

Covenant of Right Relations – Summary of Process

The process of creating a covenant of right relations began in October 2008. On October 19th 2008, Rev Fred Small preached on “Right Relations.” During the sermon, Fred preached: “Like any effective spiritual practice, a covenant of right relations is a bell of mindfulness, its peaceful resonance calling us back to our true selves. It will not make us better people. But it will call us to be the best people we can be.”

Tracy Blanchard drafted a “Right Relations” session plan for Covenant Groups and distributed it to the Covenant Group Committee, which approved the idea on October 21, 2008. The session was used by the Covenant Groups and feedback was positive.

On October 26, 2008, a group brainstormed elements of a Covenant of Right Relations at First Parish. After that session, a smaller group met twice to organize the ideas from the brainstorm session.

The process was jumpstarted again by Rev Rebecca Benefiel Bijur in the fall of 2009. During the past eight months, the Covenant of Right Relations has been discussed at committee meetings and listservs, Program Council, a Standing Committee Forum, in a feature in the Meetinghouse News (this also included a full draft of the Covenant of Right Relations), and at two dedicated forums before and after church.

In the past two years, about 60 people have participated directly in brainstorming, discussion, and feedback sessions about developing a Covenant of Right Relations at First Parish.

Rebecca summarized what she heard in these discussions:

- There has been no objection or controversy about the concept of a Covenant of Right Relations. Everything I’ve heard has been supportive of putting a Covenant of Right Relations in place at First Parish.
- Many of those who reviewed drafts especially appreciated the quality of the writing and the spiritual tone of the working drafts.
- About ten people offered specific suggestions for improving or adding wording along the way. Nearly all of these suggestions were integrated into subsequent revisions of the covenant.
- About five individuals wrote detailed emails or offered longer comments to elaborate on aspects of the covenant that they would like to understand better or improve; all of these responses had to do with the wording and intention about dealing directly with others during conflict.
- About five people have been eager to know how First Parish will publicize the covenant and we will help one another be more accountable to our intentions as expressed in the covenant: what support and coaching will we offer to one another after the covenant is adopted?

On April 20, 2010, Standing Committee voted to recommend the Covenant of Right Relations to the congregation. The final draft was shared with the congregation on the front page of the May newsletter.

Rebecca preached on Right Relations on May 16th. Rebecca preached: “Ask yourself: Am I falling prey to the win-lose dynamic I have learned in other places? Am I seeking to persuade, and not to understand? This is the familiar way, but it is not the path we hope for one another in this community, and beyond. There is another way. It is a way of allowing conflict to be transformed into opportunity. Opportunity for increased self-awareness. Opportunity to understand those around us.”