

The Epiphany Covenant

Our common covenant:

In the love of truth and the spirit of Jesus Christ, we unite for the worship of God and the service of humanity.

I own this covenant by...

committing to my own integrity. I fearlessly *seek the truth* of my life. I reflect on my beliefs and actions and take responsibility for my spiritual growth.

committing to be open to the *spirit of Jesus Christ*. I make his life and teachings my guide. As he loved God and neighbor, so I strive to love ever more fully. Especially, I love and learn from people of different religions and backgrounds, recognizing—as Jesus taught—that all people are loved by God.

committing to the health of this congregation. *We unite* by giving of ourselves to the tasks we choose together. I commit to give to my greatest capability and learn to discern my human limitations, that I may be a cheerful giver.

committing to the worship of God. I honor the presence of the divine in my life, that my relationship with God may grow. I am faithful in our common worship, recognizing that there is a strength in coming together which I cannot find alone.

committing to the service of humanity. As God works through me, I become a servant of the greater good.

That you may keep this covenant in faithfulness, Epiphany Community Church...

commits to providing opportunities for truth-seeking. Worship, classes, book studies, and discussion groups are available.

commits to providing opportunities for building community. In small groups, over time, authentic love develops. You are encouraged to join one.

commits to fair and just stewardship of resources. Your giving, whether of time or of money, will serve the greater mission of the church.

commits to providing regular worship opportunities. We grow with God every Sunday and whenever we gather.

commits to providing ways and means for you to find your particular “path of service.” Leadership opportunities, workshops, and service projects are readily available.

—Epiphany Community Church, Fenton, Michigan

UUA Corporate Counsel Opinion on Membership

June 8, 2001

Ms. Kathleen C. Montgomery
Executive Vice President
Unitarian Universalist Association
25 Beacon Street
Boston, MA 02108

Re: Unitarian Universalist Association—Board of Trustees

Dear Kay:

At your request, here is our opinion concerning whether a minor may serve on (1) the Board of Trustees of the Unitarian Universalist Association, a Massachusetts non-profit corporation organized under Chapter 180 of the General Laws, or (2) the governing board of a member congregation.

In rendering this opinion, we examined such documents and made such other investigations as we deemed appropriate. The opinion is limited to Massachusetts law.

In short, there is nothing in Massachusetts law that prohibits a minor from serving as a board member, director, trustee or officer. While Section 3 of Chapter 180 provides that: “One or more persons, of the age of eighteen years

or more in the case of natural persons, may act as incorporators to form a corporation...,” there is no similar age restriction for corporate directors, trustees or officers.

A non-profit corporation or association may prescribe in its Articles of Organization or bylaws a minimum age and other qualifications of its directors, trustees and officers. Absent a restriction, however, a minor is not disqualified from serving. The UUA’s bylaws do not preclude a minor from serving as trustee.

Congregations organized under the laws of states other than Massachusetts will need to check the applicable laws of their states, as well as their Articles of Organization and bylaws.

Very truly yours,

Edward P. Leibensperger

Resources

Alexander, Scott W. ed. *Salted With Fire: UU Strategies for Sharing Faith and Growing Congregations*. Boston: Skinner House Books, 1994.

A collection of voices inspired with enthusiasm for championing the cause of our liberal faith. UU leaders from our own local communities discuss historical and modern interpretations of UU evangelism and offer ideas and practical advice for congregational growth.

Barber, Benjamin R. *A Place for Us: How to Make Society Civil and Democracy Strong*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1998.

Benjamin Barber attempts to retrieve the ideals of “civil society” from those who want to re-create old-fashioned (and discriminatory) small communities and from the free-marketeers who associate it with unfettered commercial activity. The book offers strategies for civilizing public discourse and promoting civic debate.

Beard, Margaret L., and Roger W. Comstock, eds. *All Are Chosen; Stories of Lay Ministry and Leadership*. Boston: Skinner House Books, 1998.

These are first-person accounts of people who have become deeply involved in various aspects of UU life as lay leaders. They range from brand new churches to New England “churches on the green,” from campus ministries to worship associates. There are some very eloquent descriptions of lay ministries: worship associates, pastoral associates, social justice, and

youth ministries, etc. Especially recommended are the essays by Beverly Smrha (“Congregations as Seminary for the Laity”—using Roy Phillips’s language), Mary Ella Holst (“Social Justice as Lay Ministry”—makes the distinction between a volunteer and a lay minister), Laila D. Ibrahim (“Paul Just Died”—incredibly eloquent), Roger Comstock (“Ministry to Each Other Comes First”—talks about membership as a covenant).

Callahan, Kennon. *Twelve Keys to an Effective Church: Strategic Planning for Mission*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1983.

This oldie-but-goodie identifies the essential characteristics of an effective, growing, healthy congregation and suggests ways to develop each of them. Not all of the chapters will be relevant to Unitarian Universalist congregations. For instance, the chapter on pastoral and lay visitation is probably one you will want to skip. But the section “Significant Relational Groups” is particularly relevant, as are the sections “Specific, Concrete Missional Objectives,” “Strong Leadership Resources,” and “Streamlined Structure and Solid, Participatory Decision Making.”

Continental Unitarian Universalist Young Adult Network website: www.uuyan.org.

Links to information about programs for young adults, including district groups and resources.

Emerson, Dorothy May, ed. *Standing Before Us: Unitarian Universalist Women and Social Reform, 1776–1936*. Boston: Skinner House Books, 1999.

This anthology includes writings by, and biographical sketches of, fifty Universalist and Unitarian women. The four sections—“Call to Reform,” “Search for Education,” “Struggle for Racial Justice,” and “Reform in Religion”—demonstrate the impact of women’s leadership in creating significant social change.

Essex Conversations Coordinating Committee. *Essex Conversations: Visions for Lifespan Religious Education*. Boston: Skinner House Books, 2001.

As Unitarian Universalists enter the twenty-first century, what is central for our evolving faith? What are our goals for lifespan religious education? What are the vital components for our curricula?

Foster, Charles R. *Embracing Diversity: Leadership in Multicultural Congregations*. Washington, DC: Alban Institute, 1997.

Explores a variety of approaches congregations have taken to embrace differences, identify leadership issues diversity creates in congregations, and discover programmatic suggestions drawn from the experience of multicultural congregations to address these issues.

Foster, Charles R., and Theodore Brelsford. *We Are the Church Together: Cultural Diversity in Congregational Life*. Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press, 1996.

On-the-scene research in three culturally diverse congregations in a large Southern city addresses what it means to be “church” in a culturally diverse congregation. The authors call for a radical rethinking and reconfiguration of conventional theological, educational, and polity assumptions.

Friedman, Edwin. *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*. New York: Guilford Press, 1985.

This classic text applies systems theory to congregational life. Much of the material in this book is the underlying basis for assumptions in this report about the way congregations function as organic entities. Friedman’s discussion of the nature of healthy leadership in a system is particularly helpful.

Heller, Anne Odin. *Churchworks: A Well-Body Book for Congregations*. Boston: Skinner House Books, 1999.

Covers all vital congregational concerns—spiritual development, growth and new membership, conflict resolution, lay and professional ministry, building and grounds, congregational structure, and fundraising.

Hertz, Walter P., ed. *Redeeming Time: Endowing Your Church with the Power of Covenant*. Boston: Skinner House Books, 1998.

Resource for congregations to renew their foundational promise for support and accountability in our liberal religious community. Includes sample covenants and discussion questions.

Kirkpatrick, Thomas. *Small Groups in the Church: A Handbook for Creating Community*. Washington, DC: Alban Institute, 1995.

Kirkpatrick begins by talking about the challenge of creating community in our contemporary culture. He then offers some specific guidelines for planning small-group ministry, training leaders and facilitators, and sustaining small groups in the congregation.

Lavanhar, Marlin. “Soulful Sundown: a Manual.” Boston: Young Adult/Campus Ministry Office, UUA, 1999. Available at www.uua.org/ya.com.

A new contemporary UU worship style for young adults that explores the arts and spirituality through the interaction of local and national artists—i.e., blues, jazz, and folk performers; storytellers; comedians; dancers; and other artists with UU worship leaders. A new resource for young adult worship. This manual will help you re-create the successful Soulful Sundown worship experience in your congregation or district.

Mann, Alice. *The In-Between Church: Navigating Size Transitions in Congregations*. Washington, DC: Alban Institute, 1998.

Mann's book is a good resource for congregational leaders who are feeling the tension and frustration of being in size transitions. She offers a good framework for understanding how people in churches experience growth and change and suggests ways that these transitions can be navigated in good faith by the leadership and the membership.

Mead, Loren B. *More Than Numbers: The Way Churches Grow*. Washington, DC: Alban Institute, 1993.

This book has informed the growth strategies of many of the new and growing congregations in the UUA. Mead builds on the work of Ted Buckle in suggesting that there are four distinct dynamics to church growth: numerical growth, maturational growth, organic growth, and incarnational growth. In the context of Mead's model, growth is understood to be a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that is inseparable from the meaning of membership.

Oswald, Roy M. *Assimilating New Members: The Workshop*. Washington, DC: Alban Institute, 1990. Videocassettes.

Based on Alban and other studies that led to the book *The Inviting Church* (see below), these tapes identify the common characteristics of congregations that are warm, inviting, and growing. Taped by sponsoring church in VHS format, runs about four hours on two tapes. Includes a Discussion Leader's Guide.

Oswald, Roy M., and Speed B. Leas. *The Inviting Church: A Study of New Member Assimilation*. Washington, DC: Alban Institute, 1987.

Although somewhat old and not specifically UU, this is one of the standard guides to membership. Ever wonder why some people never return after their first visit? Why some join but you rarely see them? Or why others become active participants in your church family's life and worship? Discover how your congregation can meet growth challenges. Based on Alban Institute research, *The Inviting Church* includes a self-study design for assessing assimilation processes and analyzing visitors' perceptions.

Parsons, George, and Speed Leas. *Understanding Your Congregation as a System: The Manual*. Washington, DC: Alban Institute, 1993.

This book provides a short and accessible course in the basics of congregational systems theory. Vocabulary, concepts, real-world examples—they're all here.

Phillips, Roy. *Transforming Liberal Congregations for the New Millennium*. St. Paul, MN: Unity Church—Unitarian, 1996.

This book actually began as the 1995 Minns Lectures. Phillips's premise is that we need new models for growing and sustaining liberal congregations in order to keep our movement healthy and vital. He draws extensively on a number of well-known writers in contemporary congregational life (Kennon Callahan, Loren Mead, Parker Palmer). His theological underpinnings come from the nineteenth-century Transcendentalists and from the more recent work of Henry Nelson Wieman.

Phillips, Roy D. *Letting Go: Transforming Congregations for Ministry*. Washington, DC: Alban Institute, 1999.

This is a slightly revised version of *Transforming Liberal Congregations for the New Millennium* and is easier to acquire. Pioneering thinkers have been saying for decades that the key to church renewal lies in nurturing the ministry of the laity. Based on his thirty-plus years of experience in parish ministry, Phillips makes the case that in order for lay ministries to flourish, pastors need to let go of their traditional views about their role in the congregation. *Letting Go* forthrightly explains what it means for pastors to do less so their members have the opportunity and freedom to grow. Foreword author Michael Cowan promises, "Pastors and lay leaders approaching this book with practical hopes, needs, and questions will not be disappointed."

Rendle, Gilbert. *Leading Change in the Congregation: Spiritual and Organizational Tools for Leaders*. Washington, DC: Alban Institute, 1998.

A well-written book about how congregational leaders can help their organizations to get "unstuck" and to embrace change as a welcome and healthy way to grow. It includes lots of short exercises for church leaders who want to understand where their congregations are, what is keeping them there, and what can help them to get moving again.

Southworth, Bruce. *At Home in Creativity: The Naturalistic Theology of Henry Nelson Wieman*. Boston: Skinner House Books, 1995.

Wieman is a process philosopher and theologian. His writing is often complex and hard to penetrate; the vocabulary of process theology is obscure to most of us. Bruce Southworth has done a good job of explaining and translating him. The core of Wieman's theology is his understanding of God as the creative event—creative interchange as God operating in human history. Southworth summarizes this complicated philosophy: "Wieman's philosophical and theological goal responded to the question, 'How do we know/experience God?' The answer: In creativity. Simultaneously he was

asking, 'How might we be saved?' The answer: By faith—by ultimate commitment to God, which is commitment to the Creative Process, a commitment that necessitates our co-creativity.”

Steinke, Peter L. *Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach*. Washington, DC: Alban Institute, 1996.

Steinke offers ten principles of health in a congregation, beginning with “wholeness is not attainable, but it can be approximated.” A reassuring and easy-to-read book that covers the basics of congregational systems theory, including chapters on anxiety and fear of change preventing rather than resolving serious conflicts over growth.

Trumbauer, Jean Morris. *Sharing the Ministry: A Practical Guide for Transforming Volunteers Into Ministers*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1995.

Helps congregations look at their members in terms of providing them with “ministries” in the church and the surrounding community.

Trumbauer, Jean Morris. *Created and Called: Discovering Our Gifts for Abundant Living*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1999.

Explores the interrelationship between God’s creation and us, as well as the mission and ministry we do both as individuals and as communities of faith.

Unitarian Universalist Association. *InterConnections*. Published five times per year.

This small newsletter is sent to the lay leadership of each congregation and is available on the web at www.uua.org/interconnections. There is a searchable InterConnections Resource Library at this web address. Vol II, Issue V, contains an index of articles in the first two volumes. See particularly Vol II, Issue V, for the article on small groups, and Vol III, Issue IV, for articles on newcomer classes and encouraging youth involvement.

Weeks, Andrew D. *Welcome! Tools and Techniques for New Member Ministry*. Washington, DC: Alban Institute, 1992.

This toolkit of intentional and compassionate strategies takes an encouraging, incremental approach to help even small groups get started quickly. Adapt an additional thirty-four pages of template forms, brochures, and procedures to your needs while employing Weeks’s point-by-point recommendations to make sure your signs and property invite, not confuse; create powerful, welcoming ads and print communication; train and prepare greeters; develop programs to incorporate and track newcomers during their critical first three, six, nine, and twelve months.

Wells, Barbara, and Jaco B. ten Hove. *Articulating (Y)Our Faith: A Creative Way to Explore and Express the Basics of UUism*. Boston: Young Adult/Campus Ministry Office, UUA, 2000. Available at www.uua.org/ya.com.

Responding to the complaints they have heard throughout their ministry about how difficult it is to describe UUism, Barbara and Jaco designed this workshop Leader's Guide (with an Addendum of Resources). They have found creative ways to encourage folks over the hurdles that keep them from expressing their UU faith to others. While written with young adults in mind, it can be productively adapted and used by all generations.

Young Adult/Campus Ministry Office. "Bridging Ceremony Resource Packet." Boston: UUA, 1997. Available at www.uua.org/ya-cm.

A packet of materials to assist you in changing your traditional end-of-year CLIFF ceremony to a BRIDGING ceremony, a ceremony that recognizes the important transition from youth to young adulthood. It includes a history, sample orders of service, readings and suggestions, testimonies, and ideas for staying connected to your young people after high school.

Young adult annotated resource list: www.uua.org/ya.

This web page has a wealth of information about a variety of publications for creating and sustaining programs for young adults. It also has links to some web sources.

Young Religious Unitarian Universalists (YRUU) resource list: www.uua.org/YRUU/resources.html.

See "The Five Components of a Balanced Youth Program" for descriptions of worship, community building, social action, learning, and leadership.

