

## Covenant

*Because you believed I was capable of behaving decently, I did.*

—Paulo Coelho

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10/19**

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*Covenant* is one of those ancient words that feel leagues away from our modern comprehension. Perhaps its meaning is lost in our contemporary fray and should be remembered but not re-enlivened? Or perhaps its ancient force—one bestowing the blessings of connection, community, and collaboration—is exactly what we need today, in these days of increasing isolation.

A covenant is traditionally an agreement between an individual and that which is greater than the individual. For example, a covenant can be made by members of a community that recognize the community itself as deserving of their commitment. A covenant can also be made between an individual, or a group of individuals, and that which they understand as ultimate, whether that be God or the Universe or the Spirit of Life.

The ancient Hebrew people understood a covenant between themselves and their God, which the prophet Hosea explains: “I will make for you a covenant on that day with the wild animals, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; and I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land; and I will make you lie down in safety” (*Bible*, Hosea 2:14–23). Hosea speaks of an agreement—if the people live honorably with one another, God will establish a peaceable kingdom.

Unitarian Universalists uphold seven principles (<http://uusterling.org/wordpress/about/unitarian-universalism>), the introduction

to which states: “We covenant to affirm and promote...” Our covenant is with one another (and perhaps that which we understand as worthy of our devotion) so that we may establish a peaceable, formidable, ethical, spiritual, and supportive faith community. We covenant first “to affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person.” This is a covenant calling us to certain behavior rather than certain belief. This is kin in many ways to the covenant that the Hebrews understood between themselves and their God. Both covenants speak of behavior—how we are called to live with one another.

### MINISTER'S MESSAGE

*Covenant—  
Because You  
Believed*



Rev. Anya  
Sammler-Michael

Covenants are forward looking. They establish goals for how we could be, thus recognizing the reality that we are not fully that way yet. Hosea spoke of “lying down in safety” not because it was a reality but as a radical hope. Unitarian Universalists speak of affirming “inherent worth and dignity” because it is a blessing that this world most desperately needs. Coming together in covenant means not an obligation, but a promise to live into the principles that we deem worth of our commitment. Coming together in covenant also means a promise to see others as worthy participants in this striving for

an ideal. As Paulo Coelho said, “Because you believed I was capable of behaving decently, I did.”

May covenant guide our ways.

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

### *Covenant: We Are in a Relationship*

What is a covenant? In general terms, a covenant is an agreement, usually formal.

The writing of this month's article on covenant is timely for me, as our Board of Trustees at UUUCS recently signed a covenant together to start our new calendar year as a group. We read our Covenant before each board meeting.

Why do we make a covenant?



*Bob Brown,  
Board President*

We make a covenant, in my humble opinion, because we should respect one another, respect ourselves, and focus our attentions to the needs of our congregation.

Is that not implied and understood when becoming a board member?

Even if implied and understood, we are only human. And being human, we are not perfect. I think of this not as a flaw but as what makes us special. We do recognize our imperfections and accordingly realize we will make mistakes, get distracted, be overwhelmed by work and family obligations. We will disagree, get frustrated, and be challenged in our duties as board members.

Creating and signing a covenant to start each year as we work together reminds us why we are here. We read our covenant out loud at the start of each meeting to bring us back in focus to our goal of working together so our mission and vision at UUUCS can be fulfilled.

And this should not be surprising as our Unitarian Universalist religion is a covenant. More than 50 years ago, after discussing, arguing, and compromising for a long time, the Unitarians and the Universalists from hundreds of different congregations agreed on seven Principles—seven rules—that they all could agree to follow:

1. The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
2. Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations;
3. Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
4. A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
5. The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
6. The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;
7. Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

I believe that the distinguishing feature of Unitarian Universalism is uniting not in obedience to a religious dogma, but in the common bonds of relationship—in covenant.

## RELIGIOUS EXPLORATION

### *Covenant: A Promise for All Ages*

When I was a child and my friends and I began playing Monopoly together, we found out that we each played it differently. Some put tax payments in the center of the board and took the collected money if they landed on Free Parking, others did not. Some allowed trades, deals, and alliances, but some did not. A few put a property up for auction for anyone to buy if the first person to land on it decided not to purchase it, while most of us only allowed players to purchase a property when she or he landed on it. Finally, there always seemed to be one player who would turn over the board if the game did not go the way she or he wanted. We quickly discovered that everyone had more fun if we decided on how we would play before we started. Before beginning the game, we agreed on the rules we would follow and we also agreed that if someone upset the board or intentionally knocked off the pieces, she or he would not get to play the next game.



*Linda Weaver,  
Director of  
Religious Exploration*

Like our Monopoly games, relationships are easier if we can agree on how we will play or live together. In Unitarian Universalist congregations, we do not have rules that are handed down to us that each person is expected to follow. Instead we create our own agreements, or covenants. Every year our children and youth work together to write a group covenant in their religious education classes. They talk about how they want to be treated and make promises about how they will treat one another in their groups. The children's covenants often include such statements as promises to share, keep their hands to themselves, and listen when it is another person's turn to talk. Older children and youth often include statements about levels of participation and about when to keep confidentiality. Since all of us make mistakes and may inadvertently stray from an agreement, the groups also discuss how they will bring individuals back into covenant. The groups are encouraged to problem solve together, with appropriate guidance from adults, both before and after disagreements arise.

By creating their own group covenants and finding their own solutions to challenging situations, children apply the Unitarian Universalist value of ensuring that everyone has a say on issues that matter to her or him. They are also practicing the way Unitarian Universalist congregations govern themselves and create community, which is based on democratic principles and rooted in agreement between community members.

*Children's Religious Education topics and a list of programs and events for children and families is on the calendar at the UUUCS website, [www.uusterling.org](http://www.uusterling.org).*

## COVENANT DRIVES OUR BEHAVIOR



Andrew Mertz

My fiancée and I are in the early stages of planning our wedding location. She is from the West coast, while I am from Virginia. So which coast do we get married on? The conversation kept coming down to who we wanted at the service. We were taking the practical approach of weighing the pros and cons of each option until we decided to take a step back. We asked ourselves the question, “Who must be present to

witness the creation of this sacred covenant?” It’s not about the parties, the best weather, or our familial obligations. When it all comes down to it, it’s about the covenant we are creating and who will be a vital part of that covenant into the future.

In many wedding ceremonies, there is a part of the service that asks those who are present if they will support this marriage, making them a part of the covenant. Perhaps this is a part of old traditions that don’t mean much today, but I like to think of this part of the service as the recognition that the people getting married are not alone in their commitment. Just as it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a community to help keep a marriage working. As our society and its technology make it easier and easier to become isolated and self-sufficient, I am asking myself Has the notion of covenant fallen out of favor, or is it needed now more than ever?

A hundred years ago, we called the community covenants obligations. You took care of your family members when they were in need. If your neighbor needed help harvesting the crop, you helped out. These days one must be a part of something like a faith community or fraternal society to enjoy this type of support. It’s so rare that it can seem abnormal or weird to experience it for the first time. Those who have been a part of a covenanted community like this, just as those who have been in a marriage, know that it’s not easy. It takes effort to make it work. It takes humility to deal with our fallible human nature. It takes a community that can stay at the table when the covenant is broken.

Rev. Anya’s article refers to the behavioral nature of our faith. Ours is not a religion of orthodoxy, focusing on the right beliefs, but one of orthopraxy, the right behaviors. Similar to Islam and Judaism, but not as prescriptive, our faith calls us to act out our covenant with all of humanity. We are a universal faith that insists that all people are worthy of our love, not just some. Our ministries of connection allow us to address the covenant within our community. Working with other UU congregations and the wider faith addresses our family covenant. An example of this is our new commitment to be a teaching congregation, which brought me here. Our ministries of social justice allow us to work on the covenant

we have with those outside our community. At the end of the day, what makes us different than a civic organization is that our behavior is driven by our covenant.

*You’re Invited ...*

### Understanding Ourselves

The UUCS  
All-Congregation  
Retreat

10am-2:30pm  
Saturday Oct. 19th



### Want to share something in the November newsletter?

- ✓ Reflections or articles related to the November liturgical theme, *mercy*
- ✓ Announcements (including those related to events that will take place in November and the first 2 weeks in December)
- ✓ Group or committee updates (what you accomplished, what’s planned coming up, etc.)
- ✓ Recent photos taken at UUS or during UUS events

Please send anything you’d like to include to [newsletter@uusterling.org](mailto:newsletter@uusterling.org) by October 15.



## A MONTH OF SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

### October: Covenant

Members of our congregation are invited to engage the practice of *Lectio Divina*. *Lectio Divina* is Latin for divine reading, spiritual reading, or holy reading, and represents a traditional practice of scriptural reading intended to promote communion with that which is ultimately meaningful. It is a way of praying or meditating with sacred words that calls one to study, ponder, listen and, finally, rejoice within the soul. Unitarian Universalists embrace a wide-reaching definition of scripture, finding words of profound meaning in the works of the world religions, scientists, poets, and the experiences of our own lives.

Find the time in your day to read each piece every day. Read, pause, read again, pause, and then reflect. You may choose to write each quote in a journal and add notes from your reflections. You may choose to read each piece to your family at the dinner table. You may choose to read in the morning or before sleep. You may choose to use the piece to gather your spirit for prayer or meditation.

#### October 1—6

##### From the Bible, Hosea 2:18

*I will make for you a covenant on that day with the wild animals, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; and I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land; and I will make you lie down in safety.*

#### October 7—13

##### From Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations*

*There are indeed moral universals—the Hebrew Bible calls them “the covenant with Noah” and they form the basis of modern codes of human rights. But they exist to create space for cultural and religious difference.*

#### October 14—20

##### From José Luis Ruiz

*You only exist because of the agreements you made with yourself and with the other humans around you.*

#### October 21—27

##### From Maya Angelou

*I do not trust people who don't love themselves and yet tell me, “I love you.” There is an African saying which is: Be careful when a naked person offers you a shirt.*

#### October 28—31

##### From J. M. Barrie, *Peter Pan*

*All the world is made of faith, and trust, and pixie dust.*

OCTOBER 2013

## ROLL THE DICE!

The RE Council cordially invites you to join us for food and board sport of a different sort at the Intergenerational Potluck and Game Night on Friday, October 4, at UUCS. Please bring a dish to share for our potluck starting at 6 pm then stay and play. Bring your favorite board game from home to share or come try a new one with friends. Check in with an RE Council member for more information or to let us know you plan on coming: Kathy Ashland, Christie Circle, Ben Friedson, Trish Harris, Karen Houck, or Linda Weaver.



3RD EVER...

## JAZZ POETRY SLAM!



THEME:

## "STAND YOUR GROUND"

"WHEN POLITICS CORRUPTS POETRY CLEANSSES" - JOHN F. KENNEDY

OCT 25TH, 7PM (REGISTRATION BEGINS 6:15) •

JAZZ provided by George Mason University School of Music students!

Co-hosted by Regie Cabico and Sarah D. Lawson. Regie is one of the country's leading innovators and pioneers of the poetry slam having won 3 top prizes in National Slams. Bust Magazine ranked him in the 100 Men We Love & The Kenyon Review called him the Lady Gaga of Poetry. Sarah is the founder and slam master of the Beltway Poetry Slam, DC's premier poetry slam.

Cash wine bar, decadent snacks... and Childcare will be available.

**\$15 REGISTER**

**\$5 ADMISSION**

AT: UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST  
CONGREGATION OF STERLING,  
22135 DAVIS DRIVE, STERLING VA  
20167

More Information and to Register: <http://www.uucsjazzpoetryslam.net/>

## SACRED STORY FOR ALL AGES

### *The Hedgehogs: A Traditional Wisdom Story*

It was the coldest winter ever. Many animals died because of the cold. The hedgehogs, realizing the situation, decided to group together to keep warm. This way they covered and protected themselves, but the quills of each one wounded their closest companions.

After awhile, they decided to distance themselves one from the other and they began to freeze. So they had to make a choice: either accept the quills of their companions or disappear from the Earth.

Wisely, they decided to go back to being together. They learned to live with the little wounds caused by the close relationship with their companions in order to receive the heat that came from the others. This way they were able to survive.

The best relationship is not the one that brings together perfect people, the one in which each individual learns to live with the imperfections of others and can admire the other person's good qualities.

### *Family Discussion*

What can you do to help yourself and the other people in a group to which you belong live with one another's imperfections and admire one another's good qualities?

What covenants have you helped create? Perhaps you created a covenant in a religious education class or another group at church. Maybe you helped create a classroom agreement at school or an agreement with colleagues at work.

How has a covenant or agreement helped members of your group get along with each other? How did the group members use the covenant or agreement if there was an argument or someone did not follow the agreement?

Have you ever apologized for how you treated someone else or forgiven someone for how they treated you? What happened? How did this feel?

If you were to help create a family covenant, what promises would you like to include?



## UU HISTORY CONVOCATION

The Unitarian Universalist History and Heritage Society and UU Collegium will sponsor the second UU History and Heritage Convocation on November 7–10, 2013 in Chevy Chase, MD.

The topic this year is “Unitarian Universalism in the Nation’s Capital and Beyond.” The event is open to ministers, scholars, students, and all who cherish the history and heritage of Unitarian Universalism. The registration deadline is October 15; more information is available at <http://library.constantcontact.com/download/get/file/1101899253605-492/Convo+Registration+Packet.pdf>. May our congregation be further enriched by Linda’s leadership as she takes on this challenge.

## CELEBRATE WORLD

## VEGETARIAN MONTH

Make a difference this October by informing others about the benefits of vegetarianism. You will be helping to create a better world because vegetarian diets have proven health benefits, save animals’ lives, and help to preserve the Earth. On Friday, October 18, come to UUCS at 6:30 for food samples, presentations, information, and more. Contact Harry Harris (Hharris3226@gmail.com) for additional information or to volunteer to help.

## CHILDREN’S CHOIR

## OPPORTUNITIES

Our celebrated music director, Kris Adams, is glad to work with all ages. If your children like the idea of making music and being involved in worship, enroll them in Children’s Choir sessions. Children and youth ages 4 through 18 are welcome. Parents are encouraged to stay for at least one class to assist.

The next performance to participate in will be on Sunday, December 22. Practices will be held on Sundays, November 10, December 1, and December 15 at 11:30 am (immediately after worship service) in the Emerson room. There is a requested donation of \$10.00 per child or \$20.00 per family. The spring performance is not yet scheduled, but keep an eye open for more information, contact Kris at [music-director@uusterling.org](mailto:music-director@uusterling.org).

## MOSAIC HARMONY CONCERT AT UUCS

A Mosaic Harmony gospel concert is in your future! We are performing here at UUCS on November 2 at 3:00 pm followed by a reception. There will be a free-will offering in lieu of ticket sales. Your support enables us to continue our charitable good works through song throughout the upcoming year. All members of your family are welcome.



*Mosaic Harmony  
photo by David York*

## CONGREGATIONAL RETREAT

Our retreat will be held on Saturday, October 19th, from 11:00 am to 2:30 pm at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Fairfax (2709 Hunter Mill Road, Oakton, VA 22124). All are welcome!

We will have fun working with facilitator Sarah Keely and deepening our relationships with others in the congregation. Sarah is a trained Enneagram specialist. The Enneagram is a geometric figure that delineates the nine basic personality types of human nature and their complex interrelationships. It can be extremely useful as a source of self-knowledge because it acts as a kind of “mirror” to reveal features of our personalities that normally are invisible to us.

We will share a meal, play games, and discover deeper self knowledge that will serve us as individuals and a congregation. All ages are welcome and will participate together for some portions of the retreat. During other portions, they will engage in age-suitable and fun projects. Please RSVP to [administrator@uusterling.org](mailto:administrator@uusterling.org).

## CALENDAR

### *Stay Up to Date With UUCS Events*

OCTOBER	
Friday, 10/4	<b>6:00 pm — First Friday Event: Intergenerational Game Night</b> Please see the article for details.
Sunday, 10/6	<b>9:00 am — Preschool–6th Grade Family Breakfast</b>  <b>10:30 am — Worship Service: “Blessing the Beasts”</b> Our annual intergenerational animal blessing service honoring the connections between all beings. Bring a photo of a dear departed pet or animal companion or a memento or photo of a live animal that you wish to have blessed. Our children’s choir will sing.  <b>Noon — Inquirer’s Class in Rev. Anya’s office</b>
Sunday, 10/13	<b>10:30 am — Worship service: “We Need a Witness”</b> We need a witness to our lives. This is the purpose of a covenantal community—a community bound by our commitments to one another. Andy Johnston will return to offer his much-celebrated Appalachian ballads.

<b>Friday, 10/18</b>	<b>6:30 pm — <i>World Vegetarian Month celebration</i></b> Please see the article for more details.
<b>Saturday, 10/19</b>	<b>10:00 am — <i>UUCS Annual Retreat</i></b> “Understanding Ourselves” at the UU congregation of Fairfax. Please see the article for details and RSVP to <a href="mailto:administrator@uusterling.org">administrator@uusterling.org</a> .
<b>Sunday, 10/20</b>	<b>10:30 am — <i>Worship service: “The Promises We Make”</i></b> There are promises that we inherit. It can be frustrating to deal with, especially when we are not even aware of them, and it can be a blessing when we embrace them.
<b>Friday, 10/25</b>	<b>7:00 pm — <i>Jazz Poetry Slam: “Stand Your Ground”</i></b> Come to share or listen to poetry. A joyous, justice-making event! Find more info at <a href="http://www.uucsjazzpoetryslam.net">www.uucsjazzpoetryslam.net</a> .
<b>Sunday, 10/27</b>	<b>10:30 am — <i>Worship service: “A Jury of Your Peers”</i></b> A reflection on the Trayvon Martin verdict and a consideration of the subjectivity and objectivity of justice. Violin music will grace our service.
<b>N O V E M B E R</b>	
<b>Saturday, 11/2</b>	<b>3:00 pm — <i>Mosaic Harmony Concert</i></b> An interfaith gospel choir delights all ages with a world of song! Please see article for details.
<b>Sunday, 11/6</b>	<b>10:30 am — <i>Worship service</i></b>  <b>Noon — <i>Inquirer’s Class in Rev. Anya’s office</i></b>
<b>Sunday, 11/13</b>	<b>10:30 am — <i>Worship Service</i></b>





