



Right Relations Phase One Report

Westside Unitarian
Universalist Congregation
March 2021

I. INTRODUCTION

- The Westside Unitarian Universalist Congregation, a community of approximately 180 members at this time, is located at 7141 California Ave. SW, Seattle, Washington. Our vision is to create an inclusive, diverse Unitarian Universalist community nurturing spiritual growth and working for justice. Our mission is to support one another, expand our minds, and build a more just world. Our new called minister, Rev. Christopher Wulff, began work with us in July 2020.
- The current Covenant of Right Relations was adopted by the Congregation on May 20, 2007. See Appendix 1.
- Recent ministerial history includes a 13-year ministry followed by five years of interim ministry, during which one interim minister and one staff member were terminated, one call to ministry failed, and there was a one-year waiting period for our current called minister due to immigration issues.
- Our last right relations team was formed during Rev. Alex Holt's interim ministry. Through its short-lived existence, it organized listening circles to address a staff member termination and then disbanded due to lack of training and ongoing support. Prior to this, a Congregational Concerns Committee responded to requests for support related to interpersonal conflict. This team received very few requests during its tenure.
- The Board and the Racial Justice Change Team (RJCT) have made it a high priority to reduce racial inequity and dismantle white supremacy. As part of this emphasis, both are committed to supporting and integrating opportunities for members of the congregation to eliminate racial inequity in every aspect of our congregational life, including right relations.
- The Phase One Team believes that the work and practice of right relations is an integral part of a healthy congregation. It's about being an inclusive community where positive relationships are grounded in mutual respect and understanding. Within healthy congregations conflict is viewed as healthy and conflict resolution is conducted in a

manner that promotes safety and restoration. The work associated with right relations is intentional, proactive, and ongoing.

- This report summarizes the activities, the findings, and the recommendations of the Right Relations Phase One Team, convened by the 2020-2021 WSUU Board of Trustees to reinvigorate, update, and center right relations work in our congregational life.

II. RIGHT RELATIONS PHASE ONE TEAM

WHO WE ARE

The Phase One Team is comprised of three members, and included a fourth member for two months of our work:

Liz Berggren – Also serving as the 2020-2021 Board Secretary

Cindy Jackson – Also serving on the Racial Justice Change Team

Jade Lowry – Also serving as the 2021-2021 Board Past President

Fred Matthews – Joined for two months between November 2020 and January 2021

We are a homogeneous group of white congregants over the age of 50, and we fully acknowledged and tried to account for this reality in our work. Early in our fall 2020 formation, we endeavored to better understand the impacts of our lack of diversity with the use of the Equity Decision Making Tool created by the Racial Justice Change Team. We committed to engaging as many congregants as possible in our research, to bring a diverse set of voices, experiences and perspectives into our findings. We worked closely with the Board of Trustees through our Phase One process, which also integrated diverse perspectives.

HOW WE WERE FORMED

The 2019-2020 Board carried the unexpected responsibility of shepherding the congregation through a year of work with our federal immigration authorities, and of waiting for the time we could bring our called minister, Rev. Christopher Wulff, to join us. That

work as well as the onslaught of the Covid 19 global pandemic and the need to move into a fully virtual mode of operation for all of our congregational life altered the priorities and plans of the 2019-2020 Board, and slowed progress on initiatives such as re-imagining and strengthening right relations in our community. In the late summer and early fall of 2020, when a new board was eager to move a right relations initiative forward, we quickly experienced the reality of the impact of the times on volunteer weariness and wariness. The board engaged in invitational conversations with over 25 members of the Westside community to inspire participation as members of the Phase One Team, with a goal of starting with four-five people. We ultimately had one “yes” response from Cindy Jackson, an active member of the RJCT and long-time UU. Two board members—Liz Berggren and Jade Lowry--agreed to commit to the phase one work. After invitational calls in the Westside Week for participants to join the team, Fred Matthews joined.

OUR CHARGE

Inspired by the foundational work of the prior Board, the current Board adopted the following proposal for phase one of what is projected to be a multi-phase project.

Proposal for Phase One Right Relations Team:

In recent years, Westside Unitarian Universalist Congregation has renewed its vision and mission statements. These proclaim where we’re going and what we want to do together ([link](#)). However, the covenantal guidance for **how** to do this work and **how** to deal with the intricacies of our interpersonal relationships – the Covenant of Right Relations – has not been updated since its adoption in 2007. An effective, standing Right Relations Team is needed to review, update and implement Westside’s Covenant of Right Relations with congregation-wide engagement.

To lay the groundwork across the congregation for understanding the renewed role of a Right Relations Team, the Board proposes to develop a time-limited Right Relations Phase One Team to conduct research and determine how to navigate Westside’s start with a new right relations process. The 4-5 members of this team will engage in what we’re thinking of as “phase one” of ongoing right relations initiatives, and may remain on

the team for future phases, or bring their team contributions to a close at the end of phase one. The Board will identify Right Relations Phase One Team members, and will provide leadership for the team. Team members will be invited into a minimum six-month commitment, from October 2020 through March 2021.

The Charge for the Right Relations Phase One Team:

- Conduct research to inform our potential next steps, and engage with local UU congregations to learn from their experiences.
- Share learning with WSUU members about effective right relations work in congregations.
- Engage WSUU members through small group sessions and individual interviews to capture input and to promote investment in Westside's right relations initiatives.
- Recommend relevant training opportunities to the Board for the congregation, leadership and/or current or future right relations team members.
- Provide updates through Westside Week articles, pulpit announcements, and information sessions to maintain transparency with the congregation about activities and learnings.
- Provide monthly updates to the Board.
- Provide recommendations to the Board regarding Right Relations Team membership for the next phase of initiatives and beyond.

COMMUNICATIONS WITH THE CONGREGATION AND THE BOARD

Board Engagement:

As part of our charge, the Phase One Team provided monthly reports and updates to the Board of Trustees, and allocated time on the Board agendas for discussion in each meeting, given that two members of the Phase One Team are also Board members. This has been an invaluable part of informing the activities of the team.

Congregational Engagement:

Our primary format for updating the congregation has been through the Westside Week enews. When it was important to alert the congregation of specific opportunities, we wrote and/or delivered pulpit announcements, or email blasts. We also shared updates through the regular Board coffee hours that have been offered each month. We acknowledge that the impacts of the pandemic on

congregational life have inhibited congregational engagement during these phase one activities.

III. EXTERNAL RESEARCH

SOURCES WE CONSULTED

We began our research process by exploring the UUA website and talking to our Pacific Western Region representative for guidance. We soon found out that there is no how-to manual for right relations work, which means that we are free to chart our own course based on the needs of our congregation.

Next, we looked for inspiration to three other congregations in our region who have gone through the process of doing right relations work within the past several years: East Shore Unitarian Church in Bellevue, Northlake UUC in Kirkland, and Quimper UUF in Port Townsend.

FINDINGS

Every congregation approaches right relations work in its own unique way. Here are some highlights of what we learned:

1) Forming a Covenant: One congregation had a very extensive process which included a foundational sermon on the topic of right relations followed by two congregation-wide workshops facilitated by outside consultants, and then a three month period of gathering input and crafting the covenant, all of this culminating in a service and a signing celebration. In another congregation, a two person team held a workshop with board and staff, then two workshops with the congregation, wrote a draft, solicited feedback, made some changes, again sought input, then finalized and presented the document to the congregation for adoption. It is also important to note that covenants vary greatly in length and specificity, from very short to several pages.

2) Forming a Right Relations Team: One congregation has two teams, one a standing Right Relations Committee which reports to the board and whose function is to oversee a second Right Relations Facilitation Team (RRFT) and to provide training and

resources as needed. For the initial formation of the RRFT, the Right Relations Committee invited people to submit applications and selected individuals who were trusted by the congregation and had some background experience with interpersonal relations. Those joining the team were given training on facilitation and conflict mediation as well as on how to hold community circles. Another congregation's right relations team was formed by asking congregants to submit names of people they would recommend. Those people were interviewed and a team of ten people was formed. The third congregation has a Healthy Congregations Team composed of three members who are selected by the board in consultation with the minister and the Committee on Ministry.

3) Role of the Right Relations Team: The principal role thus far of one congregation's right relations team has been to hold community circles in order to build trusting relationships within the congregation. That team meets monthly. Another congregation has used its team to facilitate a community forum on a contentious topic and to deal with an issue arising out of that forum involving a congregant's claim of having suffered serious harm from another person. The third congregation's team has no regularly scheduled meeting, does not operate proactively and only responds upon specific request.

4) Use of Outside Resources: One congregation made extensive use of an outside consultant over a multiyear period, while the other two congregations did not engage an outside consultant.

5) Frequency of Contact with Congregation: One congregation's team has been very active in holding monthly community circles. Another congregation has held one congregation-wide forum and was still in the process of deciding how it would function when the pandemic hit, while the third congregation's team has been largely dormant.

Concluding Thoughts and Considerations

As this brief overview makes clear, each congregation creates its own path. Some factors which can affect the right relations formation process are the congregational budget, which affects use of outside consultants; the size of the congregation, which also affects available resources; and the number of people interested in participating in right relations work.

IV. INTERNAL RESEARCH

Three strategies were used to gather input from the WSUU congregation regarding right relations: focus groups, an invitation for individual conversations via phone or email, and a congregational survey through WSUU enews. The input focused upon three major categories of questions: general perspectives, right relations teams, and right relations covenant. There were 27 participants in the 3 focus groups, 18 participants provided individual input, and there were 60 respondents to the online survey. In addition, leadership groups including the Board, and some members of the Leadership Assembly provided comments.

FOCUS GROUPS INPUT SUMMARY

Q: What do you see the role of right relations to be in our community?

- To support open, healthy communication and conflict resolution among members
- Part of a larger tent concept like “Healthy Congregations”
- Involves a continuum of supports and processes, from community building to responding to interpersonal conflicts
- Process is proactive and intentional so as to support preventative work, congregational capacity building, and interpersonal skill building
- Bring community together with focus upon how we relate to one another
- In past has been a reactive process to address conflict
- Means to address conflict while it is still manageable and not “sweep it under the rug”; WSUU is a risk avoidant culture
- Right relations is not mentioned in the by-laws. In what ways will this be addressed and included?

Q: How do you see right relations and racial justice intersecting?

- Intersects with some goals of RJCT
- Right relations is a way for members of the congregation to be in community while doing challenging work and speaking freely
- Provides structure for assuring safety and ability to hold space for all, radically accepting people

2020-2021 Right Relations Phase One Report

- Provides means for all intersecting identities to be included safely
- Offers a way to connect with others in the broader community to share lived experiences
- Provides way for educating the community to understand that being in right relations with someone “doesn’t mean you don’t challenge yourself”
- Offers a means to facilitate an understanding of the harm that has occurred to members of the congregation
- Right relations supports all of us taking care of and loving each other
- Has potential to bridge what many have learned in Beloved Conversations to broader work within the congregation

Q: How would you like right relations education to be offered?

- Use multiple modes: videos, study modules, articles, internet links, in-person workshops
- With an intentional, comprehensive plan for individual work and congregational work
- Tools and training can help teach the foundational skills with compassion and love, but living right relations requires trust

Q: What should a right relations team do?

- Intersect with pastoral care team, have working relationship
- Facilitate ongoing skill development within the congregation; i.e. skills to foster healthy & productive conversations, reconciliation, restoration, conflict resolution, active listening
- Work should be preventive and include awareness of needs for early intervention by being aware of the pulse of the congregation
- Specify the roles and relationships of the right relations team between and among various groups within the congregation, especially pastoral care team
- Recognize and build systems to meet both interpersonal and systemic congregational needs
- Infuse right relations with our values to support and expand our welcoming and open community
- Act as stewards for right relations for the community as a whole
- Remember the lessons learned from the mis-steps of the prior Congregational Concerns Committee

Q: How do you see yourself interacting with a right relations team?

- Requesting coaching before foreseeable delicate conversations and assistance during challenging situations
- Accessing when need to have facilitated conversation for a difficult conversation with another community member

Q: What skills and qualities do you want to see in the members of the right relations team?

- Skills > active listening, reconciliation and restitution practices, deep understanding of dynamics and strategies of conflict resolution, group facilitation skills, approaches to facilitate inclusive communication and disrupt impact of racism, discern difference between intent vs impact
- Qualities > empathy, openness, nonjudgmental (especially regarding ethnic, gender, disability issues), understanding others point of view, understand their limits and limitations, open to ongoing skill development and collaboration, intuitive regarding status of community/relationship needs
- Ethnically diverse team; diversity in ways of seeing and experiencing the world
- Respected by larger portion of the community

Q: How do you think we can best form our next right relations team?

- Similar to MST formation with nominations, applications, and discernment
- Think about organizational structure and how groups and staff will work together and how roles will intersect
- Clarify scope of team before recruit
- Explore why members want to join the team and skills they possess
- May need more than one team to prevent burnout
- Be mindful of need to have the team be representative of the congregation so those utilizing the team feel safe.
- Since right relations work has multiple points of impact, should have some members skilled for mediating interpersonal conflicts and some more working more proactively with larger community supporting the development of an inclusive beloved community.

Q: How do you see a covenant of right relations being used in our congregation?

- As a reference standard, guidepost for how we treat each other and interact.
- Is part of the foundation for increasing our capacity to build and nurture our Beloved Congregation.
- Need to clarify is it a set of promises or aspirational?
- Covenant should support being together and guide finding a way to work through conflict, not side-step issues and behaviors or prevent conflict.
- Covenant should be something that everyone owns for common good.
- Current covenant is language heavy, like legal document. Modification needed to make it accessible to all and address reconciliation, mediation, restorative justice.
- Covenant with statement of values and ethical standards provides aspirational grounds, larger than specific behaviors that could be considered out of covenant

Q: What needs to be considered in the development of our right relations covenant?

- How will the covenant include the values/beliefs that are considered part of Healthy Congregations principles?
- Process needs to be inclusive of all voices so as to avoid an outcome representing only dominant culture values
- Be mindful that many are uncomfortable with change and may need attention to be brought into the process
- RR team needs to be strongly in covenant with one another before guiding and modeling for the congregation
- A predicate to the covenant is our Sunday affirmation; what is created could be an expansion of that
- An understanding that this takes time, commitment, trust
- Could consider starting with a conceptual framework, sharing it with the congregation for feedback
- Consider inclusion of specific behavioral principles that can be measured

CONGREGATIONAL SURVEY

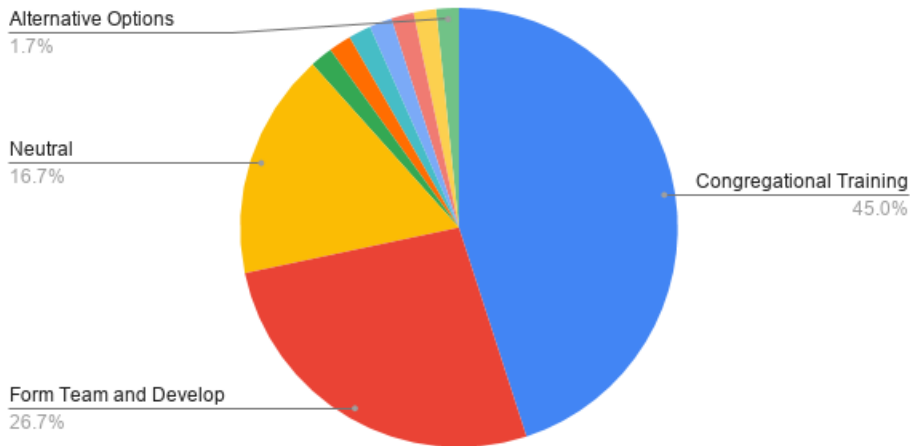
Q: What do you think is the top priority for our right relations work?

- Congregational training – 45%
- Form team and develop covenant – 26.7%

2020-2021 Right Relations Phase One Report

- Neutral – 16.7%
- Alternative options – 1.7%

Count of What do you think is the top priority for our Right Relations work?



Selective Comments:

Congregational Training —

Maybe the first priority should be more general education about what this is all about and why it seems assumed that we need a new covenant.

I think this needs to be a multi-year process, [supporting] the congregation in learning a lot more about how equity looks in action.

Covenant Formation —

I'm not totally clear what this is (Is it like a mission statement, but with teeth?)

Who decided the current covenant is inadequate? What is broken that needs fixing? I think that ought to be a part of the education, whoever carries it out.

Neutral —

I don't fully understand the goal of this group in order to provide input as to how you achieve your goal.

Why can't forming a team be one of the ways training and education occur to create a new covenant?

Other —

My top priority is maintenance of the UU spiritual and supportive community.

Ascertain the need for a new WSUU Covenant and Revive or Reform whatever comes of the decision.

Ask more questions rather than training

Why do we need a new covenant?

INPUT FROM LEADERSHIP

Summary of Board input:

- Next steps focus upon building relationships which are the bedrock of right relations work. There are a variety of ways to accomplish this.
- Healing from wounds, challenges of our past is a primary need for our congregation. How does that intersect with phases of right relations work?
- Developing and implementing a strategic plan is essential to having structures to support right relations work. Internal structures need to support overall vision for right relations becoming part of congregational life.
- Healthy Congregations is part of the big picture.
- Know training is essential, but question the value of large, congregational training sessions.
- Believe right relations work intersects with racial equity work.
- Right relations work intersects with “Widening the Circle” concepts.

Summary of Leadership Assembly input: (focus was training & budget allocation)

- Contextualize our training focus on learning to have difficult conversations rather than managing conflict.
- If using listening circles, need to contextualize and be very clear of goals.

- May not be time to spend money during the pandemic when we can't meet in person – maybe better to move money to next year's budget.
- Recommended "Allyship" as a sermon topic (Anastacia Renee) with discussion group following.
- Learning to have difficult conversations could be a two-part program with facilitated guides for discussion.
- Mix educational offerings that cost and options that are minimal cost or free.
- Collaborate with ongoing activities to leverage the strengths we have in place.
- Need drop-in level of offerings rather than having all small groups; this could increase access to community members.
- Maintain focus upon positive, organic ways to gather as community, for both new and seasoned members. Could increase opportunities for old wounds to heal without directly focusing upon them.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EDUCATION AND CAPACITY BUILDING

- Develop "refresh" opportunities for connections for the congregation to nurture our relationships, such as:
 - Congregant-led opportunities (coloring, movies, crafts, etc.)
 - Program-based opportunities (Even-Song, Sermon-Building)
 - Clusters
 - Post-Sunday service tabling/coffee hour options
- Establish common reading opportunities for the entire congregation to facilitate shared knowledge and understanding.
- Engage Pacific Western District Healthy Congregations consultants to support us in creating and holding safe/brave spaces to build trust and hear each other's experiences.
- Create opportunities with structured discussion formats for the congregation to exchange perspectives on key issues prevalent among congregants at this time.

- Offer pastoral care opportunities to Westside's BIPOC members through Westside's minister and through opportunities for care from UU BIPOC ministers.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PHASE TWO COVENANT RENEWAL TEAM CHARGE

We recommend that a Phase Two Covenant Renewal Team focus on renewing our covenant with one another. This team is not meant to implement conflict resolution processes or mediation. We recommend that a Phase Three Right Relations Team be charged with developing and implementing re-imagined conflict resolution and mediation processes to support the renewed covenant.

Suggested Process for Renewing our Covenant with One Another:

- Form Phase Two Covenant Renewal Team with an emphasis on broad representation of program areas and groups to encourage shared ownership and communications (see section below).
- Engage the congregation in a variety of ways to revisit our covenant and examine how we want to live it.
- Provide foundational framing of this process through related sermons offered by Rev Christopher.
- Draw on the perspectives and experiences of youth and our broader UU Youth Ministry in this covenanting process.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PHASE TWO COVENANT TEAM FORMATION

- The Board convenes a team that includes representatives from key program areas of our congregational life.
 - This group is about bringing all of our voices to the table and keeping open communications to actively engage congregants in the covenanting process. Potential program groups to be represented in the Phase Two Covenant Renewal Team --
 - Worship
 - Music

2020-2021 Right Relations Phase One Report

- RE
 - Youth
 - Covenant groups
 - Social justice –
 - RJCT
 - Plate collection
 - Environmental justice
 - Membership
 - Board/leadership
- Team formation process –
 - Ask each program group to identify someone for this team.
 - Ask each group to ensure their representation is inclusive of our congregation, considering:
 - Marginalized groups (BIPOC, LGBTQ+, members who experience disabilities, older members)
 - Age/generational considerations
 - Length of membership considerations
 - Desire to participate and commit to this important work
- Team facilitation –
 - If the Board is able to hire an external facilitator to guide this process, that is our first recommendation, based on the success of other congregations.
 - Another alternative is for the Board to engage one or more Westside members who have facilitation expertise to lead the group.
 - A third alternative is to allow the Phase Two Team members to self-select their leadership and process.
- Timeline –
 - We recommend not starting this process immediately in order to lay groundwork, to have bridging activities, and to allow our capacity to be restored from the impacts of the pandemic.
 - We recommend focusing energy on bridging activities during the 2021 spring and summer, to rebuild our foundation of trust and caring and to build our capacity to hear each other's different perspectives.
 - Potential bridging elements may include –
 - Rev Christopher's sermons

- Opportunities with structured discussion formats for the congregation to exchange perspectives on key issues prevalent among congregants at this time
- Healthy Congregations consultant work
- Strategic planning that moves us all toward embracing the concept of renewal
- Aligning to our current budget reality
- We recommend that the Phase Two Team members commit to a year of service from their start date.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE TEAMS

- Recommendation for Phase III Team:
 - Following the covenant work, form a team that will support the work of living into our right relations on the ground.
 - This team might require more experience and/or training in facilitation, holding space, mediation and conflict resolution.
- Recommendation for Strategic Planning Team:
 - Recommendation for a strategic planning initiative – the team itself may not form this year because of lack of capacity, but some of the strategic work is already being addressed and can continue to be addressed until there is capacity for more explicit work on a plan by a designated team.
 - This unique time of beginning to recover after a long year of pandemic offers opportunities for renewal and re-imagining different aspects of our community.
 - We are being called into aligning our programming with our budget.
 - We envision making changes to our governance structure and our processes for nominating and voting on leadership roles.
 - We continue to emphasize addressing equity throughout our congregational life.

APPENDIX ONE

WSUU EXISTING COVENANT OF RIGHT RELATIONS

Members will strive to do the following as they participate in the life of the Congregation:

- Welcome and engage members and visitors alike, encouraging them to join in congregational activities.
- Value and express our own emotions and differences in a way that respects the worth and dignity of each person.
- Express gratitude for the efforts of others.
- Listen attentively to appreciate fully another's point of view, valuing the perspective of others.
- Support and encourage the personal and spiritual growth of others, acknowledging that each person has a unique path and truth.
- Support and respect the contracts and/or agreements with the minister, staff, board, and congregational committees.
- Value confidentiality.
- Ask for help, support, and collaboration when needed and encourage others to do the same.
- Build courage and commitment to voice values in the world, and work toward positive relationships with other faith communities.
- Provide opportunities to share diverse ideas in a safe place.
- Approach disagreements and conflicts constructively, communicating with others in a direct, caring and responsible manner.
- Advocate for mediation and resolution processes agreeable to all parties, when conflicts and misunderstandings arise within the congregation.
- Acknowledge that everyone makes mistakes. Seek and offer forgiveness.

(May 20, 2007)