



Report of the Healthy Congregation Committee to the Congregation

April 2022

Background In 2019 the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Durango (UUFD) Board of Trustees approved the formation of a Healthy Congregation Committee (HCC) in keeping with the 2017-2022 Strategic Plan. The formation of the HCC was delayed until April 2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Founding members of the HCC were: Sherrod Beall (Chair), Kathleen Adams, Jim Brooke, Mary Hockett and Laurie Meininger. As of this report, all members of the committee remain except for Jim Brooke; the HCC is actively seeking a new member.

Purpose of the Healthy Congregation Committee According to the charter approved by the Board of Trustees (BOT), the purpose of the HCC is to be a resource for promoting and facilitating open, respectful, productive communication, restoring right relationships, and addressing conflicts in our congregation in the spirit of our Mission and Relational Covenant. Our motto: *“We don’t have to think alike to love alike”*.

Activities of the HCC In 2021-2022, the HCC:

- Organized and attended trainings on facilitation and effective communication with BOT members.
- Drafted a Relational Covenant which has been presented several times to the Congregation for comment.
- Hosted a Sunday worship service in November 2021 with the theme “Love and Listening”.
- Hosted and facilitated a series of Listening Circles to provide a sacred and safe space for Congregants to listen to one another to restore trust and right relations within the Congregation, learn of congregational concerns and questions during the current ministerial transition and to give congregants an opportunity to practice active, generous listening. More than 60 congregants participated either in person or via Zoom.
- Drafted a policy and procedure for conflict resolution that, once approved by the BOT, will serve as the process by which conflicts between minister, congregants, and staff will be addressed and resolved.
- Is hosting and co-facilitating a congregation-wide workshop: “Speak Truth, Hear Love” on May 14, 2022, to further develop the Congregation’s skills in effective, non-violent communication, adopt the Relational Covenant and generate recommendations for UUFD leadership in the areas of: Communication, Governance, Congregational Relationships and Our Ministry (themes which emerged from the listening circles).

What have we learned from the Listening Circles? Over a span of four months, the Listening Circles conducted by the HCC identified several general themes. These are listed in order of number of “contributions” by members with a few predominant comments and quotes (*italicized*).

1. Communication

- Frustrated with lack of response from minister and leadership
- Frustrated/angry with lack of opportunities to participate; and
- Need for respectful, and transparent communications, including how the budget is prioritized, and how members of committees, teams, and the lay leadership are selected; and
- Need for a relational covenant

“Excited that change will improve communications.” “Decisions and changes made by the board and minister need to be known by the congregation.” “Concerned that a culture has arisen where people have no voice.” “Was drawn to our fellowship because it listened, and questions were allowed.”

2. Governance

- Concern that shared leadership is not really being shared
- Concern board has too much power
- Concern minister has too much power and was too involved in committees and micromanaged
- Recommendations for review of role of the minister and the governance (Hotchkiss) model
- Possible conflicts between by-laws and board policies

“Disappointed with the dysfunction around the annual meeting.” “Governance model is designed for democratic organizations and is inherently messy. Messy is good.” “Biggest concern is that everything we have built together will disintegrate.”

3. Congregational Relationships

- Appreciation and gratitude for minister’s service
- Excited for the future and upcoming opportunities that change offers
- Surprised, sad, and dismayed by minister’s leaving
- Confused by issues and conflicts
- Frustrated and dissatisfied with leadership and minister
- Concern with loss of support without a minister
- General concern for the health of the fellowship

“The Relational Covenant is a good way to flesh out how much is “us” and how much is “me”. ” “Believe we really care about each other.” “As a new member I am very frustrated. I am afraid to take sides.” “Open heartedness is needed.”

4. Our Shared Ministry

- Need to increase social justice activities
- Need to be more proactive in spreading the UU message
- Need for revitalization of Faith Formation, including family/youth support
- Desire for more spirituality
- Recommendation for more lay led homilies

“Our fellowship is supposed to be a resource for personal growth and joy.” “Spreading the UU message, which is hope, is an important role for the church.” “It is important that we grow to achieve our goals.”

The Healthy Congregation Committee is grateful to the Congregation for its honesty, openness and trust. We are more hopeful than ever that UUFD is embracing its future with love and a dedication to service. We are all learning and growing spiritually.