

**Right Relations Phase One Report**  
**Summary of Key Findings and Recommendations**  
**May 2021**

Our 2020-2021 right relations work has given us some valuable gems of wisdom and information to guide us on our path forward as a congregation. This executive summary captures some of these key points, and more detailed information about our findings is contained in the Right Relations Phase One Report that can be found on our WSUU website [here](#).

Our Right Relations Phase One Team (Liz Berggren, Cindy Jackson, and Jade Lowry, with Fred Matthews' participation for two months) was charged by the board with conducting research to inform our way forward. To that end, we conducted interviews with other congregations; conducted research through UUA resources and Pacific Western Region leadership; and conducted focus groups, meetings, a survey, and interviews in our own congregation. Here are four key learnings:

- 1) **Open Path** – First, it became clear that there is no single road map for us to follow into right relational bliss – not from the UUA or from any other congregation. However, there are some good models and methodologies for us to draw on as we carve our Westside path. Some consistent elements that we saw from other congregations and that were emphasized by our own members include –
  - a. the importance of trust-building for right relations work to be effective – just forming a team and putting them out there to resolve conflicts has not proven to be a successful model;
  - b. the importance of inclusiveness and how right relations work can intersect with racial justice work;
  - c. the importance of holding the joys and sorrows of all our members; and
  - d. the importance of inviting conflict and diverse perspectives to be part of our congregational life in a healthy way.

We know that often these kinds of statements may sound reasonable to all of us, but that tensions can arise in *how* we live these agreements. Which leads to our second key finding.

- 2) **Healthy Congregation Work** -- This right relations path is really the work of being a healthy congregation, and it is work that necessarily connects to and impacts all areas of congregational life. That whole idea is in contrast to the way that right relations work has typically shown up in our congregation and in many others. For example, in our congregation, our long-time Congregational Concerns Committee had the function of responding when called on to mediate and help to resolve conflicts when they arose, and to do so without training or clear methods to fulfil their roles. We are grateful to all who have served in that capacity. And we are learning some ways to re-imagine the vital

role of a right relations, or “healthy congregation” team. Most of the right relations work in UU congregations has been focused on reactive, restorative processes. A primary function of right relations work should be *proactive* to reduce the need for restorative function.

- 3) **Living Our Covenant** -- One of the greatest failures that congregations seem to experience around right relations is the failure to live the covenant. The covenant is so much more than words on a page that we’ve agreed to – we need to bring it to life with intentionality in all our activities, and through *renewing* that commitment as we change and grow over time. And most importantly, to learn how to hold the responsibility of our covenant as a congregation. The congregation owns our covenant – our promises to one another – not the board, minister, or any specific team, but the whole of us collectively. As we have learned from our UU youth community, this collective ownership can be powerful.
- 4) **Constructive Conflict** -- We learned particularly from other local congregations who have recently re-invented their right relations initiatives, that this work is not necessarily about harmony or being nice and conflict-free. But rather that conflict is generative and creative and important, and it can be handled constructively and with kindness. Conflict is inevitable, but not unsurmountable. As we open our circles of communication and exchange more and more, our community and our culture will shift in new ways. So we need our vibrant covenant to be alive in our community, and we need healthy pathways for respectfully and lovingly holding space for healing, for listening to understand one another, and for reconciling and restoring.

And this will bring some challenges to the surface for us, such as –

- a. How can we honor a grieving process for people who have been hurt, unseen, or who have had real harm brushed under the rug?
- b. How do we focus on what it looks like to be IN covenant, rather than reactively focusing on behaviors that are out of covenant?
- c. How can we bring consciousness to our power and equity dynamics, and slow things down to examine what’s happening?
- d. How can we create a positive, high vibration context for all of this work — one that allows us to learn, make mistakes, focus on care for ourselves and each other, and that is inviting to our new members and helps to connect new members and long-time members who see the congregation very differently?

### **With that backdrop, what comes next?**

The Phase One Team has recommended to the board and Rev. Christopher that the next church year, starting in September, be focused on renewing our covenant with one another; hopefully with some in-person connection along with our online options. This congregation-wide process will include Rev. Christopher’s vision and leadership; education for all of us; and the formation

of a Phase Two Covenant Renewal Team. From the internal input we received, we recommend that this team guide us in examining our existing Covenant of Right Relations, formed in 2007, to determine how it works or doesn't, and to bring it to life in a meaningful way for our current community. This is necessary congregation-wide work. This important work needs to be completed before we engage a right relations team in any role of proactively supporting the congregation in *living* our covenant.

We also recommended that two teams be formed in the following, 2022-2023 church year:

- 1) A Strategic Planning Team to guide us in re-imagining systemic aspects of our community that will help to strengthen our congregational health and our right relations efforts, including governance and equity work.
- 2) And a Phase Three Right Relations Team that will guide us in living our covenant with love and congregational health.

It has been a pleasure for us to serve in this capacity this year. Please reach out to any of the Right Relations Phase One Team with questions or for further conversation.

This quote stands out from our focus groups – “It is an act of love to keep coming together despite hardship and turmoil.” And so it is.