



## **Journey Begins, Creating or Reviewing a Covenant**

Greenville UU Fellowship, Greenville, South Carolina

Covenant Group Session Plan

Revised by Denise Frick, August 2024. Inspired by Rev. Chris Hockman's sermon on August 7, 2022, New Beginnings.

**Welcome, Chalice Lighting:** Here we are, together in this space. By our love and by our covenant, we make this a holy place. We light the chalice of Unitarian Universalism in honor of the light that lives in each of us, the light that shines among us, and the light we bring into the world.

**Personal Check In:** Briefly share something from your life since we last met and how you are feeling now.

### **Opening Reading**

We come together this day to remind one another  
To rest for a moment on the forming edge of our lives,  
To resist the headlong tumble into the next moment,  
Until we claim for ourselves awareness and gratitude.  
Taking the time to look into one another's faces  
And see there communion: the reflection of our own eyes.  
This house of laughter and silence, memory and hope,  
is hallowed by our presence together.

~ Kathleen McTigue, *Singing the Living Tradition*, reading 435

With every new day is renewal and hope. Our lives are just a stream of infinite beginnings. Every moment has the potential for a new start and every moment is important.

~Rev. Chris Hockman, from sermon at GUUF August 7, 2022

### **Questions to prompt and guide discussion**

#### ***Questions about out Covenant Circle journey beginning or beginning again:***

1. In what ways has this Covenant Circle become new or transformed for you over the past year(s)? If you're new to this Covenant Circle, what moved you to try this new experience?
2. Beginning again may be awkward and have some obstacles. As we begin again in the Covenant Circle, how can we best care for each other and ourselves?
3. Share an experience of a new beginning or a fresh start giving you hope. Or share a new perspective you gained on account of a recent new beginning or fresh start.

#### ***Questions to prompt what you might want to include in the covenant for this circle.***

4. What do you need in this Covenant Circle experience to feel safe and respected and to trust the other participants with your personal stories? (Responses to this question will form the basis for the circle's covenant)

**Sitting in Silence** (Reflect on the questions just posed as you prepare to hear the readings)

### **Readings (See below)**

**Sharing** - This is a time to speak without interruption and for deep listening. Deep listening means no interrupting, no fixing, no saving, no advising, and no setting each other straight. Please share one or more responses to the session questions. (A facilitator will take notes on the responses to question # 4, which relate to what the individuals may want to include in the group covenant.)

(After each person has shared once, this is usually a good time to take a brief break)

**Open Discussion** -This is a time to respond to something another person said about the topic or to relate additional thoughts that may have occurred as others shared their thoughts on this topic. Continue to practice deep listening.

**Summary of Initial Covenant:**

Within each Covenant circle at GUUF, members abide by a group covenant -- a statement of the relationship of the members to each other. A covenant captures the promises we make to each other. Creating a covenant is an important practice, with each circle writing their own unique covenant. Our group responses to question 4 today give us a basis for our group's covenant.

The facilitator taking notes regarding what people have said about a covenant will read them back to everyone. The group can clarify or add to this draft covenant. The draft covenant based on this first discussion will be sent out to the group prior to the next covenant circle meeting. The covenant will be finalized by the group in the meetings ahead.

*If this is an ongoing circle that already has a covenant.* Review your existing covenant as it relates to the discussion today. What changes do you want to make to your group covenant?

**Announcements/Plans**

**Personal Check Out:**

*What is the most important aspect of this groups covenant for you?*

**Closing Reading:**

We are going,  
Heaven knows where we are going, but we know within.  
And we will get there,  
Heaven knows how we will get there, but we know we will.  
It will be hard, we know, and the road will be muddy and rough, but we'll get there.  
Heaven knows how we will get there, but we know we will.  
Wo-ya-ya. Wo-ya-ya. Wo-ya-ya."

Written by Sol Amarifio, arranged by Ysaye Barnwell. Hymn 1020 in *Singing the Journey*, supplement to *Singing the Living Tradition*, the Unitarian Universalist hymnbook.

**Extinguish the Chalice**

*We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we meet again.*

## Readings

If this circle has a Covenant, include the current Covenant in this selection of Readings.

In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's there are few.

~Shunryo Suzuki, Zen master

Giving is a miracle that can transform the heaviest of hearts. Two people, who moments before lived in separate worlds of private concerns, suddenly meet each other over a simple act of sharing. The world expands, a moment of goodness is created, and something new comes into being where before there was nothing. ~ Kent Nerburn, *Simple Truths*

We must always change, renew, rejuvenate ourselves; otherwise we harden.

~Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

For none of us ever really walks in another's shoes or knows the innermost rooms of a person's heart. None of us truly knows the lonely places of another's journey or the causes of the lines around another's eyes. Therefore, let us be gentle with one another. Let us listen more than we speak and accept more than we judge. ~ Elizabeth Tarbox, *Life Tides*, UU Minister

When you speak to me about your deepest questions, you do not want to be fixed or saved: you want to be seen and heard, to have your truth acknowledged and honored. If your problem is soul-deep, your soul alone knows what you need to do about it, and my presumptuous advice will only drive your soul back into the woods. So the best service I can render when you speak to me about such a struggle is to hold you faithfully in a space where you can listen to your inner teacher.

~ Parker Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness*

Each of us brings a separate truth here,  
We bring the truth of our own life, our own story.  
We don't come as empty vessels...  
But rather we come as full people -- people who have our own story and our own truth.  
We seek to add to our truths and add to our stories.  
This room is rich with truth, rich with experience.  
All manner of people are here: needy...joyful...frightened...anxious...bored...  
We all bring our truth with us.  
May we all recognize the truth and the story in everyone's life.  
And may we hear and honor the truths that we all bring as we gather together...  
Together we have truths. Together we have a story. Together we are a community.  
~Rev. Penny Hackett-Evans

Covenant is a way of working and being together in the context of human interaction including the natural energy of conflict. A covenant is an open and unequivocal statement about how we intend to live and a claim of the importance of that choice. When we make a promise we stretch out to say, 'I will be there no matter what turns up.' As free selves we know we become genuine selves by making commitments to others. This is holy and sacred lifelong work.

~From Karen Lindley of the Wilmington, Delaware Unitarian Church