

MONMOUTH REFORM TEMPLE CODE OF ETHICS

INTRODUCTION

Monmouth Reform Temple (MRT) is a Reform Jewish community that exists in the context of our people's covenantal relationship with God. Ours is a vibrant, multi-generational congregation, guided by tradition, grounded in the modern world, and infused with the sacred values of our faith.

MRT is an inclusive congregation that demonstrates respect for the needs of all. Through worship, learning, and a concern for social justice, we strive to better ourselves, our community, and the world at large.

Our Jewish values embody the teaching that every human being is created in the image of God (*b'tzelem Elohim*). We therefore strive to hold ourselves to the highest standards of personal integrity, social responsibility, and human decency. When we behave ethically and hold ourselves accountable, MRT is a safe, welcoming, and sacred environment.

This values-based code of ethics sets forth the principles and expectations for adherence to standards of conduct for our congregants, lay leaders, clergy, and professional staff (whom we refer to collectively as "partners"), as well as visitors and guests, whether participating in a MRT activity that is in the building, online, or offsite.

MRT has adopted two value statements, one drafted by MRT (see Addendum A) and one drafted by the URJ (see Addendum B). It has also adopted procedures delineating how allegations of unethical behavior based on the MRT Code of Ethics will be addressed (see Addendum C).

CODE OF ETHICS

1.0 EXEMPLIFY HOLINESS (*K'DUSHAH*)

MRT welcomes all who wish to engage with our sacred community.

- ✧ We embrace everyone without regard to religious background, age, ability, race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, marital status, or socioeconomic status.
- ✧ We strive to make all who participate in our community feel a sense of belonging with the expectation that their ideas and concerns can be openly stated and responded to with respect.

1.01 INCLUSIVITY AND RESPECT

Every individual who enters our holy MRT community is valued. Congregants, clergy and staff members will conduct themselves and their relationships in an open and honest way, treating others with respect, dignity, and fairness in accordance with the Jewish value of *derech eretz* (decency and respect). To that end, congregants, clergy and staff members will:

- ✧ Conduct themselves with good manners and common courtesy.
- ✧ Refrain from *lashon hara* (negative talk, gossip, and slander).
- ✧ Refrain from derogatory speech.
- ✧ Encourage open discussion, while maintaining confidences.
- ✧ Express openness and willingness to engage with all other congregants, clergy and staff members and support one another's work.

2.0 HONESTY (YOSHER)

MRT expects all who engage in our community to conduct themselves in an honest manner.

- ✧ We promote open and honest communication that allows for addressing differences constructively.
- ✧ We protect the confidentiality of privileged information, either about an individual or the synagogue, and do not disclose it without permission. For example, this includes personnel information such as employment status, compensation, and performance review, as well as personal information about an individual's health, financial status, or family matters.
- ✧ We respect the efforts of others and do not take credit for their work.
- ✧ We recognize, respect, and protect the intellectual property rights of our synagogue and others. We obey copyright laws governing the use and distribution of published materials.
- ✧ We make decisions regarding synagogue-related matters with transparency, openness and accountability, unless confidentiality dictates otherwise. For example, it is especially important that we protect inadvertent and premature release of names of candidates for employment. This includes adhering to placement guidelines of the CCAR (Central Conference of American Rabbis), ACC (American Conference of Cantors), and ARJE (Association of Reform Jewish Educators) when hiring clergy.

2.01 PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL INTEGRITY

We are expected to behave in a manner that brings credit to MRT and to the community. This behavior includes, but is not limited to:

- ✧ Conducting ourselves in an honest manner and being truthful in communications and conduct.
- ✧ Conducting all financial affairs with complete honesty and integrity and refraining from financial impropriety (e.g., embezzlement, nonpayment of just debts, inappropriate use of restricted funds, or tax evasion).
- ✧ Representing accomplishments and achievements accurately.
- ✧ Considering the impact of accepting gifts (such as a clergy or staff member's acceptance of a gift from a congregant; a congregant's or staff member's acceptance of a gift from a synagogue vendor) and accepting gifts only in accordance with gift and conflict of interest policies on such matters, always being mindful of perceptions that such acceptance may generate.
- ✧ Refraining from hiring or firing, rewarding or punishing staff or volunteers, and awarding or denying contracts based solely on personal considerations (e.g., favoritism, nepotism, or bribery).
- ✧ Establishing and enforcing the appropriate procedures to protect the assets of the Congregation.
- ✧ Staying informed of and providing accurate information on issues, practices, policies, rules, regulations, and laws that govern our work, professional, and volunteer activities – always striving to implement them in a forthright, fair, and equitable manner.
- ✧ Reporting unethical or illegal conduct to appropriate internal and/or external authorities.
- ✧ Recognizing, respecting, and protecting the intellectual property rights and contributions of others, including complying with copyright laws that govern how published materials are used and distributed.

2.02 CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

MRT partners should avoid conflicts of interest and the appearance of conflicts of interest. Those in positions of authority and influence, including members of the board, officers, and staff members, must conduct all congregational business in a manner that is morally, ethically, and fiscally of the highest order and can bear public scrutiny at all times. Decisions of the board, officers, and staff must always be guided by the policies of MRT and in its best interests. Wherever possible, conduct should be based solely on the best interests of MRT under applicable laws and regulations. Actions should not be influenced by personal considerations or the appearance of such factors.

For our purposes, a “conflict of interest” means one or more of these scenarios:

- ✧ A transaction in which an MRT partner or a close family member has a direct or indirect interest, financial or otherwise, in the outcome of any transaction or matter involving the synagogue.
- ✧ Considerations or competing interests exist, real or perceived, for an interested partner, other than the best interests of the synagogue.
- ✧ A situation in which an MRT partner has a relationship with other parties that might reasonably be expected to affect the conduct of the congregant or staff member in a manner inconsistent with the overriding duty he or she has to advance the interest of the synagogue.

When acting on behalf of MRT, a congregant or staff member should never, without full disclosure and appropriate approvals from relevant synagogue leaders:

- ✧ Divulge or release proprietary or confidential information about MRT, its deliberations, or congregants, clergy and staff members.
- ✧ Obtain personal advantage or benefit due to one's synagogue position.
- ✧ Use MRT's property or resources for personal benefit.

A potential conflict of interest can be difficult to discern. It may arise in settings beyond the obvious business relationship setting (e.g., the acceptance of gifts, honoraria, royalties, or using intellectual property that belongs to the synagogue). Congregants, clergy and staff members must consult others about any real or potential conflicts and assist one another to resolve any such conflicts.

2.03 CONFIDENTIALITY

Confidentiality involves preserving information, especially as it pertains to personal or private information about congregants, employees, volunteers, and business and financial data of the synagogue. Personal and financial information is confidential and should not be discussed or disclosed without permission. Even well-meaning disclosure of information revealed in confidence may have damaging results. Care should be taken to ensure that confidential conversations are not overheard and that any documents containing confidential information are not left in the open or inadvertently shared. Under certain circumstances, however, it may be necessary to share otherwise confidential information to avoid harm. As special diligence is required for employment discussions, the community shall:

- ✧ Protect information to which we have access by way of a "need-to-know" to support our professional roles in the congregation, including personnel information related to employment status or progression, compensation, performance management, etc.
- ✧ Discourage the seeking of employment-related information about others.
- ✧ Refrain from speculation about other synagogue partners' personal situations (e.g., health, financial difficulty, marital problems).
- ✧ Refrain from sharing, even with family members, information obtained in confidence (e.g., in an executive session of a board meeting).
- ✧ Establish and strictly follow procedures when conducting personnel searches, including, in the case of clergy, guidance from their professional organizations (e.g., CCAR or ACC). It is especially important to prevent inadvertent and untimely release of candidate names and prior employment details.

There are inherent challenges in using the internet, email, and social media, as well as texting and other electronic communications. MRT partners should demonstrate respect, professionalism, and good judgment when using any such technology. Special care must be taken to protect confidentiality when using social media (e.g., blogs, message boards, chat rooms, electronic newsletters, online forums, social networking sites, and other sites and services that permit users to share information and photography with others).

3.0 HONOR (KAVOD)

MRT values acting with integrity.

- ✧ We act solely according to the synagogue's best interest when acting on its behalf.
- ✧ We refrain from using one's synagogue position for personal advantage or benefit. For example, we refrain from hiring or firing, rewarding or punishing staff or volunteers, and awarding or denying contracts based solely on personal considerations such as favoritism, nepotism, or bribery.
- ✧ We conduct financial matters related to synagogue involvement with complete honesty. For example, we refrain from financial impropriety in decisions regarding restricted, committed, and discretionary funds.
- ✧ We are bound by sacred obligation to uphold financial agreements made with the synagogue. If a change in personal circumstances occurs, we will inform those charged with managing MRT's finances and make appropriate arrangements.
- ✧ We conduct employment practices and related decision-making in an ethical and legal manner. We establish and enforce the appropriate policies and procedures to protect the employees of the congregation, such as fair employment policies, grievance reporting, and conflict resolution procedures.

3.01 SOCIAL AND PUBLIC PERSONA

Leaders' behavior outside the synagogue, which may seem private, could affect not only our own reputations, but also that of our synagogue. We must gauge our actions accordingly.

- ✧ A positive reputation, including our presence on social media, is one of the most difficult assets to establish and one of the easiest to lose. We should be mindful of when our personal communications could be misconstrued as representing the views of the synagogue or another organization, and we should refrain from communications that are inappropriate (e.g., obscene content and defamatory statements).

3.02 INCLUSION AND DISCRIMINATION

MRT strives to maintain an environment and policies that promote respect for every individual in our congregation and our community regardless of: ancestry, age, disability (mental, physical or emotional), genetic information, gender, gender identity or expression, marital status, medical condition, military or veteran status, national origin, race, religion, sexual orientation, financial means, or political affiliation.

3.03 EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES: HIRING, DISCIPLINE AND TERMINATION

MRT, under the guidance of its Human Resources (HR) Committee, provides all employees a copy of the MRT Policy Handbook for Employees (updated April 2023). Should any portion of the handbook conflict with the Code of Ethics, the Code of Ethics will take precedence and supersede any procedures otherwise delineated by the handbook.

Decision making is undertaken in an ethical and legal manner. Those MRT partners who engage in such matters have a responsibility to:

- ✧ Conduct all personnel matters with integrity.
- ✧ Implement hiring, discipline, termination, and other employment practices in a forthright, fair, legal, and equitable manner.
- ✧ Establish and enforce the appropriate policies and procedures to protect the employees of the congregation, including fair employment policies, grievance reporting, and conflict resolution procedures.
- ✧ Refrain from hiring or firing, rewarding or punishing, and awarding or denying benefits based on personal considerations, including but not limited to, favoritism, nepotism, or bribery.
- ✧ Stay informed of, compliant with, and provide accurate information on issues, practices, policies, rules, regulations, and laws that govern our work, professional, and volunteer activities.

- ✧ Report unethical or illegal conduct to appropriate internal and/or external authorities. Ensure rigorous adherence to effective procedures that respond to grievances, incidents and needs.

4.0 COMPASSION (RACHAMIM)

MRT embraces the fundamental value of performing acts of lovingkindness (*g'milut chasadim*).

- ✧ We treat others with respect, dignity, fairness, and compassion.
- ✧ We refrain from derogatory speech, negative talk, gossip, and slander, whether in person or on social media.
- ✧ We oppose bullying, including any unwanted behavior that degrades, humiliates, or oppresses another. Verbal, physical, or cyberbullying is never acceptable.

5.0 JUSTICE (TZEDEK)

MRT believes everyone entering our sacred space has the right to feel safe and respected, and that we are morally and ethically responsible for one another (*kol yisrael areivim zeh bazeh*).

- ✧ We do not tolerate sexual harassment, including unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal, physical, written, or visual conduct of a sexual nature.
- ✧ We do not tolerate acts or behaviors that exploit the vulnerability of another, take advantage of a power imbalance, compromise one's moral integrity, or create an intimidating, offensive, abusive, or hostile environment.
- ✧ We strive to protect those who appear to be the victims of abuse or neglect, including spousal abuse, child abuse, verbal abuse, physical abuse, and other types of domestic violence.

Procedures for addressing allegations of unethical behavior are available on request from the MRT main office.

5.01 PERSONAL BOUNDARIES AND HARASSMENT

As MRT partners, we must ensure that personal boundaries, including those related to romantic and sexual matters, are always respected. We also are responsible for responding appropriately to allegations or discovery of boundary-crossing by others. MRT partners should never:

- ✧ Engage in any act or behavior, even if it appears to be consensual, that exploits the vulnerability of another, takes advantage of a power imbalance, compromises one's moral integrity, or creates an intimidating, offensive, abusive, or hostile environment.
- ✧ Use a position or authority to intimidate, bully, or unduly influence others or allow other partners or guests of the synagogue to do so.
- ✧ Engage in abusive, harassing, or bullying behavior or unlawful discrimination.

5.02 SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND MISCONDUCT

Whether explicit or implicit, expectations of sexual favor as a condition of a person's employment or as they affect a person's standing within the community are unethical. Such conduct unreasonably interferes with a person's work or volunteer performance and creates an intimidating, hostile, and an offensive working environment. The following categories of behavior are inherently unethical and never acceptable in the MRT community:

- ✧ Sexual abuse, including of a child.
- ✧ Sexual activity with a person who is legally incompetent or otherwise unable to give consent.
- ✧ Physical assaults or violence, or any attempt to commit such acts.
- ✧ Unwanted, intentional physical contact.
- ✧ Possession of or sharing of pornographic or sexually explicit material.

- ☆ Unwelcome sexual activities, advances, comments, bullying, electronic communications, stalking or invasion of privacy.
- ☆ Direct or implied threats that submission to sexual advances will be a condition of employment, promotion, or affiliation with the synagogue.