

First Unitarian Society of Milwaukee

MINISTERIAL COVENANT¹

As partners in professional ministry at the First Unitarian Society of Milwaukee, as colleagues who aspire to a relationship of mutual care and respect, and as advocates of excellence and integrity in ministry, we covenant with one another to strive for the following:

SHARED AND SEPARATE MINISTRIES

We commit ourselves to ministering, as individuals and as a team, with the whole congregation. We recognize and support our specific areas of focus, our different styles of ministry, and our individual calls to ministry – while working towards shared ministerial goals and a model of shared ministry.

We will speak well of each other and our ministries. We will respect and make room for each other's leadership. We will share ideas freely and give credit where credit is due for work done. We will be curious and learn about each other's strengths, gifts and challenges of ministry.

BOTH HIERARCHY AND TEAM

While we are all ministers and colleagues and commit to treating each other accordingly, we recognize that the Senior Minister supervises the Associate Minister, and the Associate Minister supervises the Director of Religious Education. Ultimately, the final decision in matters of ministry to this congregation rests with the Senior Minister. Open and frank discussion on these issues and decisions is not only acceptable, it is expected. Once a decision is reached, however, we will all support it. Disagreements and challenging questions should be reserved for private conversations. The Senior Minister also has a responsibility to support the Associate Minister and Director of Religious Education's ministerial identity within the congregation and amongst the staff.

RESPONSIBILITY TO CONGREGATION AND EACH OTHER

We recognize that we share responsibility for ministering to this congregation. We will create our schedules (preaching, hours, vacation, etc.) collaboratively, keeping in mind the needs of the congregation and our individual needs. Again, the final decision on these matters lies with the Senior Minister.

¹ This document was originally crafted by Craig Schwalenberg and Drew Kennedy, then revised by Dena McPhetres and Drew Kennedy, then revised by Dena McPhetres and Elaine Peresluha, then revised by Jennifer Nordstrom and Dena McPhetres. It was based on covenants graciously shared by Kelly Crocker, Michael Schuler, and Scott Prinster of First Unitarian Society of Madison, WI; by Justin Schroeder and Theresa Schwartz of Unity Church-Unitarian of St. Paul, MN; by Lindsay Bates and Jennifer Innis of Unitarian Universalist Society of Geneva, IL. Language was also added from Lynn Ungar of Church of the Larger Fellowship.

CELEBRATING THE STAFF'S MINISTRIES

We will strive to appropriately recognize and support the work of our non-ordained colleagues, whose efforts, while often less visible and acclaimed, contribute enormously to our more visible efforts. In support of our broader Staff Covenant, we will work together to promote healthy and respectful staff relationships.

COMMUNICATION AND FEEDBACK

We will continually work to cultivate a relationship of honesty and trust, seeking feedback and using one another as sounding boards. We commit to receiving this feedback in the spirit it is offered – colleague to colleague, with honesty, compassion, and good will. We will guard against triangulation and other unhealthy forms of feedback between each other and in the congregation as a whole. We will do our best to learn and accommodate each others' preferred communications styles and own our own preferences.

PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES

We will help each other to maintain meaningful and appropriate professional boundaries, including the setting of limits, in the interest of maintaining our mental, emotional, spiritual and physical well-being and enhancing our work and relationship with the congregation. This commitment includes an intention to keep, and to help each other keep, a Sabbath.

PROBLEMS

When problems arise or conflicts with this covenant are perceived, we commit to raising the issue promptly so we can learn from each other, make amends, and improve our ministries.

If I feel you have broken our covenant I will talk with you directly. I will name your behavior and how I feel about it, but not assume that a single action defines who you are as a person. I will be clear with you about what I would like you to do differently, and what, if anything, I need from you in order to make our relationship whole again. If I realize that I have broken our covenant I will go to you directly to apologize. I will name what I did wrong and what I intend to do in the future. I will ask you if there is anything you need from me to make our relationship whole. If you come to me to tell me I have broken our covenant I will listen harder to what you have to say than to my own defensiveness and embarrassment. I will be more invested in making our relationship whole than in being 'right.'

We encourage each other to seek professional counsel outside the congregation to facilitate and improve our individual and shared ministries. If we come to a difficult place in our personal or professional relationship, we will enlist the aid of a mutually agreed upon person or persons outside of the congregation to address the issues and heal our relationship.

CHANGES

We recognize that our ministries, our relationship, and this congregation, will change; as such, so will this covenant. We commit to revisiting this covenant and modifying it as needed (annually, at least.)

The Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom
Senior Minister

The Rev. Dena McPhetres
Associate Minister

Kimberlee Tomczak Carlson, M.Div
Director of Religious Education