

Workshop 2 Living in Covenant

Introduction

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. – UUA.org

This session describes why and how Unitarian Universalists live in covenant with one another and the world we live in and guides participants in creating a covenant they can live into throughout the year.

Goals

This session will:

- Explain how and why Unitarian Universalists covenant with one another and the larger world
- Provide tools for participants to create a covenant
- Guide participants in creating a covenant they can live into throughout the year.

Learning Objectives

Participants will:

- Reflect on the reasons Unitarian Universalists use covenant to create sacred communities
- Learn three models for creating covenant they can use within and beyond Unitarian Universalist contexts
- Brainstorm and create an aspirational covenant.

Workshop-at-a-Glance

ACTIVITY	MINUTES
Opening	10
Activity 1: Why we Covenant	10
Activity 2: How we Covenant	10

Activity 3: Creating a Covenant	25
Closing	5

Spiritual Preparation

Read your congregation's covenant if there is one and ponder ways you've seen fellow congregants live into your shared covenant. Read Jennica Davis-Hockett's Blue Boat Blog post titled [3 Models for Youth Group Covenanting and Beyond](#). What comes up for you as you read this post?

Opening (10 minutes)

Materials for Activity

- Chalice, candle, lighter or LED/battery-operated candle
- Newsprint and markers
- Chalice lighting words: Worship Web [Bold and Courageous Together](#) by Erika A. Hewitt

Reader 1:

The word courage comes from the Latin cor, which means heart. According to poet Mark Nepo, the original use of the word courage meant to stand by one's core: a "striking concept that reinforces the belief found in almost all traditions that living from the Center is what enables us to face whatever life has to offer."

Reader 2:

To "encourage" means to hearten; to impart strength and confidence. This is our work, as a religious community: to encourage one another; to be bold in engaging the world around us, as well as what scares us internally; to give one another the confidence and heart to life as fully as possible.

All:

*With full hearts,
we affirm our relationships with one another;
we recognize our agency and our connective power;
and we accept our responsibility to be bold and courageous.
We light this chalice,
symbol of that we are, all that we have done together,*

and all that we will be as our shared ministry encourages those within, and beyond, our walls.

- Check in question:

When was a time that making a promise to someone else strengthened your relationship with them?

Preparation for Activity

- Make a copy of the Reader 1 and Reader 2 chalice lighting words
- Ask for two volunteers for the Reader 1 and Reader 2 sections of the chalice lighting
- Post the chalice lighting words for All on newsprint
- Post the check in question in the designated place

Description of Activity

Welcome first-time participants. Invite participants and facilitators to go around the circle and say their names and briefly answer the check in question (in 3 or 4 sentences). Remind participants that check in is not a time for cross talk - clarifying questions can be asked if necessary. After everyone who wants to has had a chance to check in ask for a volunteer to light the chalice, invite Reader 1 and Reader 2 to read, then signal to the group to read the chalice lighting words written on newsprint.

Including All Participants

Let participants know they have the right to pass or pass for now. For participants who have trouble being concise you can ask them “how would you sum up your experience in one sentence?” For participants who have trouble refraining from cross talk remind them of the group covenant and to be respectful of their peers’ time to share and the leaders’ time to facilitate.

Activity 1: Why We Covenant (10 minutes)

Materials for Activity

- Handout 1 The Temporary Autonomous Zone
- Laptop and projector
- Video: [What do We Promise to One Another?](#)

Preparation for Activity

- Make copies of handout for all participants.
- Load the video.

Description of Activity

In this activity participants reflect on the reasons Unitarian Universalists use covenant to create sacred communities.

Ask the group if they've ever felt a sense of belonging in a UU community that they haven't felt elsewhere. Say something like:

It is easy to mistake that feeling of belonging as somewhat magical, or like it happens naturally because of the people present. But that magic doesn't happen on it's own. The magic we create is very intentional. That magic is what Sufi writer Hakim Bey calls a "Temporary Autonomous Zone." It is an impermanent utopian experience that can be transformative.

Pass out Handout 1 The Temporary Autonomous Zone and ask for volunteers to read it aloud.

Tell participants that one way to create a temporary autonomous zone is by creating and upholding a covenant, which is the sacred promise we make to ourselves, each other and the world.

Watch the video What do We Promise to One Another? and tell participants that in this session they will create a covenant together that answers the questions posed in the video.

Including All Participants

For participants with auditory processing disorders or are hearing impaired, turn on closed captioning for the video. For participant who are sight impaired, encourage them to sit close enough to the screen to see and/or close enough to the speakers to hear.

Activity 2: How We Covenant (5 minutes)

Materials for Activity

- Handout 2 Models for Covenanting

Preparation for Activity

- Make copies of handout for all participants.

Description of Activity

In this activity participants learn three models for creating a covenant they can use within and beyond Unitarian Universalist contexts.

Ask the group by raise of hands who has participated in a covenanting process before. Ask them by show of fingers how confident they feel in participating in a covenant building process. One finger means “I’ve never done it/don’t quite get it,” five fingers means “I’m a total veteran; I do it all the time.” Note that there are advantages and disadvantages to being both novice and expert. Share this quote from Shunryu Suzuki, Sōtō Zen monk and teacher, author of *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind*:

In the beginner’s mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert’s there are few.

Pass out Handout 2, Models for Covenanting and tell the group that different kinds of models will be useful for different types of groups. In the future, they may want to create a covenant with a committee they’re part of, their family, their roommates after they leave home or a student group. Mention that some people of different faiths may be averse to the way Unitarian Universalists use the word covenant because in some faith traditions, as mentioned in the video, a covenant is something that can only be made by God to God’s chosen people. Say that they may want to consider sharing the concept, using the word “promise” instead of “covenant.” Invite them to keep this resource so they can refer to it when they want to lead a covenanting process in the future.

Activity 3: Creating a Covenant (25 minutes)

Materials for Activity

- Leader Resource 1, Questions for an Aspirational Covenant
- Newsprint
- Various colors of markers

Preparation for Activity

- Write the italicized phrases from Leader Resource 1 Questions for an Aspirational Covenant on newsprint leaving space between phrases for brainstorm ideas.

Description of Activity

In this activity participants brainstorm and create an aspirational covenant their group can live into throughout the year.

Explain to participants that they are going to practice covenanting in a way that might be unfamiliar to them. They’re not going creating a list of agreed upon behaviors rather, they are

going to create a statement of aspiration - what the group aspires to be, using the brainstorm model in Handout 2 Models for Covenanting.

Tell the group you are going to scribe the brainstorm so they each have an opportunity to participate. Invite participants to share ideas and remind them that in this phase of brainstorming there is no judgement. Ask participants the first question from Leader Resource 1 Questions for an Aspirational Covenant and invite participants to finish the sentence “We treat ourselves...” If a participant offers an idea and you are unclear what to write say “can you sum that up in one sentence?” or “can you elaborate?” or “what I think you’re saying is...” and attempt to summarize their idea. Write down all ideas as close to verbatim as you can. Do this for each question in the leader resource.

Tell the group that the second stage of brainstorming is synthesizing similar ideas. Ask participants if they notice phrases with a common thread. Circle those ideas with one color marker. After demonstrating this, invite a volunteer to scribe using different colored markers for different ideas or themes. Encourage the group to continue synthesizing ideas. After a number of common themes have been identified, ask the group if there is anything on the newsprint they feel doesn’t fit in the covenant. Ask the scribe to cross those things off.

Ask for a volunteer or two to rewrite the covenant with you on a new sheet of newsprint while the other participants talk quietly amongst themselves. After the break ask a volunteer to read the covenant aloud to the group and ask the group to sign it if they agree with what it says.

Inform participants that being part of a Living Tradition means that we can revisit and amend our covenant in the future if we feel the need. If you are doing the Creating Inclusive Community session with participants, tell them that they will have an opportunity to update the covenant in this session. Ask for a volunteer to take a picture with their phone and share it with the group.

Including All Participants

If your group has a few members who are quick to share and share often, consider limiting contributions to two or three times per participant. If your group has many members who are reluctant to share, consider encouraging all participants to share at least one or two ideas.

Closing (5 minutes)

Materials for Activity

- Taking it Home
- Handout 3 Personal Covenant

Preparation for Activity

- Make copies of Taking It Home and Handout 3 Personal Covenant for each participant

Description of Activity

Invite participants to gather in a circle. Thank everyone for their contributions to the group. Pass out Taking It Home and explain that it contains ideas for ways they can continue to explore workshop topics with family and friends. Point out the section on creating a personal covenant. Inform the group that a covenant does not need to be reciprocal, meaning you can practice being in covenant with yourself or with other people even when they are acting mean or selfish. Go over Handout 3 Personal Covenant with the group.

You can offer that the group can continue a discussion about this session at a later date or in a closed Facebook group if your group has one. End the workshop by inviting participants to take a deep breath and close their eyes if they are willing and share the prayer A Web of Holy Relationships by By [Lyn Cox](#), available on [Worship Web](#).

Spirit of Life,

Who draws us together in a web of holy relationships,

Make your presence known with us and in us and among us.

Remind us that we are not alone in history,

Ignite us with the courage of the living tradition.

Remind us that we are not alone in entering the future,

Anchor us with patience and perseverance.

Remind us that we are not alone in our times of grief and pain,

Comfort us with your spirit, manifest in human hands and voices.

Remind us that we are not alone in joy and wonder,

Inspire us to honor and extend the beauty we find in this world.

Divine music of the universe,

Let our hearts beat in diverse and harmonious rhythms,

Cooperating with an everlasting dance of love.

May we move with the rhythms of peace.

May we move with the rhythms of compassion.

May we move with the rhythms of justice.

Source of stars and planets and water and land

Open our hearts to all of our neighbors
Open our souls to a renewal of faith
Open our hands to join together in the work ahead.

So be it, blessed be, amen.

Leader Reflection and Planning

As leaders working with youth in a Unitarian Universalist context, this workshop offered an opportunity to consider the importance of covenant in our lives as Unitarian Universalists. What did you learn from this session on covenanting? How did participants surprise you in the Creating a Covenant activity? Did your understanding or ability to explain how and why we covenant increase after preparing this session? What did you as co-leaders learn from your co-facilitator? Share your feedback and learnings from this session with the minister and religious educator.

Handout 1: The Temporary Autonomous Zone

Attribution: from the Tapestry of Faith program [Resistance and Transformation Session 8](#) by Colin Bossen and Julia Hamilton

However strong the desire to do so, the likelihood is small that a community can sustain itself when it is organized around values different from those of the dominant culture. Financial and other outside pressures are often too much to bear. Most efforts to create enduring utopian communities have failed within a few years.

However, the experience that utopian communities seek to create—a vision of justice and equality realized in a particular time and place—happens more often than many suspect. These experiences occur whenever two or more people gather and treat each other with equity and compassion. The Sufi writer Hakim Bey has named this phenomenon the "temporary autonomous zone."

Temporary autonomous zones are places where—for however brief a time—a community flourishes by experiencing and embracing values counter to those of the dominant culture. Rather than just conceptualizing a community where members live according to their values, participants in a temporary autonomous zone actually embody those values in their interactions with each other. The experiences that people have in temporary autonomous zones can be transformative. Such experiences suggest that another world, one with different values and social norms, is possible. Some people believe so because they have lived in it, even if only briefly.

In his work "The Temporary Autonomous Zone," Bey argues that temporary autonomous zones come in many forms and have occurred at many times throughout human history. He posits that communities as widely varied as revolutionary communes, 18th-century pirate enclaves, contemporary all night dance parties and the common dinner party can all be described as temporary autonomous zones.

Many people experience temporary autonomous zones at Unitarian Universalist camps and conferences. The conferences offer a week-long or weekend space where participants create a transient community that reflects Unitarian Universalist values. Many report that such experiences are transformative. For some, especially youth, the time spent in the transient and temporary communities of camps and conferences is as central to their understanding of Unitarian Universalism as their participation in a congregation. This suggests that, for at least some Unitarian Universalists, temporary autonomous zones play an important part in supporting their ongoing faith development.

Handout 2: Models for Covenanting

Attribution: [3 Models for Youth Group Covenanting and Beyond](#) blog post by Jennica Davis-Hockett

Scaffold Model - add/change/rearrange

The facilitators of the group provide a starting point for the covenanting process. This is a very basic list of “good ideas.” the group can agree to accept this covenant in total or choose to edit it by adding elements unique to the group, changing elements that don’t fit for the group and/or rearranging the elements to fit their needs and priorities.

This model works best for

- A group of people that has never covenanted before and needs a lot of guidance,
- A group who has a very short amount of time to build a covenant.

Brainstorm Model - from nothing to something

The facilitator of the group guides the group through the three stages of brainstorming:

- Offer any ideas without judgement,
- Synthesizing by grouping like ideas and discarding ideas the group agrees are not needed
- Rewriting the synthesized ideas neatly on a separate piece of paper
- Making a decision to accept the final product

The scribe supports the group by writing down verbatim what group members say.

This model works best for

- A group that has the luxury of time
- A group the size of which allows for every voice to be heard
- A group that would benefit from going through this process as a community building exercise.

From Many to One Model

Each person writes down a few key points they would like to be included on the group covenant on a piece of paper or a note card. This is done in silence or with minimal talking. The group elects a small number of delegates to synthesize the items and write a draft covenant to bring back to the group. The whole group provides feedback and adopts the covenant by consensus.

This model works best for

- A group where some people are dominant speakers and others’ voices go unheard,
- A very large group,
- A group that has difficulty coming to agreement.

Handout 3 Personal Covenant

Developed by Jennica Davis-Hockett, Leadership Development Associate for the Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministries

Find a quiet, comfortable space where you can be alone. Remove all distractions and let others know you will be unavailable for the next 30 minutes. Spend some time meditating on your responses to the following questions. Then, on the back of this sheet of paper or in a personal journal write your thoughtful responses. This personal covenant is for you alone, you do not need to share it with others.

How do I want to treat myself?

- *How do I listen to my body to make sure I get enough sleep and relaxation, eat good food, stay hydrated and get enough exercise?*
- *What expectations do I set for myself? How do I ensure they are reasonable?*
- *Do I talk to myself like I would a friend I care about?*
- *How do I set aside time for my spiritual practices?*
- *How do I set personal boundaries? How do I help others respect them?*

How do I want to treat others?

- *How do I show people I care about them?*
- *How do I treat people I don't get along with in a way that still honors their inherent worth and dignity?*
- *What expectations do I set for others? How do I ensure they are reasonable?*
- *How do I respect other people's boundaries?*

How do I communicate with others?

- *How do I communicate my needs to others?*
- *How do I express my gratitude for others?*
- *How can I communicate with others when I'm frustrated with integrity and respect?*
- *How can I practice listening to others?*
- *How can I offer feedback to others?*

How do I want to treat my environment?

- *In what ways do I practice respect for the interdependent web of which I am part?*
- *How do I create spaces that invite comfort, creativity and studiousness?*
- *How am I a steward of my home?*

How do I live my Unitarian Universalist faith?

- *What aspects of my faith are important in times of celebration?*
- *What aspects of my faith do I rely on when times get tough?*
- *How do I share my faith with others?*
- *How do I live the seven principles?*

How do I become a person others can count on?

- *How do I make sure I keep my promises?*
- *How can I use my talents for the benefit of others?*
- *How can I increase my skills?*

What sacrifices am I willing to make in the name of the highest good?

- *What am I willing to give up because it isn't healthy for me, my family, others or my planet?*
- *What am I willing to do for others that doesn't necessarily benefit me?*

How do I make amends?

- *How do I find the courage to say I'm sorry when I am wrong?*
- *How do I renew a promise that I have broken?*

Just like the covenant your group created in this week's session, this personal covenant is a living document. Keep this covenant in a place you can refer to often and feel free to add to or remove things from this covenant as your spiritual journey evolves.

Taking It Home

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. – UUA.org

IN TODAY'S SESSION... we explored how and why Unitarian Universalists covenant with one another and the larger world, reviewed three different ways of creating a covenant and created an aspirational covenant the group will live into throughout the year. The practices we used in this session can be used in daily life.

EXPAND YOUR AWARENESS At school this week, **notice** if there is an “unwritten code” between you and your friends of ways you behave together online and in real life. **Find and review** your congregation’s or community’s covenant and **pay attention to your behavior** and the behavior of other community members. Are they living in covenant? How can you express your gratitude if they are or offer feedback if they are not? **Read** [3 Models for Youth Group Covenanting and Beyond](#), a Blue Boat blog post by Jennica Davis-Hockett to expand your understanding of how Unitarian Universalists use covenant.

PRACTICE COVENANTING **Create a personal covenant**, a promise you make to yourself. Use Handout 3 Personal Covenant. **Make a promise** to a friend or family member, and keep it.

Leader Resource 1: Questions for an Aspirational Covenant

How do we we treat ourselves?

We treat ourselves...

How do we treat each other?

We treat each other...

How do we communicate?

We communicate by/with...

How do we treat our space?

We treat our space with...

How do we treat those not part of the group?

We treat those not part of the group...

How do we uphold our faith?

We uphold our faith by...

How do we become people others can count on?

We become people others can count on by...

What sacrifices are we willing to make in the name of the highest good?

We are willing to sacrifice...

How do we make amends?

We make amends by...

Facilitator Feedback Form

We welcome your critique of this program, as well as your suggestions. Thank you for your feedback! Your input improves programs for all of our congregations.

You may choose to [complete this feedback form online](#).

Otherwise, please forward your feedback to:
Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministries
youth@uua.org

OR

Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministries
Ministries and Faith Development
Unitarian Universalist Association
24 Farnsworth Street
Boston, MA 02210-1409

Workshops You Field Tested: *

- Workshop 1: Web of Youth Ministry
- Workshop 2: Living in Covenant
- Workshop 3: Meaning of Leadership Worship
- Workshop 4: Shared Leadership
- Workshop 5: Active Listening
- Workshop 6: Creating Inclusive Community
- Workshop 7: Leadership Styles
- Workshop 8: Building Multigenerational Connections
- Workshop 9: Conflict Resolution and Transformation

Number of Participants: * _____

Age Range: * _____

Did you work with (a) co-facilitator(s)? *

Yes No

Congregation: * _____

Overall, what was your experience with this program?

What specifically did you find most helpful or useful about this program?

In what ways could this program be changed or improved (please be specific)?

Did you enrich the program with any resources that you would recommend to others?

What impact, if any, do you think this program will have on your life going forward?

What impact, if any, do you think this program will have on your congregation going forward?

Your Name: _____

Your Email: * _____

Participant Feedback Form

We welcome your critique of this program, as well as your suggestions. Thank you for your feedback! Your input improves programs for all of our congregations.

You may choose to [complete this feedback form online](#).

Otherwise, please forward your feedback to:
Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministries
youth@uua.org

OR

Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministries
Ministries and Faith Development
Unitarian Universalist Association
24 Farnsworth Street
Boston, MA 02210-1409

Workshops You Participated In: *

- Workshop 1: Web of Youth Ministry
- Workshop 2: Living in Covenant
- Workshop 3: Meaning of Leadership Worship
- Workshop 4: Shared Leadership
- Workshop 5: Active Listening
- Workshop 6: Creating Inclusive Community
- Workshop 7: Leadership Styles
- Workshop 8: Building Multigenerational Connections
- Workshop 9: Conflict Resolution and Transformation

Your Age: * _____

Congregation: * _____

Overall, what was your experience with this program?

What specifically did you find most helpful or useful about this program?

In what ways could this program be changed or improved (please be specific)?

Did you enrich the program with any resources that you would recommend to others?

What impact, if any, do you think this program will have on your life going forward?

What impact, if any, do you think this program will have on your congregation going forward?

Your Name: _____

Your Email: * _____