# Behavioural Covenant

**For Members of National Committees in The United Church of Canada**

## Background, Context, and Rationale

The United Church of Canada seeks to strengthen relationships that are grounded in behaviours and ways of being that demonstrate our Christian commitments in word and deed. This Behavioural Covenant for Members of National Committees provides guidelines on how committee members could work well together within the freedom of covenantal relationships for the good of the whole United Church.

The Behavioural Covenant helps to provide safer space and a framework for understanding, for deeper dialogue, and for co-creating intercultural community. It also offers guidelines on how committee members can be held accountable for and increase their effectiveness through their behaviours on committees. The covenant is not meant to be punitive; it is based on relationships and accountabilities to one another.

This covenant accompanies the United Church’s commitments to Holy Manners, the Equity Aspirations, and the Seven Sacred Teachings; it aims to honour our diversity. When it is lived out, the Behavioural Covenant offers the possibility of creative and transformative decision-making. It is for committee members, and has a different emphasis from the church’s Code of Ethical Conduct for Workplaces, a policy that is for General Council and regional council office staff.

## Theological Understandings

What is a covenant? A covenant is a relationship agreement.

Theologically, the understanding of covenant in scripture is expressed in God’s relationship with creation. In the story of Noah, God covenants with the whole creation, making promises to all creation. Throughout scripture, God continues to choose to covenant, where the terms of the relationship are set down by God and the people freely choose to live in covenant. Some familiar covenants include the covenant with Noah and all of creation (Genesis 9), the covenant with Abram/Abraham and Sarai/Sarah (Genesis 12 and 15), the covenant with the Israelites in Egypt (Exodus 6), the Ten Commandments (Deuteronomy 5), the covenant with Ruth and Naomi (Ruth), the covenant with David (2 Samuel), and a renewed covenant (Luke 1). These covenants, and others, are built on behaviours of responsibility and accountability, relationship with the integrity of all creation, and the vision of wholeness and goodness for all creation: shalom.

Covenant is built on the diversity of thoughts brought together in dialogue and decision making to enhance the whole church and our relationships in wider society. The creation of a behavioural covenant is grounded in A Song of Faith and in scripture.

From A Song of Faith, we are reminded of how we can be in community together:

In and with God,
 we can direct our lives toward right relationship
 with each other and with God.
We can discover our place as one strand in the web of life.
We can grow in wisdom and compassion.
We can recognize all people as kin.

A Song of Faith also notes that:

We sing of a church
 seeking to continue the story of Jesus
 by embodying Christ’s presence in the world.
We are called together by Christ
 as a community of broken but hopeful believers,
 loving what he loved,
 living what he taught,
 striving to be faithful servants of God
 in our time and place.

Mohawk peoples offer the teaching “Akwe Nia’Tetewá:neren,” which means “all my relations.” This teaching is a reminder that we are connected to one another, and that our relationship includes the responsibility of becoming one in mind and spirit through our decisions together. These words were given by Indigenous Elders, and the words are a part of the United Church crest to remind all of us of our commitment to a deeper spiritual relationship with one another.

The United Church crest holds the four colours of the medicine wheel. These colours symbolize the many teachings of how Indigenous Peoples relate to one another and with the world.

From Indigenous teachings, we remember the story of the Peacemaker who brought us the Haudenosaunee Great Law of Peace, from whom we learned the importance of peace and respect for all life. The Great Law of Peace teaches us to live in harmony with one another and with the natural world.

We also continue to find inspiration in scripture from the Beatitudes in Jesus’ sermon on the mount (Matthew 5:1‒12), suggestions for conflict resolution (Matthew 18:15‒20), and behaviours of communication and mediation in the early Christian community (Ephesians 4).

## The Behavioural Covenant

### As part of our covenant, we are all accountable to one another

As a national committee member, the chair(s) of your committee, in cooperation with staff, are accountable to you to help ensure that you:

* are treated with Holy Manners and/or the Seven Sacred Teachings in your interactions with others
* are respected as a contributing participant to enacting the Call and Vision of The United Church of Canada
* can participate and share in worthwhile ways
* have a clear understanding of the mandate of the role to which you have been appointed
* have a clear understanding of the limits and boundaries of the role to which you have been appointed
* receive important training on equity, diversity, and anti-oppression that is offered by the General Council Office, and how these apply to your committee’s work
* can access the resources and time required to carry out your responsibilities
* receive clear feedback, clarification, and guidance should you fall short of fulfilling any responsibilities
* can name any challenges you are experiencing or barriers to your participation so that, collectively, they can be addressed with creativity and grace
* have the tools to find resolution when conflict arises
* have access to Equity Support Team member(s) and/or the Anti-Racism and Equity Lead staff
* receive thanks and appreciation for your service and contributions
* receive reimbursement for approved out-of-pocket expenses
* are in an environment that is safe and free from harassment or discrimination
* can speak with staff of the General Council Office (the Program Coordinator for Member Engagement about any difficulties you may encounter), the staff resource for your committee, or regional council staff as needed

### As part of our covenant, we are each accountable

As a national committee member, you are accountable for:

* applying the Seven Sacred Teachings and/or Holy Manners in your interactions with others
* not discriminating, and intentionally not engaging in deculturation or in words or behaviours that are—or can be perceived as—racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, ableist, discriminatory, or exclusionary in any way
* aiming to apply the learnings from the educational experiences on equity, diversity, and anti-oppression to the ongoing work of your committee
* remembering that everyone has a different intersection of their lived experience and lived identity
* showing up for meetings having properly prepared and willing to participate fully
* being aware of your duties, the mandate of the group, and policies related to what is expected of members
* fulfilling your duties and expectations in relation to the committee’s terms of reference
* being willing to take part in a conversation if there are concerns that you are not fulfilling your duties or expectations
* being sensitive to differences in communication styles and preferences, including neurodiversity
* being attentive to exclusion and the many ways people feel or are excluded
* notifying staff resource people or the chair (s) of the committee, in advance, if you are not able to attend a meeting
* keeping what is discussed confidential
* being aware of any conflicts of interest that you may have, being open to identified perceived conflicts of interest by others—and being willing, if necessary, to remove yourself from a particular conversation or from the committee
* aiming to participate fully: as much as possible, come to meetings with the intent of being fully present
* seeking training, clarification, and advice as needed
* striving for accuracy and quality to meet agreed-upon expectations
* sharing constructively for the good of the whole
* understanding that different people have different ways of communicating; avoiding jumping to conclusions when someone communicates in ways that may be unfamiliar to you
* working and participating in meetings in ways that allow them to move ahead and be constructive
* being aware of and upholding The United Church of Canada policies and procedures on sexual misconduct; conflict of interest; workplace discrimination, harassment, and violence response; dispute resolution; and the church’s commitments to equity.

### Continuing to live out the covenant

The General Secretary is committed to ensuring that participating on a national committee is a full and meaningful relationship. This covenant is therefore created for the good of the whole. Each member on a national committee is expected to actively live out this covenant and to hold one another accountable for doing so.

The committee chair (s), in cooperation with staff, are responsible for continuing to work with committee members to help them live into their covenant or to recognize when they can no longer do so.

If a member is unable to fulfill their duties, or if the member’s participation in the group is not in the best interests of the group or the General Council:

* the committee member can voluntarily resign by submitting a written resignation to the chair (s), or
* the committee member may be asked to resign from their position, or
* the chair (s) of the group may consult with the committee or body that appointed the person to review the member’s appointment

If the behaviour of a national committee member is against the law, the matter will be taken to the local authorities.

If there are conflicts between national committee members, the church will follow mediation and the approved processes that are in place.

Committee members commit and agree to maintain healthy conversations.

### What if the covenant is broken?

If a member feels that this covenant has been broken, they should first consult with the chair of the committee to seek a resolution. If the offending person is the committee chair, the member should consult the General Secretary.

### Commitment to the Behavioural Covenant

All members of each national committee, along with the chair (s) and General Secretary, are asked to sign a single copy of this covenant as a tangible way of committing to mutual relationships, responsibilities, and accountabilities.

## Appendix A: Holy Manners

We will:

* keep God at the centre of everything we do
* each speak for ourselves
* speak for a purpose
* separate people from problems
* allow for full and equitable participation
* attend to others carefully without interruption
* welcome the conflict of ideas
* take a future orientation
* demonstrate appreciation
* honour the decisions of the body
* commit to holding one another to account when we do not keep our holy manners
* keep the discussion at the table
* be mindful of our body language
* check in about good use of time
* allow the quiet people to speak, with an invitation to speak
* sincerely say what we really feel

## Appendix B: The Seven Sacred Teachings

Within the Indigenous Church, conversations are often grounded in the Seven Sacred Teachings, also known as the Grandfather Teachings. It is not expected that non-Indigenous people understand or know these teachings on their own. If/When there are Indigenous members on a committee, provide space for Indigenous Peoples to bring their knowledge to the discussion. For members of the Indigenous Church, these teachings are often put ahead of the Holy Manners.

The Seven Sacred Teachings are:

* Love
* Respect
* Courage
* Honesty
* Wisdom
* Humility
* Truth

**Note: Some of the Indigenous teachings used in this covenant are those of nations surrounding Toronto, the Iroquois and Anishnawbe nations. United Church committee members are encouraged to seek guidance and teachings from the nations that surround them as these vary among Elders, Knowledge Keepers, communities, and nations.**

## Appendix C: Liturgy Based on A Song of Faith (2006) and the Call of The United Church of Canada

**One Voice**:

Called together by Christ
as a community of broken but hopeful believers,
striving to be faithful servants of God
in our time and place as we offer our varying gifts,

**Many Voices:**

**We commit to keeping God at the centre of everything we do**.

**One Voice:**

We confess that we have not always lived up to our vision of community;
we need the Spirit to reorient us,
to live an emerging faith,
challenging us to live by grace rather than entitlement.

**Many Voices:**

**We commit to being truthful in our communications by**
**speaking for ourselves and speaking purposefully.**

**One Voice:**

We are called as a diverse community of people celebrating our differences,

**Many Voices:**

**and so we commit to honouring our intercultural vision**
**through welcoming the conflict of ideas,**
**making space for the full and equitable participation of all,**
**enabling especially people who are quiet to speak,**
**being mindful of our body language,**
**listening carefully without interruption, and separating people from problems.**

**One Voice:**

We are called to be bold disciples;

**Many Voices:**

**as we live into our call to discipleship,**
**we will hold one another to account when we do not keep to our commitments.**
**We will take a future orientation in our discussions and imagination,**
**demonstrate appreciation,**
**and honour the decisions of the body.**

**One Voice:**

We are called to lead in hope with purpose and vision
as members of a community held and inspired by God,
partnering with God in the mending of the world,

**Many Voices:**

**so we commit to keeping the discussion at the table**
**and to be faithful stewards of our time.**

**One and Many Voices:**

**We affirm that we are called by God,**
**as disciples of Jesus,**
**to offer leadership to The United Church of Canada**
**as it seeks to be a bold, connected, evolving church**
**of diverse, courageous, hope-filled communities**
**united in deep spirituality, inspiring worship, and daring justice.**
**Amen**

## Appendix D: Liturgy Based on the Call and Vision of The United Church of Canada

One:

Called by God, as disciples of Jesus,
The United Church of Canada seeks to be a bold, connected, evolving church
of diverse, courageous, hope-filled communities
united in deep spirituality, inspiring worship, and daring justice.

**ALL:**

**As leaders,**
**we commit to living deeply into our spirituality through spiritual practices demonstrated in our ability to keep God at the centre of everything we do.**

**We commit, in our meetings, to respond to the call of deep discipleship by**
**speaking for ourselves;**
**speaking with purpose;**
**separating people from problems;**
**allowing for full and equitable participation;**
**creating space for quiet people to speak, with an invitation to speak;
sincerely saying what we really feel;**
**attending to others carefully without interruption;**
**being mindful of our body language;**
**welcoming the conflict of ideas;**
**demonstrating appreciation;**
**keeping the discussion at the table;**
**honouring the decisions of the body;**
**exercising faithful stewardship in our use of time;**
**and committing to holding one another to account when we do not keep our Holy Manners.**

One:

And, as we practise daring justice,
we will be courageous in focusing on the future in our decisions and strategies.

Amen.