

COVENANT

1. To covenant with one another is to engage in the spiritual and everyday practice of loving better. All Souls Covenant of Right Relations, Preamble. All Souls Committee on Right Relations, All Souls website (Governance/Right Relations)
2. “Based on the scholarship of countless scholars over the decades, covenant can be properly understood . . . to be a sacred family bond. In ancient Israel there was no word for family. Somebody could conclude, ‘Well, maybe for the ancient Hebrews family is not important.’ But you can’t read very far in the Old Testament before you realize that for them tribal bonds, kinship obligations, marriage and parenthood and brotherhood — all of these family relations are unbreakable bonds that God himself has instituted. So, obviously for the ancient Hebrews, family was very important. But then why [was there] no word for it?
“ . . . ‘[C]ovenant’ was that word . . . [for family. W]hen you establish a covenant, you establish a family bond; and . . . when God covenants with humanity in that series of Old Testament covenants, . . . he is fathering his people.

--Scott Hahn, in “Salvation History: One Holy Family,” online essay

A Leadership Perspective

1. Covenant relationship begins with a spiritual act of being knit together

Being “knit” together is like being chained to one another. In nearly every language, friendship is considered to be the union of souls bound together by the band of love. Covenant relationships produce a sameness – as though one soul were in two bodies. To be knit together, the strands of God-centered belief need to be tied in place. There must be a mutual personal commitment to the relationship that includes a mutual respect, resulting in building the other person and not tearing down.

2. Covenant relationship begins and grows by making and keeping covenant

The purpose of a covenant is to guarantee that the relationship will remain healthy and will last. The covenant itself is a series of words that are spoken to define the nature of the

relationship and the principles of commitment to it. When covenant is the foundation for relationships, the possibility of maintaining permanence and stability is greatly enhanced.

3. Covenant relationship begins with a “generous soul” attitude

The generous soul gives not only what is valuable and suitable to the relationship, but also asks what is honorable. A “generous soul” attitude causes both people to pour out affirmation, encouragement, and words of greatness. It quickly promotes the other person over self. All relationships grow when the “generous soul” attitude is present.

4. Covenant relationship grows and stays healthy as we protect the relationship

Every relationship will have its times of testing, stretching, problems, and disruption. Outside pressures can be expected; however, we must handle these pressures wisely and successfully if we are to maintain true covenant relationships. We need to consistently protect the relationship by being faithful at all times with our words, attitudes, and actions.

Your leadership and your life will be much more fulfilling and fruitful when you have covenant relationships.

--Frank Demazio, from “Building Covenant Relationships,” in his blog, Strategic Leadership

“Covenant” and Unitarian Universalism

“I would like new members of our churches to understand that in joining this church [you] are not allying [your]selves with a bureaucracy in Boston call the Unitarian Universalist Association. [You] are not joining a sect called Unitarian Universalism. [You] are not even becoming Unitarian Universalists. Rather, [we] are allying [our]selves with something much larger and much more important than anything categorized under a denominational label or religious brand name. [We] are connecting [our]selves with the great and noble heritage of the free faith. [We] are connecting [our]selves to the great and good of every generation that has stood against all idolatries and hindrances to the spirit, to those who have stood for truth as they saw it, even at the ultimate cost to themselves. [We] are connecting [our]selves with the freedom fighters and freedom lovers of every age and every race and nationality and every religion.”

--Rev. Dr. Earl K. Holt III in his essay “The Wise Weakness of the Congregational Way”

Our Ideals and Living Practices: The All Souls Covenant of Right Relations

We expect this covenant to be challenging, but we also expect it to inspire us to strengthen our relationships and deepen our sense of community. . . .We commit to living and working with this draft covenant, adjusting the ideals, and expanding the examples to make it truly our own. (from the Preface). . .

We practice hospitality, welcoming all those who enter.

We work to foster a multicultural and multigenerational community that sees diversity in all its manifestations as a sign of our strength.

We listen with respect and attention and speak with care.

We serve our church community with generosity and good humor, and we will acknowledge the service of others.

We resolve conflicts directly, using openness and compassion.

We acknowledge our mistakes and shortcomings and are willing to forgive those of others.

We support each other in times of joy and need.

--Excerpted from The All Souls Covenant of Right Relations,
developed by the All Souls Committee on Right Relations

For Reflection and Discussion

1. How do you understand being in covenantal relationship? What covenantal relationships come to mind?
2. Frank DeMazio writes of the need to be faithful “with our words, our attitudes, and our actions.” Do you feel particularly challenged in word, attitude and action? How do the three relate to one another?
3. Is there anything in The All Souls Covenant of Right Relations that jumps out at you as you reflect on your own role of in the life of the church?
4. How does your participation at All Souls relate to your ability to be in covenantal relationship?

--Mary Beth Hatem, for All Souls covenant groups