

## Commission on Appraisal 2020 Annual Report

*A covenant is a mutual sacred promise between individuals or groups, to stay in relationship, care about each other, and work together in good faith. In the Unitarian Universalist tradition, we seek to raise the “WE” above the “I” – the community above the individual.*

*As seekers, we willingly CHOOSE to love each other and stay in relationship over and over, again and again. In this way we may break promises, but by leaning into the transformational power of our faith, we can begin again in love. (CoA October 2019)*

This has been a year of discernment, transition and discovery for the members of the Commission on Appraisal. We began the year with nine commissioners and following the abrupt resignation of two commissioners in February 2020, we are ending the year with seven committed members.

In 2019 and 2020, we stayed focused on our goal of producing a report on the topic of Covenant. We met face-2-face and in numerous virtual gatherings. In each one of those sessions, we continued appraising and studying this worthy subject. Our willing labor was to carefully consider and discern the nature and validity of the promises, pledges, and bonds we make, break and are called to mend.

It has been a year of deep discussions, thoughtful sharing, and deliberation of a broad spectrum of ideas. As noted by then Chair, Rev. Xolani Kacela, Ph.D., in the Commission on Appraisal 2019 report:

*We realize that there have been many efforts to examine covenant in our movement. Notably, Rev. Susan Ritchie led a taskforce that generated a significant report. Also, the Commission on Institutional Change, led by Rev. Leslie Takahashi, has studied the nature of covenant throughout our movement and has commented on their findings in their reports. These have been worthy efforts. Still, we believe there is more work to be done.*

Our hope is that the work we are preparing will shine a new light on the power of covenant and refresh the space which it currently occupies within our denomination. To this end, we have created and will present a workshop at UUA General Assembly 2020, “Unlocking the Power of Covenant”. This piece of work is in addition to the forthcoming report (which will include a renewable virtual component, namely a website). Both the report and the website will be available in time for the 2021 UUA General Assembly, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

It is important to note that in early 2020, we struggled with Covenant, within the CoA. A series of missives from one member to others on the CoA, breached the covenant which we all agreed to uphold. When approached by their fellow commissioners about this painful behavior, two members chose to resign from the commission, rather than openly address the issues which were raised. They left the group, without taking steps to restore the trust that had been broken. With support from Carey McDonald, the remaining seven members of the CoA weathered this storm with grace and compassion. We turned towards each other and together decided to move forward. Our work between March and June 2020, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, was particularly fruitful. We embraced technology, discovered new skills, and drew upon personal resources. On the whole, in the past year, we focused on gathering viewpoints and ideas that will (1) Help others better understand covenantal relationships and (2) Re-invigorate the use of covenants throughout our movement.

The endeavors of the current Commission on Appraisal are rock-solid. The members are caring, strong and dedicated to Unitarian Universalism. We are looking forward to finishing our work in 2020-2021 and having a completed publication on Covenant for the 2021 UUA General Assembly. It has been my honor to serve alongside of them.

Respectfully submitted,  
Rev. Carol Thomas Cissel, MDIV, MS  
Interim Chair, UUA Commission on Appraisal