

Covenant Corner: From the USNH Newsletter Living Our Covenant

In June, 2015 our congregation voted and approved a Covenant on Right Relations to assist and guide us to build a more perfect community, committed to creating and nurturing a culture of authenticity, respect and kindness. Our covenant asks each of us to reflect on our words and deeds. It lives and breathes in the way we treat one another and our staff.

* Be open * Value differences *

Inevitably, we will fail. And in the words of researcher/story teller Brene Brown, "Failure is just another word for education." Failure gives us the opportunity to recognize our mistake, make amends, and do better in the future. In addition, our covenant lives in how we respond to other's mistakes.

* Listen Deeply * Use kind language *

When we witness another congregant falter, we have the opportunity to respond in a way that embodies respect and non-judgement. When we live the spirit of our covenant, we move on from such an incident. We choose not to gossip, demonstrating our esteem for, and commitment to, one another.

* Speak our truths * Work with Conflict *

Congregational life comes with joys and sorrows. We rejoice when a goal is reached or a social justice project is completed. We mourn when we lose a congregation member or fall short on a shared goal. We will have failures in Right Relations. Within our own failure is the opportunity to be accountable and make amends. Within other's non-covenantal lapse is the opportunity for a response that fosters forgiveness and respect.

* Seek humor and joy *

In all our interactions, not only between one another but also with our staff, we have an opportunity to live our covenant and build a stronger USNH.

~ The Permanent Committee on Right Relations
rightrelations@usnh.org

Covenant Readings Used at USNH

A Covenant Invites Relationship: A Reflection by Lisa Ward (adapted)

A covenant is not a definition of a relationship; it is the framework for our relating.

A covenant leaves room for chance and change, it is humble toward evolution.

It claims:

*I will abide with you in this common endeavor,
be present as best as I can in our becoming.*

This calls for a level of trust, courage and sacrifice that needs to be nurtured, renewed and affirmed on a regular basis.

A creed creates a static truth, something that does not incorporate new insights and realities.

A covenant is a dance of co-creation, keeping in step with one another in the flow of our lives.

A creed seeks uniformity and a unison voice.

A covenant seeks harmony and a shared voice.

Sometimes we may arrive at something unanimously, but it is not required.

A creed gives authority to the statement.

A covenant gives authority to shared intention.

A creed creates an “us” and “them.”

A covenant invites relationship.

A creed is a prescription that must be relied on.

A covenant relies on the treasures of shared truth.

The overall trust within a covenant is in the Truth (Capital T): something which no one person can fully see, yet something which each and every person can come to know—in glimpses, in another's story, in epiphanies.

Truth is ever changing in our seeking to understand because of our limited perspectives—we grow into a deeper sense of the meaning of all things when we take our journeys seriously, with full heart and mind.

The courage within a covenant is in the acceptance and celebration of life, with all of its challenges, pain, ironies and joys.

And the sacrifice within any covenant is in the letting go of dogma, of assumptions, of control—and giving over to a greater wisdom which comes to us in bits and pieces.

The task of a covenant is to take responsibility for the freedom we espouse.

We know that we are interconnected and that what we do creates ripples of hope or despair, of affirmation or negation.

A covenant is only as strong as the community that adopts it - An essay by

Victoria Weinstein

(adapted for PCRR Shared Chalice Lighting reflection)

What does this continuing, deep, sacred beckoning to be in relationship with the holy and with one another require of us right now? Is the covenant concept just an arcane curiosity that got picked up as an organizing principle for congregational polity, or is it a powerful through-line that binds us to one another, our history and our deepest communal calling?

How are we bringing OUR covenant to life?

A covenant is only as strong as the community that adopts it. It can be a museum piece gathering dust in a congregational record or tucked away, inconsequential, on the last page of the weekly bulletin.

How strong is OUR covenant?

It can be a formality that no one knows or cares about, or it can be a defining statement that is given life by frequent repetition, interpretation, and review. What does our covenant say about us?

It can sit around looking fancy but accomplish nothing, or it can become inscribed on the people's hearts to whom it belongs.

How do we embrace our covenant?

A covenant should be revised with each new generation, however the community defines generation. When it no longer speaks and resonates for the people whom it is intended to bind together in common purpose and promise, it should be aired out and edited.

Is an update of OUR covenant needed?

Ultimately, our covenants should speak both to us and for us, proclaiming not necessarily our reality as a community—for we are often a mess, depending on the hour or the season—but rather our aspirations.

Do we aspire to conscious covenantal living?

A contract implies a job that will be accomplished within a set time and under specific circumstances. Covenantal promises are based not on certainties and specificities but on faithfulness to the love that calls each one of us out of our separateness to become a people.

How shall we embody OUR promises this upcoming year?