

BEHAVIOURAL COVENANT

*As the people of God, then, the holy people whom God loves,
you are to be clothed in heartfelt compassion,
in generosity and humility, gentleness and patience.
Bear with one another; forgive each other.
Colossians 3:12 and 13 (NRSV)*

This document reflects our core belief that our God is a good God, loving all of creation and loving each one of us as part of that creation. We are created in love and are called by God to love one another.

At the instruction of God, we are to clothe ourselves in compassion, generosity of heart, humility, gentleness and patience, bearing the burdens of each other and forgiving each other in times of hurt and conflict. With this in mind, the congregation of Central United Church (Central) commits itself to the following **Behavioural Covenant** which will govern our interactions in the congregation; on the Board; with our paid, accountable staff, including ministry personnel, salaried staff and contract staff; with our Celebrate Life Recovery ministry; with our volunteers and in all aspects of our shared life as a community of faith.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

In all of our interactions in the church, we will remind ourselves that we are the people of God. When we gather for meetings, congregational functions, worship services and any other gatherings related to the ministry of Central, prayer, meditation or some other form of Christian spiritual practice will be included in our gathering time.

RESPECTFUL LISTENING AND SPEAKING

We value the warmth and concern for others that is expressed in our community life at Central. In affirming that value, we will treat each other with respect and dignity, listening carefully to one another, responding with care and attention, knowing that wisdom comes to us through mutual respect and a determination to fully understand the perspectives of each other. We will refrain from personal, judgemental comments about others, seeking always to honour the Godliness in each person, respecting where each person is at in the journey of their life. However, we will not be reticent about

naming inappropriate behaviour when it occurs, including gossip and triangulation, recognizing that grace, mercy and love must guide our actions.

We will seek to communicate with each other directly and respectfully. We will respect boundaries that we have set for ourselves and boundaries set by those with whom we are interacting.

This document recognizes there are many ways in which human beings interact and communicate with one another, including direct conversation, body language and gestures, written and digital communication methods that may include e-mails, Facebook, Twitter, Messenger and other social media platforms.

We also recognize that in all human interactions, messages are sent and messages are received. In this document, we stress that it is important for there to be reciprocal agreements in place to govern our interactions with one another; in other words, if a message is sent that is not welcome, the person receiving the message should indicate that such is the case, so that awareness is raised and, ultimately, all are able to participate comfortably in the life of the community.

We also reiterate in this document that unsigned or anonymous correspondence, letters, e-mails or social media correspondence will not warrant any effort at a response. If such communication contains threats to the personal safety of persons or the property of Central, appropriate action will be taken to immediately address the threat.

EMBRACING DIVERSITY

We will honour diversity, as well as the breadth, depth and uniqueness of each person's perspective and life journey. We will create a space where it is safe to express opinions and ask questions, without an atmosphere of judgement or disapproval. We will create an environment where openness and transparency are considered normative for our work together. We recognize that all of us are vulnerable at times, with some more vulnerable than others, and have written Duty of Care Policy and Procedures to minimize power differentials that may exist in our faith community.

We also recognize the uniqueness of our Celebrate Life Recovery gathering and the gifts such a ministry brings. This ministry deepens our awareness of the vulnerability of the people who come to us in their recovery, compelling us to provide protection for them as part of our behavioural covenant.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

We acknowledge that conflict is a normal part of human relationships and organizations. We will resolve conflict guided by Matthew 18:15-17a

If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church.....

The conflict resolution model used for this document is also based on *The Dispute Resolution Handbook* (October, 2016) of *The United Church of Canada*.

- (a) In any conflict situation, all parties involved are encouraged to be open to change and deeper learning.
- (b) When long term, unheard and unresolved conflicts are revealed, we will make every effort to deal with them in a timely and loving manner, invoking the conflict resolution protocols outlined in this document, but only if no further harm is done.
- (c) We will engage directly with the individuals involved in a conflict situation.
- (d) Every effort will be made to resolve concerns, disagreements or conflicts openly and transparently unless confidentiality is required to ensure the safety of the individuals involved.
- (e) We acknowledge the potential for hurt and pain when conflict arises and commit to dealing with such situations in a timely and appropriate manner.
- (f) We will not hesitate to access conflict resolution resources to deal with a conflict situation that is beyond our ability to resolve.
- (g) We recognize that in some situations the nature of the conflict requires the intervention of legal authorities such as the police or courts of justice (e.g. child abuse, inappropriate sexual conduct). We will not hesitate to access these authorities and the wider courts of the United Church of Canada to assist in resolving such conflicts.
- (h) We will accept responsibility for the work and decisions undertaken by our faith community at Central. We will support these decisions with grace and will not undermine or find fault with others when we are not in agreement with the outcome.
- (i) We will direct our feedback to the appropriate person or decision-making group.

- (j) We will offer forgiveness to one another when mistakes are made and feelings are hurt, recognizing forgiveness is often a long and difficult journey. We recognize forgiveness is sometimes unattainable and ultimately left in the hands of God.
- (k) We will pray for one another and with one another as we seek to resolve conflicts.
- (l) We will believe the best in each other and seek to conduct ourselves with humility and grace in all of our interactions with each other.
- (m) We will communicate decisions directly, openly and in a timely manner to those most directly impacted by the conflict to ensure accountability and lessen conflict.
- (n) When conflict cannot be resolved at the moment or in the situation from which it arises, we will set an agreed upon time to deal with the conflict, thereby lessening the possibility for increased conflict with a prolonged passage of time until resolution.
- (o) If paid, accountable staff members are involved in an unresolved conflict situation with each other or the congregation. it may be brought to the Ministry and Personnel Committee who, in turn, have the authority to bring the conflict to the Board or the wider courts of the church, as deemed necessary.
- (p) Conflict situations that arise between congregational members that are unresolved may be brought to the Minister(s) of the pastoral charge who has access to wider resources for resolving conflict.

EXPRESSIONS OF APPRECIATION

We recognize that our work as a community of faith is often difficult and demanding. We will, therefore, express our appreciation to one another, in concrete and specific ways. We will speak words of love and thankfulness to one another for our shared life and the work we carry out in the name of Jesus.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE BEHAVIOURAL COVENANT

To ensure compliance with the covenant thus established, we will conclude each meeting or gathering with a “check in” time to review the Behavioural Covenant. We will offer mutual agreement when the covenant has been upheld. We will name those places where we have contravened, whether consciously or with unintended actions, the intentions of this covenant. If persons are non-compliant with the articles of this covenant, we will invite them to make amends. If non-compliance continues, we will use the conflict resolution process outlined above to resolve difficulties.

This document is a living document and can be changed or revised with the approval of the Board.

APPENDIX: HOLY MANNERS

The phrase “Holy Manners” comes from *Behavioural Covenants in Congregations: A Handbook for Honouring Differences* by Gil Rendle. (An Alban Institute Publication, 1998)

Holy Manners are promises we make to each other that embrace shared expectations of the Christian behaviour we strive to offer each other. Practicing Holy Manners creates safety within the faith community. We are more likely to experience healthy relationships within the faith community and are better able to create or renew meaningful friendships.

As children of God, we strive to make the following Holy Manners a reality as God continues to fill us with love, recognizing as human beings there will be times when we fail to live up to our covenant promises. It is then that learning to forgive one another, even as we ask God to forgive us, is part of our commitment to Holy Manners.

In our shared life as a faith community we recognize some among us are more vulnerable than others and that there are power differentials within a faith community. We have developed Duty of Care Policy and Procedures to deal with such power differentials.

We promise, to the best of our ability:

- To **love** one another, as God has loved us
- To **respect** one another. Harassment in any form including but not limited to verbal, physical, emotional, spiritual or sexual abuse will not be tolerated.
- To use “**I Statements**” that share our personal thoughts and discourage anonymous complaints
- To “**step back**” in the midst of difficult issues to allow an opportunity for prayer and reflection
- To **value** different ideas and opinions
- To **manage** conflict in such a manner that there are no winners and losers but respected participants
- To practise **forgiveness** in our interactions with each other
- To demonstrate **patience** in every situation
- To show **compassion** and **kindness** to everyone in need, recognizing that each one of us carries an inner life that is sometimes fragile, requiring care
- To demonstrate **sensitivity** to another person’s circumstances

Ratified by the Board of Central United Church March 25th, 2018