

Unitarian Universalist Church of Greater Lansing

**OPERATIONAL POLICY on Living Our Values Team (LOV) and Process for Feedback on Congregational Relationships and Congregational Operations**

Adopted by Senior Minister Rev. Neal T. Anderson on September 27, 2023

“As a spiritual community inspired by awe and wonder we: Nurture spiritual growth, connect in authentic, loving relationships, and engage in courageous work for peace and justice.”

**PURPOSE:**

The purpose of the lay-staffed “Living Our Values” Team (LOV) is to serve as partners to the congregation and congregants in building, maintaining, and repairing congregational relationships and ensuring we are living in alignment with the UU Lansing Covenant and covenantal relationships in general. The LOV team is also called to support and nurture the health of the congregation and its many thriving ministries, with a primary focus on operational policies, processes and communication.

**ROLES/RESPONSIBILITIES:**

**Congregational Relationships:**

The role of the LOV Team is to support the congregation by helping to create and maintain an environment in which congregants can “connect in authentic, loving relationships” and helping to manage and potentially resolve conflicts, misunderstandings, and or harm between individuals or small groups, arising from actual or perceived breaches of covenant that have harmed some or all of the parties involved.

The Team will engage in its work of supporting covenant-based relations, or “right relations” through three modalities:

- Supporting covenant-based relationship **in the absence of harm or conflict**, through proactive, skills-building activities such as workshops, seminars, and discussion circles, among other possibilities;
- Addressing **potential or actual harm in the moment**, as proactive bystanders reminding those involved of our covenant and commitment to mutual care.
- Serving as facilitators and guides **after harm has been caused** by assisting the parties involved to engage in conversation, mutual healing, and recommitment to covenant.

Team members will commit to supporting and nurturing healthy relationships in part by modeling authentic, loving interaction with others, and showing concern when harm has been caused, whether intentional or not- initially recognized or not. They will also attempt to identify any patterns of harmful or hurtful behavior that may arise from lack of awareness regarding various issues, cultural differences, unrecognized sources of privilege or inequality, or other factors that suggest the need for proactive action (e.g. workshops) by the congregation, as a whole.

The Team will practice confidentiality when engaging with parties to harmful incidents or discussing those incidents in participants’ absence, to the extent possible, while maintaining a spirit of openness and transparency in sharing lessons learned through the process of discussion and resolution.

The LOV Team, and its members, will remain fair-minded and impartial in instances of intervention in real-time harm or conflict and in the process of supporting parties after harm has been caused. They will help parties in conflict achieve true resolutions that improve and enhance their relationships, rather than assignments of fault or blame that often damage relationships and engender resentments.

The LOV Team will remain fair and impartial in matters related to congregational covenant and right relations, not serving as advocates for individual congregants, staff, ministers, specific program areas or subgroups of the congregation. The health and vitality of the UU Lansing community will be held at the center of all the LOV Team does.

#### Congregational Feedback:

The LOV Team will also receive, reflect on, and directly respond to feedback from the congregation and congregants related to processes, activities, programs, ministries and communication within the community, with an eye towards supporting and productively enhancing these. Congregational processes, activities, programs, ministries and communication may include the work of the Senior Minister, staff, the lay leadership (with the exception of the Board), or members of the congregation, the congregation's operational policies & processes, and the congregation's activities, programs, and ministries. The team honors the confidentiality of its internal reflection and deliberation processes, while committed to the transparency of information sharing and outcomes. The team will serve as an open channel in responding to feedback, questions, or the need for additional information that may arise in our increasingly complex organization, in particular paying attention to areas/issues where it may become apparent that there is a significant critical mass of congregational interest.

The LOV Team may, at times, proactively survey the congregation and staff to solicit feedback on a particular topic, but it is anticipated that most congregational feedback will be in the form of email, phone calls, and personal communications with the LOV Team and/or the Senior Minister and congregation's staff.

The LOV Team will work collaboratively with the Senior Minister and at times staff to find a way forward on issues that warrant an adjustment of congregational policies or processes, and provide clarifying information to inquiring parties when such would be helpful.

The work of the LOV Team will reflect UU Lansing and UU values, and the congregation's governing policies, and will seek to strengthen the shared covenant-based fabric of our community.

The LOV Team and its members, will remain fair and impartial in matters related to congregational life, not serving as an advocate for individual congregants, the Senior Minister, the staff, specific program areas of the congregation, or specific subgroups/teams of the congregation. The needs of the UU Lansing community, as a whole, will always be held first and foremost at the center of all that the team does.

#### SELECTION PROCESS & ACCOUNTABILITY:

The LOV Team will engage in the described roles and responsibilities as a **community of practice**. Recognizing that everyone possesses different skills and expertise, LOV is a team that is committed to reflecting, learning, and acting together, over time. Because this team functions as a 'community of practice,' rotation on/off the team will include a process of invitation and discernment in conversation with the facilitator, and/or the Senior Minister. The team will consist of at least 5 members: a facilitator, and at least 4 other members who can be called on when feedback or congregational relationships require. The team will strive to flexibly welcome in those who are committed to this work and provide

ways to graciously release those who need to move on, with an eye toward helping, over time, as many people as possible deepen their covenant-based skillfulness. The team will gather as is determined necessary to engage in the work.

This team reports to the senior minister and will submit periodic reports on its activities to the congregation's Board of Trustees, as is helpful or requested.

#### COLLABORATIVE RESPONSIBILITIES:

The LOV Team will focus on matters relating to healthy relationship and the healthy embodiment of our UU Lansing Covenant. Recognizing it is difficult to discuss healthy relationship and interpersonal dynamics without also discussing specific programmatic or operational matters that constitute the contexts in which relationship has gone awry, the LOV Team has primary responsibility for "right relationship" and covenant-based issues but also engage congregants who have not found other avenues to engage operational policies, processes, and communication. The team will model healthy, ongoing communication, and collaboration.

The Team will submit a Monitoring Report for their activities once a year to the Senior Minister who reports compliance to the Board.

#### FEEDBACK:

UU Lansing's Senior Minister, staff and lay leadership will always strive to utilize "direct address" in welcoming feedback from the congregation in matters stated above.

With that in mind, any feedback on relationships within the congregation or that which is related to processes, activities, programs, ministries and communication within the community shall be first addressed to the individual(s) who is responsible and or accountable for the feedback being provided. The individual(s) who are responsible and accountable for the feedback being provided will do their best to address the feedback. If the congregant providing the feedback remains dissatisfied with the response they can then address their feedback to the Senior Minister or write a formal letter to the LOV Team sharing their feedback. The LOV Team will then discern response(s) based upon the policy above.