



# Transforming Times



## Covenant

*The Journal of the  
Unitarian Universalist Church of Tucson  
October 2009*

A covenant is a special kind of promise or agreement. It has a sacred quality. The intent is to uphold and uplift that which is inviolable. It protects and strengthens that which we hold as most precious in our lives. The making of a covenant is a life-affirming act.

The role of covenant is central in Unitarian Universalist heritage and tradition. In a non-creedal faith such as ours, it is the spirit of covenant that holds us together in common bond. The power of a covenant is in its ability to transform a group of individuals into a faith community. Without commonly held beliefs among us, it is our mutual agreements that form the connective threads of community.

Covenants live and grow and breathe just as we do. Covenants do not demand perfection. They invite us to begin again, even when we have failed. A broken covenant is an opportunity for renegotiation. A renegotiated covenant can recognize the ways we have grown and changed. The process of renegotiating can establish an even firmer foundation than what existed before – more honest, more realistic.

A covenant is always mutual. Each person who enters the covenant has equal responsibility and accountability for upholding the agreements. When two people enter into a marriage or committed relationship, vows are exchanged. This is probably the most universally recognized form of covenant. In order for a loving partnership to endure over time, we must consider not only our own well-being, but the well-being of another person. And so it is with all covenants.

A covenant always invites us to live from the best of who we are. It holds our highest ideals and deepest values. There is a transcendent quality that stretches us beyond our own self-interest in order to engage with life more fully. A covenant, wholly embraced as a way of life, engenders certain virtues that add to the quality of life: patience, forgiveness, generosity, and humility, to name just a few.

An important piece of work was completed with the adoption of a Covenant of Right Relations at the Annual Meeting of the congregation last April. Now, our task is to make the covenant real in our shared life, a life that extends beyond the walls of the church. Everywhere we are together, meetings and social events included, we are called to be in right relationship with each other.

The Covenant of Right Relations is included in this issue of Transforming Times. You can also find it on the UUCT web-site. Please take time to look at it again. These are the mutual agreements holding us together in the spirit of beloved community.

Yours in covenant,  
Diane

*Transforming Times* is organized around theological themes. Each theme plays a part in the development of a well-grounded religious and spiritual life. The church's offerings are by no means limited to the themes. They do provide common ground for community conversation, a way to gain more meaning and depth. We want to hear many perspectives on each theme. You are invited to submit your original poetry, artwork, or short essays of 300 words or less. Be warned: seriously engaging these themes could transform your life!

September: Freedom	February: Love
October: Covenant	March: Brokenness
November: Religious Authority	April: Forgiveness
December: Concepts of God	May: Transformation
January: Evil	

## THE COVENANT OF MUSIC AT UUCT

The Covenant of Right Relations adopted by UUCT on April 26, 2009 has as its purpose the desire to strengthen the bonds of trust and loyalty between us. It also seeks to diminish the chances of hurt and disillusion and instead to seek to create an atmosphere of honesty, respect, trust, gratitude, forgiveness, and acceptance of each other. These resolutions also apply in a very special way to our music program at UUCT.

For example, when one of our choral groups sings an anthem, the written notes on a page become audible and the voices blend in harmony. The singers follow the guidance of the conductor thus establishing a bond of trust between each other. In this way, the leader's interpretations become the choir's and a music covenant has been established between them. The original notes have become transformed from silence to sound. And if one singer makes a mistake, the other singers overlook it in the true spirit of forgiveness thereby establishing right relations as a community of singers. I guess the adage "No one is perfect" applies here!

As a congregation, we join in singing the same words of the hymns even if we don't always agree with the ones coming from the printed page. We should think of our singing together as a chance to tell each other we are connected and are part of a religious community. This means that we should feel welcome to share our beliefs, ask questions, and seek out answers. It's often been said that music is the universal language and this is true even though we all are aware how diverse the expression of music is. Let's realize that this is exciting and that music opens doors for friendships whether we're in church or out in the community. It's my prayer that our lives will always be enriched by sounds of music.

This is also an opportunity to invite congregants, members, and friends to join the adult volunteer choir, Desert Chorale. Rehearsals are held every Wednesday from 5:30 to 6:45 p.m. in the sanctuary under the direction of Brian Moon.

Children, young people, and their parents are invited and encouraged to come to Family Singers' rehearsals every Sunday morning from 8:45 to 9:40. A nursery is provided for the very young!

Agnes Paulsen  
Minister of Music  
Director of Family Singers

## Covenanting

Submitted by Mary Wiese, Membership and Community  
Life Administrator

The English Thesaurus lists covenant as an *agreement*, *contract*, or *promise*. These are all things that have personal meaning for me as I am sure they do for many of you.

An agreement to me is an affirmation of consensus. However, in order to reach consensus it is necessary to really listen to one another. Sometimes that means repeating the same thing or communicating the message in a different way. When we assume that the other party understands our message without confirmation, communication breaks down. When this happens, consensus and agreements lose validity. That is why it is vital to follow the practices in our Covenant of Right Relations that states:

*"Practicing deep, open, and respectful listening" and "Seeking and providing clarification about assumptions and expectations."*

A contract may be a legal document or a formal agreement. I feel that a contract becomes a verb when people sign our membership book. In doing so, one should be committing to becoming engaged in the life of the congregation. The practices in our Covenant we should follow to honor this contract are:

*"Working for the common purpose-remaining committed to the group as a whole" and "Honoring the commitments we make to individuals and the congregation as a whole."*

I feel that a promise is a vow. We have all broken a promise from time to time in our lives. However, when promises are repeatedly broken, we lose our trust. It is essential to explore the reasoning behind that which we presume to be a broken promise. Otherwise, we may proceed to a level of mistrust that leads to conflict. We can address this by following the part of our covenant that states:

*"Allowing sufficient time to identify and explore disagreements and conflicts-being willing to work through conflict and disagreements" and "Speaking directly and privately with individuals with whom there is a misunderstanding, concern, or disagreement in an effort to resolve interpersonal disputes."*

When we take the time to show appreciation for each others' gifts and respect of another's perspectives, our accomplishments may be limitless.

**Love is the message of this church  
And service is its law.  
This is our great covenant together  
To dwell together in peace.  
To seek the truth in love,  
And to help one another.**

*Affirmation of the UU Community Church, Glen Allen VA*

I had never thought much about the word or idea of covenant. It seemed like some archaic religious word that didn't have much meaning today. That was until I agreed to teach the UU Roots in North America class three years ago. In preparing for the first class I came upon a wonderful series of lectures "The Lay and Liberal Doctrine of the Church: The Spirit and the Promise of our Covenant" by Alice Blair Wesley (available at [www.uua.org/uuhs/UUResources/](http://www.uua.org/uuhs/UUResources/)). I was enthralled, captured, excited by her six lectures and I learned how vital and important to our UU way of doing things is the idea of covenant. In this essay, let me paraphrase and quote what she said and tell you why I felt it captured so wonderfully my experience as a life-long UU.

When the Pilgrims and other early settlers arrived in New England, they were escaping from the tyranny - a king, a proscribed religion, a hierarchical social system - that they had been living under. They realized that in this new land they had to organize themselves somehow, to have agreements about how to live together in a just and peaceful way. So they started by meeting and talking together about the things that mattered most to them: "to lovingly discourse and consult together and prepare for spiritual communities in a church society..."

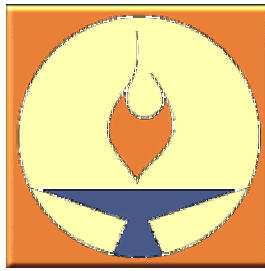
"The people met for weeks in discussion and the laypeople's central conclusion was this: "Members of their new free church should be joined in a covenant of religious loyalty to the spirit of love. And once the members were joined in a covenant, of their own writing and signing, the member's loyalty in the church should be only to the spirit of love, working in their own hearts and minds. No one - not the Governor, not the General Court, not even members of other similarly covenanted churches would have any authority in the local free church."

Alice Blair Wesley goes on to explain that our 17th century ancestors said that if the free church is about working together in a spirit of mutual love, then that fact ought to shape the organization of the church, everything from how you join, to how church decisions are made. The free church tradition in North America began as a lay movement. The folks wanted to show how just, how peaceful and how comfortable a well ordered society could be if the people were free to found and establish free churches governed by the spirit of love. "This covenantal organizational pattern of the free church was the key element of our ancestor's doctrine of the free church. It is a doctrine grounded in an understanding of how the power of mutual love deepens and works among individuals in free religious groups. That is, in free religious groups, loyalty, before all else is to the spirit of love."

In joining a covenanted, free church, I sign a promise that may sound simple. "It should sound simple - but which, if you really mean to "keep covenant" with the other members, brings you into intimate companionship with others who have promised to live with all the integrity you and they can together muster, in all the years of your lives."

And that is the concept I found so exciting. That idea, I realized, was the reason that I have been a member of this church for over 40 years, through thick and thin. It is my church; one in which I have an equal voice with everyone else, young and old, new and experienced. It is a church in which we reason together in love. We are not here to one-up each other, but to learn together, from each other, how to walk with love and respect through this one life that we have. That is my covenant with each and every one of you, to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, and to help one another.

Margot W. Garcia



UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH OF TUCSON  
COVENANT OF RIGHT RELATIONS  
Adopted April 26, 2009

We, the members of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Tucson, affirm this covenant of right relations to strengthen the bonds of trust and loyalty in our beloved community and to diminish the chances of hurt and disillusion in times of disagreement. In adopting this covenant we seek to create an atmosphere of honesty, respect, trust, gratitude, forgiveness, acceptance and loyalty within our congregation. The goal of the covenant is to provide a clear statement as well as guidelines about how our values and principles can best be demonstrated through our actions. We aspire to strengthen our relationships and enlarge our sense of community. The well-being of our congregation depends on a sense of fellowship among and between all within our community—members, friends, minister, staff, and youth—whenever and wherever we worship, interact or work together.

In adopting this covenant, we realize that differences, strong feelings and disagreements will arise. These can and should be the well-springs of change, creativity, and growth. When we practice right relations we reduce the level of conflict, misunderstanding and hurt feelings that can occur when people speak passionately about subjects of importance to them. Right relations are the foundation on which a safe congregation is based. To this end, we pledge to govern our actions and our speech by the spirit and letter of this covenant.

The practices we will follow include:

Recognizing our shared leadership and expressing gratitude for the efforts of others  
Working for the common purpose—remaining committed to the group as a whole  
Honoring the commitments we make to individuals and the congregation as a whole  
Practicing open communication, sharing news, decisions and issues that impact the community life  
Practicing deep, open and respectful listening  
Focusing on the message not the messenger—critiquing ideas not people

Allowing sufficient time to identify and explore disagreements and conflicts—being willing to work through conflict and disagreements  
Seeking and providing clarification about assumptions and expectations  
Sharing strongly held convictions openly rather than withholding input  
Respecting confidentiality by keeping confidences and not asking others to break them,  
Being true to our chosen path and supporting others on their own journey.  
Being loyal to the absent and refraining from criticism of those who are not present  
Speaking directly and privately with individuals with whom there is a misunderstanding, concern or disagreement in an effort to resolve interpersonal disputes  
Attempting to resolve non-personal controversies e.g. on policies, programs or finances through the relevant committee or channel  
Using “I” statements, taking responsibility for speaking our own truth

Although this document expresses our written promise, our true covenant exists in our day to day interactions with one another. In times of harmony may it deepen our bonds with one another and in times of conflict may it guide us in working through our differences. Our goal is the resolution of problems through solutions which serve both the common good and the individual. Reconciling conflict allows us to remain in fellowship.