

## MEMORANDUM

To: UUA Board of Trustees, c/o James Snell  
From: Carey McDonald, UUA Outreach Director

Re: Covenanting Communities pilot project  
Date: April 6, 2016

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The Covenanting Communities designation began in 2015 as a collaborative pilot project with the UUA staff and Board of Trustees. The project's goal was to explore different ways that groups can be in relationship with one another and with the UUA, beyond traditional congregational membership.

In the past year, we have learned a lot about the kinds of relationships that UU leaders value. This project has affected the choices of emerging congregations to pursue full congregational membership, connected with the UUA's emerging ministries programs, and encouraged discussion on the role of UUA related organizations. For the coming year we are continuing the status, though it is no longer a "pilot." We look forward to seeing how more groups, communities and leaders explore different kinds of relationships with and within our faith movement.

### What is a Covenanting Community?

Covenanting communities are groups recognized by the UUA who show the following characteristics:

- They fully claim UU Principles and Sources and work to advance UU values
- They are committed to being in covenant with the larger UU movement, particularly with nearby UU communities and individuals
- They are self-governed and freely associate with the UUA
- They are NOT member congregations

This definition is intentionally inclusive of different forms, practices, geographies and identities beyond the traditional congregational model.

### The Covenanting Communities process

Last year, the Board approved the creation of the Covenanting Communities status; groups submit applications and UUA staff review and approve applications. In the first year, we invited known existing ministries to consider becoming covenanting communities. Nine applied and were recognized, which included being showcased at General Assembly.

This year, we are issuing similar invitations to existing emerging ministry groups, and currently have two new applications. Communities recognized last year will be invited to renew. So far, we know Metthow Valley has shifted its status to be a part of a multisite ministry rather than a separate covenanting community.



## 2015-16 UUA Covenanting Communities

Covenanting Community	City	State
Buffalo Unitarian Universalist Fellowship	Buffalo	MN
Prairie Unitarian Universalist Fellowship	Hutchinson	KS
Sacred Path, A Unitarian Universalist Church	Indianapolis	IN
Sacred Fire Unitarian Universalist	Carrboro	NC
The Welcome Table Church	Tulsa	OK
Covenant of Unitarian Universalist Pagans	virtual	
Unitarian Universalist Community Cooperatives	Boston	MA
North Kitsap Unitarians	Poulsbo	WA
Metthow Valley Unitarian Universalist Fellowship	Twisp	WA

### Impact of Covenanting Communities

Groups and leaders who have become (or considered becoming) Covenanting Communities have reported a range of positive reactions. Some groups that are non-traditional forms of religious community felt affirmed in ways they had not been able to experience before (JUCC, Sacred Fire). Other groups who had been emerging congregations valued the space and prompting for discernment about their status, and appreciated that they were seen as “enough” in the form they currently had, with openness but not pressure for future full congregational UUA membership. All welcomed the chance to be more international about their relationships with the wider UU faith movement.

Beyond the groups who received invitations, word has gotten out – other groups, such as camps and conference centers and independent spiritually-focused groups who feel a UU affinity, have reached out to us about the status. Some have been encouraged to pursue related organization status as a first step, recognizing that they could progress to the deeper relationship of Covenanting Community in the future. The CC status has thus helped us have new and important conversations. However, it is also clear that the CC status by itself is not sufficient to sustain innovative and emerging ministries. These groups need concrete resources – funding, back-office support, etc. – to succeed in the medium term beyond the startup phase. We must continue to respond to these needs going forward.

### Moving forward

Given its positive response, we will keep the status in its current form for this year. Covenanting Communities will be featured on UUA.org this spring. We also need to clarify the different ways that groups and individual leaders can be in relationship with the UUA, including related organizations status, to help knit together a broader and flexible web of relationships. Finally, we want to explore new kinds of partnerships with interfaith and non-UU spiritual groups to see how the wider notion of covenantal relationship could facilitate a network of people committed to UU values and mutual relationship outside traditional church structures.

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