, are empowered by the Board to work with congregants to achieve reconciliation.

- If direct conversation is too difficult or unsafe, then contact a member of the COM. Based on the outcome of the conversation with the CoM, the other party may be contacted by a member of the CoM
- COM members will help the parties involved share concerns and make agreements about reentering right relations and being in covenant together.
 - This help might look like coaching, simple presence during conversations, or more involved participation in the conversation.
- COM members may make recommendations and negotiate behavioral contracts or other behavior changing strategies when behaviors or practices are harmful to the church community or not expressive of our collective values.

Refusal to Engage in a Reconciliation Process

When one or both parties refuse to participate or come to an impasse in the reconciliation process *and* the harmful behavior persists:

- The COM shall inform the President of the Board of Directors of the impasse and the breakdown of mutual understanding.
- The President of the Board of Directors and a member of the COM shall then meet with the individual(s) to communicate the concern and encourage the person(s) to engage in a reconciliation process.
- Any individual(s) who chooses not to live within the covenant of our community or will not participate in or live within agreements reached from a reconciliation process may be excluded from church activities up to and including membership suspension or revocation. The duration will be based on the specific circumstances of each situation.
- If membership suspension or revocation is indicated, the COM will formally communicate with the UUCOD Board of Directors with a description of the situation, process(es) followed, and recommendation for suspension, revocation, and, if applicable, terms of reentry to the community. In accordance with the UUCOD Bylaws, the board will then vote on the COM recommendation.
- Confidentiality will be maintained unless circumstances require otherwise.