

# ARTICLE FOR MAY BEACON

What has the UUCGT Healthy Congregations Team been up to? This is the second of two articles that hope to give you some insight into the answer to that question.

In March we published an article that led you thru our journey to a systemic Healthy Congregations system in our congregation. We discussed the covenant we adopted in June 2019 that describes how we ideally ARE with each other and shared the first step of four steps to guide what we DO with each other when conflict arises. Below are all 4 steps of our proposed **HEALTHY CONGREGATION GUIDELINES FOR THE HCT AND THE CONGREGATION AT LARGE**. (Step 1 is presented to refresh your memory from last month's article).

**HEALTHY CONGREGATION GUIDELINES FOR THE HCT AND THE CONGREGATION AT LARGE** (These guidelines are modeled on the efforts developed at the Rogue Valley Unitarian Church in Ashland, Oregon):

[STEP 1](#): Talk directly with the person (member, minister, staff) with whom you have the conflict.

- Anonymous complaints are not acceptable. Own the issue.
- Examine your role in the conflict. Why is this matter important to you? Get clear in your mind what happened and why. Write your thoughts.
- Email is not an acceptable means of communication in a time of conflict.
- As soon as possible after the incident, agree on a mutually acceptable time and place to talk in private with the other person(s) involved.
- During the discussion, use "I" statements ("I feel" not "you did"). Actively listen to the other person. Repeat what the person says to you in order to verify that you have heard her/him correctly. Communicate to achieve understanding.
- If you feel that safety is an issue, or that the conversation is too difficult to manage alone, seek the assistance of an appropriate, mutually acceptable, third party. The Healthy Congregations Team has members who are available to help.
- Avoid any action that can lead to gossip. Choose your support and help wisely.
- If the conflict is not with the person, but with how that person is performing a job (staff, RE teacher, etc.), address your concern to the Minister if one-on-one discussion does not work or does not feel possible.

STEP 2: If, after having a direct discussion, the issue remains unresolved, go to the Minister

- Counseling by the Minister must be acceptable to all parties. If the Minister is not appropriate or available, seek a member of the Healthy Congregations Team.
- If the conflict involves the Minister, the issue should be taken to the Healthy Congregations Team with strong encouragement to direct them back to the minister, or offer to go with them to the minister. The HCT will let the minister know regardless of which direction the person chooses.

STEP 3: If, after ministerial counseling, the issue remains unresolved, the parties involved should again seek the services of the Healthy Congregations Team.

- At least two members of the HCT will meet with those involved in the conflict to facilitate mediation.
- If resolution is achieved, the parties will sign a statement that the conflict has been resolved to their satisfaction. This statement will be kept in a confidential file accessible only to the HCT and the Minister.
- If the conflict is not resolved, the HCT is empowered to recommend outside mediation or counseling.
- Should one or both of the parties refuse to participate in the resolution process, or if behavior is unchanged, and it is the belief of the HCT that the behavior is a threat to the Congregation, the matter will go to the Board for action.

STEP 4: The Board, in consultation with the Minister, will consider matters coming from the HCT and take appropriate action

- The Board may endorse the HCT recommendations.
- The Board may solicit assistance from the Mid America Region team of the UUA and/or UUA.
- The Board may take action to exclude a person from attending, for a period of time, based on a refusal to honor our Congregation's Covenant.
- The Board, given just cause, by a two-thirds majority may exclude a person from the Congregation and the Congregation premises and remove his/her name from membership. (This process will be linked to the work of the Safe Congregations Team).
- The Board may specify conditions for returning as a welcomed member of our Congregation and set criteria for evaluation of compliance.
- Assent of the Board by a two-thirds majority will be required for return to the Congregation.

In summary, our Healthy Congregation guidelines are recommended to clearly communicate to all who walk together at UUCGT that:

- It is expected by the Congregation and the Board of Directors that conflicts can and will be resolved respectfully by the individuals involved, acting in alignment with Unitarian Universalists Seven Principles.
- STEPS, 3 and 4, will be implemented when behaviors are seen to be dangerous (threatening to people or property), disruptive (interfering with essential Congregation functions), or image tarnishing (repeated aggressive, hostile or demeaning behavior toward guests or members, including unwelcome sexual advances).

- Finally, when no resolution is possible, concern for the well-being, openness, safety and stability of the Congregation as a whole shall be given priority over the feelings or actions of any individual.

**OUR REQUEST TO YOU AND WHAT IS COMING SOON.** Please spend some time reviewing what is presented here. The HCT looks forward to input from everyone in the congregation. We will be working with Rev. Cathy to present this material in services, small groups, and future articles in the Beacon. Given we cannot gather together in person at the moment, if you have feedback please contact Susan Lio ([susanlio53@gmail.com](mailto:susanlio53@gmail.com)). Also, keep your eyes out for:

- Ongoing offers to participate in small circles, excellent places to practice the interpersonal aspects of our covenant. Our website now lists all active circles [here](#).
- We will have a service dedicated to what it means to be a people of covenant in the near future.
- Consider purchasing the book Growing Ourselves Up by Jenny Brown, which will help us to develop skills in our life relationships, including those within our congregation.

Your Healthy Congregations Team,

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