UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST
CONGREGATION *of* COLUMBIA

COVENANT OF RIGHT RELATIONS

We, the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Columbia, strive to build and maintain a welcoming, safe and inclusive community for all who worship and work here – one where trust, acceptance and caring thrive. As a diverse community bonded by love and gratitude, we encourage all to use this Covenant of Right Relations as a tool to help us navigate our interactions so that our differences can foster growth, not division. This CRR is intended to lay out how we can aspire to behave and communicate with each other to reveal common values and goals, and to move us toward the Beloved Community we seek. To live this covenant as a congregation, we encourage each member to strive to embody the following to the best of their ability.

I, as a member of UUCC promise to:

My actions:

A. Maintain a spirit of good will, understanding that words and actions may have a hurtful impact, despite good intentions.
B. Bring my best self to all encounters to honor, strengthen, and preserve the ties and the mutual goals that unite us.

My attitude toward others:

C. Seek opportunities for understanding, not blame; for inclusion, not division, as we actively strive to resolve the conflict in a way that will strengthen our community.
D. Listen to one another with empathy and kindness, seeking both to understand and be understood, knowing that we often do not know what we do not know.

My communication:

E. Communicate with one another directly, with respect, honesty, compassion, with attention to the impact of our words and actions on others.

My restoring relations:

F. Forgive myself and others when we fall short. Sincerely apologize and seek to make whole. Begin again in love.

Please note the following examples starting on the next page that are offered to help clarify and illuminate each point that follows this list.

MY ACTIONS:

A. Maintain a spirit of good will, understanding that words and actions may have a hurtful impact, despite good intentions.

Impact on myself and others:

- I will monitor the impact of my words and actions, remembering that the impact may be different than my intent.
- I will remember that the impact of my words and actions will be affected by variations in attitudes, aims, worldviews, and/or spiritual paths.
- I will listen carefully when told of negative impacts of my words and actions.
- I will apologize when I negatively impact others rather than defending my intent.

Attitude toward myself and others:

- I will use empathy, not judgement in trying to understand others.
- I will recognize the worth and dignity of each person.
- I will hold myself and others as wise, caring, and capable.
- I will hold myself and others as full of complexity and experiences I will never fully know.
- I will hold myself and others as capable of discovery and growth.
- I will notice, appreciate and acknowledge the positive contributions that I and others make.

B. Bring my best self to all encounters to honor, strengthen, and preserve the ties and the mutual goals that unite us.

Attitude:

- I will hold myself accountable for being the best person I can be.
- I will hold myself as wise, curious and open.
- I will hold my perspective as only one of the perspectives on truth.
- I will hold myself as capable and open to seeing more perspectives than my own.
- I will hold myself as open to learning, even when I feel uncomfortable.
- I will hold myself as possibly wrong.

Accountability:

- I will own my part in difficult situations and relationships.
- I will take responsibility for my actions and my mistakes or misunderstandings.
- I will take responsibility for following through on promises and commitments that I make.
- I will take responsibility for my reactions as well as my actions.

- I will hold myself accountable for using conflict constructively to support a stronger team, congregation and relationships.
- I will hold myself accountable for expressing appreciation and gratitude.
- I will hold myself accountable for trying hard to accurately discern communications, interactions and events, rather than assuming I know what is going on.
- I will hold myself accountable to share only what I know to be true, refusing to fall into shared stories, assumptions, and rumors.
- I will hold myself accountable by respectfully questioning any disparagement of people, present or not present.
- I will take responsibility for my own self-care, so that my personal resourcefulness is at its best.

Acting as leaders:

- I will continuously seek the highest and most long-term view of issues and events.
- I will always hold the welfare of others, and the larger congregation, as my focus.
- I will seek to inspire and empower others within our community.
- I will continuously question my own assumptions.
- I will foster deep questioning when I see those around me falling into unquestioned assumptions or group judgments.
- I will encourage and listen to the voices of those experiencing the congregation in ways different from my experiences.
- I will recognize that either/or is seldom appropriate when engaging with the difficult issues of a complex relational organization.
- I will embrace ambiguity and "both/and thinking," knowing that the best way to address the issue is to work cooperatively to find creative solutions that work for everyone.

Self-care:

- I will accept that there will be times when I am not able to share.
- I will try to communicate my needs in an inclusive and loving way.
- I will monitor my own emotional well-being as I interact with the community.
- I will remember that I deserve respect.
- I will seek to stay in relationship, despite conflict, using the conflict as a source of growth.
- I will remember that relationship is two-way, with each party having responsibility for understanding, respect and care of the other.

MY ATTITUDE TOWARD OTHERS:

C. Seek opportunities for understanding, not blame; for inclusion, not division, as we actively strive to resolve the conflict in a way that will strengthen our community.

Converting conflict to opportunity:

- I will take responsibility for educating myself as to intercultural differences that might affect communication.

- I will reflect, reframe, and ask open-ended questions, seeking to enable the other person to feel heard, and for me to fully understand.
- I will seek to discern the other person's needs, emotions, interests and values that may be underlying the perceived conflict.
- I will seek to discern and articulate clearly my own needs, emotions, interests and values that may relate to a given conflict.
- I will separate the impact of each person's words and actions from that person's inherent value.
- I will remember that each person is better than the worst thing they do or say.
- I will seek to understand what is at stake for others and for me.
- I will seek common good, and where possible, "win/win" outcomes that meet the underlying needs of those in conflict.
- I will seek appropriate help in problem-solving if the conflict escalates rather than resolves.

Dealing with frustration and anger:

- I will take responsibility for my reactions.
- I will work to make sure I am not misinterpreting others.
- I will slow down and reflect on the sources of hurt, anger and frustration within me.
- I will become curious about my own triggers and vulnerabilities and seek to learn from my reaction.
- I will breathe deeply and seek calm, choosing my response carefully.
- I will share that I am frustrated or hurt, but not blame my hurt or frustration on others.
- I will accept that anger in others may be an expression of strong feelings and not necessarily an attack on me.
- I will accept that each person is worthy of forgiveness.

Building Cultural Competency:

- I will seek to educate myself and be sensitive to cultural differences.
- I will remember that even small things can hurt another.
- I will think carefully about alternative perspectives, realizing that others may view things differently.
- I will honor the cultural sensitivities and preferences of others as they define them.
- I will act and speak in ways to be sensitive to diverse group preferences.
- I will speak up, in a manner respecting all parties, if I observe someone being culturally insensitive.

D. Listen to one another with empathy and kindness, seeking both to understand and be understood, knowing that we often do not know what we do not know.

To others:

- I will be deeply curious.
- I will listen with both head and heart.
- I will seek to understand before being understood.
- I will listen to hear the other person's deeper intent, meaning, feelings, and values.

- I will listen to learn something new rather than to design my response.
- I will listen with awareness of my judgments, working to suspend them and be open.
- I will seek to affirm the communications of persons who have described their hurt or trauma.
- I will seek to educate myself about inter-group differences, rather than rely on "others" to explain differences between "them" and "us."

To myself:

- I will seek to understand my own motivations.
- I will be open to input about my impact on others.

Compassionate listening:

- When seeking to understand, I will allow the other person to define how much they share.
- When seeking to understand, I will remember that the questions, themselves can create harm.
- Before asking clarification questions, I will ask permission.
- When seeking to understand, I will remember that it is my responsibility to make a good faith effort to understand, not the other person's responsibility to explain more than they are prepared to.
- When seeking to understand, I will remember that my background, sensitivities perceptions and assumptions may differ from those of the person I am trying to understand.

MY COMMUNICATION:

E. Communicate with one another directly, with respect, honesty, compassion, with attention to the impact of our words and actions on others.

Sharing:

- I will monitor what I say in terms of its impact on those around me.
- I will choose to share or not, taking into account its impact on myself, others and the community.
- I will honor the decisions of others not to share.
- I will create a safe space in which others can communicate directly with me.
- I will speak only from my own experience, not generalizing about others.
- I will share with humility, knowing that I could be wrong.
- I will share, realizing that I could be hurting someone. Once aware of any negative impact, I will acknowledge it, and learn from it.
- I will share honestly and consistently the positive as well as the negative.
- I will provide space for others to share, by ceding the floor to others who wish to communicate.

Use of email and social media:

- I will use my messages for efficient and clear communication.
- I will use empathy to try to understand the impact of any message before I send it.
- I will read over my messages with the receiver(s) in mind to ensure they are clear and accurate.
- I will never use messages to discredit someone or perpetuate a rumor.
- I will recognize when a relationship or situation has become difficult and messages are likely to be misinterpreted and will choose to communicate, instead, by phone or in person.
- When I interpret a message as hurtful or negative, I will communicate with the sender, in person, if possible, to determine the true intent and gain deeper understanding of the meaning and what I can learn from it.

MY RESTORING RELATIONS:

F. Forgive myself and others when we fall short. Sincerely apologize and seek to make whole. Begin again in love.

Forgiving myself and others:

- I will choose to try to understand rather than blame.
- I will choose an attitude of forgiveness.
- I will recognize that forgiveness is a gift I can choose to give (to myself and others).
- I will accept that I may not be ready to forgive or accept forgiveness at this time.

Apologize:

- I will sincerely apologize when I hurt someone, regardless of my motivation, and say specifically what I'm sorry for.
- I will accept responsibility for my actions that caused harm.
- I will acknowledge that some actions that seem appropriate at the time can hurt others.
- I will value each relationship over winning an argument.
- I will genuinely request forgiveness when I cause harm.
- I will accept that a person I harmed may not be ready to forgive me right away.
- I will ask sincerely how I can make it right and honor the response.
- I will sincerely look for ways I can change my behavior.

Restore relationships:

- I will recognize my part in any broken relationship, owning and examining my hurt or anger regardless of my intentions.
- I will use imagination and empathy to acknowledge to myself that the other person is also hurting or angry and to imagine how that feels.
- I will recognize that holding negative feelings hurts me as much as anyone, and center myself in being the best person I can be, as a loving and forgiving person.

Once both parties are willing to work on restoring the relationship;

- I will reach out to the other person and invite them to a meeting, possibly with a facilitator or third person, in which I will truly seek to understand the other person's emotions, interests and values.
- I will consciously shed negative feelings and actively try to forgive the other person.
- I will put the relationship above my hurts, opinions and anger and agree to move forward in a restored relationship.
- I will work with the person to find common values and goals.