

U.U. Small Group Ministry Quarterly



Vol. 4, No.2, Winter, 2008
Published by the U.U. Small Group Ministry Network

Behind the Scenes of Small Group Ministry

Susan Hollister, Newtown Square, PA

A successful small group ministry (SGM) program requires a support structure of individuals working together to keep the program running smoothly. Foremost there must be oversight of the entire SGM program and coordination of the four areas of responsibility: leadership, membership, content, and visibility. Leadership is facilitator support; membership is group formation; content is session plans; and visibility is program promotion. Depending on program size, these functions can be performed by the Program Coordinator (PC) and minister or by a Steering Team. (See a companion article by Susan Hollister in the Fall 2006 Issue of the Quarterly which discusses the way these functions vary by congregation size).

Oversight: The Coordinator guides the program, keeps the vision of small group ministry, sets long-range goals, and makes adjustments to improve the program. In a medium to large program with ten or more groups, a Steering Team (ST) provides oversight. The ST is composed of the Program Coordinator(s), the minister, several facilitators, and facilitator coaches. They plan and lead the monthly facilitators' meetings, recruit new facilitators, develop a training curriculum, and coordinate training sessions.

The ST may also evaluate the program at year's end, asking participants about favorite topics, topic preferences, reasons for joining a group, and whether expectations were met. (The Network web site has a selection of evaluation forms contributed by congregations across the country). Based on questionnaire results, the Coordinator(s) or team make necessary changes to enhance the program and expand its appeal in the congregation.

Leadership: The Leadership function is to recruit, train and support group leaders or facilitators. The initial facilitators may be an outgrowth of the program's implementation team. **To purposefully grow the program, it is essential to have a cadre of well-trained facilitators in reserve.** Potential facilitators are chosen on the basis of SGM experience, qualities and skills, and interest in serving as a group leader. Training includes topics such as the mission of small group ministry, the SGM model and session components, facilitator expectations and responsibilities, facilitation skills, group health maintenance, and support resources.

(Continued on page 2)

Growth Through Division: A Covenant Group Successfully Splits!

Rev. Heather Janules, Bethesda, MD

Unitarian Universalism is a faith with few "miracle stories" but many miracles. As the ministerial liaison to the Covenant Group program at Cedar Lane Unitarian Universalist Church in Bethesda, Maryland (850 adult members, 300 children,) **I can attest to the transformative experiences fostered by our covenant groups - intellectual, spiritual, emotional and relational experiences that are nothing short of miraculous!**

Our program experienced a "miraculous" event in the Fall of 2007 when one of our long-time groups took the brave step of splitting into two...and both groups emerged from the split as healthy, growing covenant groups.

Bob Harrison, one of the early founders of Cedar Lane's covenant group program, tells the story this way: "The group was organized to follow the 'Living by Heart' (LBH) curriculum developed by the Reverends Laurel Hallman and the late Harry Scholefield. The group, had met year-round and had grown to a dozen participants.

"After three years together, when a thirteenth person asked to join, several participants talked about starting a new group, feeling that the larger size of the group -- while inspiring a rich intellectual conversation each week -- was beginning to diminish the potential for intimacy and deeper community. One member of the group asked Heather what she thought. She encouraged us to split into two different groups.

"Some members readily assented, others weren't so sure. All agreed that they valued mightily the confidentiality and community they had developed..."

In the end the group decided to split. As some members of the original group hadn't gone through the entire LBH curriculum before, the "new" group decided to follow more closely the poetry-rich course manual. **Since its formation in October 2007, the new group has grown from five to eight and the original Living By Heart group continues to thrive.**

Together, we at Cedar Lane learned that while splitting a group can be emotionally treacherous, it can be successful and may yield new opportunities for covenant group members, new ones and long-timers alike. As well, splitting a group is in harmony with the core goals of the covenant group ministry. To close a group (that is getting too large) contradicts one of the missions of covenant groups - to always have space for new people to join this special ministry. In addition, allowing a group to get too large detracts from the gifts of Small Group Ministry.

For those covenant group leaders who are considering splitting a group, we encourage you to take this leap of faith, despite the challenges and difficult feelings that may arise. Good things - and even miracles - are sometimes the fruit of risk.

Behind the Scenes of Small Group Ministry

Susan Hollister (continued from page 1)

Monthly leadership meetings are the most important way to support facilitators. Facilitator meetings have a dual purpose: they model the SGM format and provide peer consultation. The format includes two check-ins: personal check-in for deeper connection among facilitators, and group check-in, an opportunity to share both successes and challenges and to brainstorm solutions with fellow leaders. Discussion topics center around skill building on a practical issue, such as welcoming a new member or dealing with disruptive behaviors. In a large program it is effective to divide the facilitators into two or more groups of ten. Steering Team members and coaches, former facilitators experienced in both SGM and group dynamics, meet with each group.

Membership: The most important tool for membership is the data base of group composition, contact information, and meeting logistics. Initially the minister and/or Program Coordinator manage the information, add new members to groups, and monitor group status. As the program grows, the job may be divided among two or more people on the Steering Team. In a program with 10+ groups, a staff member may be enlisted part-time to manage the data base, receive sign-up sheets, send out orientation materials, and communicate group status to the PC(s).

Many programs have ongoing sign-ups, adding new group members throughout the year. In addition, the Steering Team may sponsor a Covenant Group kickoff event in September when people can ask questions, participate in a "sampler" small group, and fill in a registration form.

Content: There is a variety of Small Group Ministry/Covenant Group session plans used in congregations. The Coordinator or ST may choose a book of published sessions and make copies available to all the facilitators. Some groups use a book format and discuss a different chapter at each meeting, or they may choose their own topics and take turns presenting them. The minister often writes the session plans and relates them to current sermons. In larger programs a session team works with the minister to develop session plans. They also solicit topic suggestions from group members. Creating a session plan can even be a service activity! Part of the monthly facilitator meeting is devoted to distributing and discussing session plans. The facilitators may even "try it on for size" by answering the discussion questions during the meeting.

Visibility: The Program Coordinator or Steering Team keeps Small Group Ministry at the forefront by publishing newsletter articles and Sunday bulletin notices and by extending invitations from the pulpit. They also manage a bulletin board and/or webpage and host sign-up Sundays. The team produces communication tools: a brochure, program guidelines, fliers, sign-up sheets, and a welcome

letter for new group members. They acknowledge the dedication of facilitators by scheduling a recognition or Installation Sunday and an annual appreciation dinner.

Like a well-oiled machine, the five-part structure supports Small Group Ministry/Covenant Groups from the wings and ensures the program's continued growth and success.

The UU Small Group Ministry Network (UUSGM Network)

Our Mission:

"To help create healthy congregations and a vital Unitarian Universalist movement by promoting and supporting Small Group Ministry."

The UU Small Group Ministry Network is a membership-based organization. The purpose of the Network is to support small group ministry and related shared ministry models in Unitarian Universalist congregations through developing new resources, networking and training opportunities.

Joining the Network

For info on joining and benefits of membership, see the back page of this Quarterly, or visit www.smallgroupministry.net

Board & Staff

Diana Dorroh, President
Steve Becker, Vice President
Rev. Helen Zidowecki, Secretary
Susan Hollister, Treasurer
Anne Haynes
Walter LeFlore
Mary Ann Terry

Advisory Board

Rev. Bob Hill
Rev. Rav. Glenn Turner



Coordinator

Rev. M'ellen Kennedy

The UUSGM Quarterly Editor: Rev. M'ellen Kennedy

The UUSGM Quarterly provides information, explores issues and shares resources on Small Group Ministry or Covenant Groups. It is funded by our members like you. Do you have a SGM experience to share, or a testimonial, or an exciting aspect of the SGM program in your congregation? Please send your submissions, your ideas and requests for topics to mellen@smallgroupministry.net.

What Is Small Group Ministry?

Small Group Ministry (SGM) or Covenant Groups are revitalizing our congregations. The groups provide an opportunity for community building and spiritual exploration for their members. The groups serve both newcomers and “old-timers” in our congregations who may not yet have found a way to connect deeply in our congregations.

In recent years, many Unitarian Universalist congregations have started Small Group Ministry Programs. **A typical group has about ten members, is guided by a trained facilitator, meets at least once a month and creates and abides by a covenant or set of ground rules.** Facilitators usually meet regularly for ongoing support and training.

The **group meeting format** includes a time for centering, an opening reading, a check-in, usually a discussion of a topic agreed on by members, thought-provoking questions, check-out and a closing. Each group develops a way to welcome new members, stays connected with the larger congregation, and participates occasionally in service projects to benefit the congregation and/or the larger community. The kinds of topics that groups explore are far ranging and are usually tailored to the interests of participants. **Small Group Ministry is creating new opportunities for connection, growth and depth for our visitors and members.**

Written by M’ellen Kennedy

Need Help with Your Youth Group? Youth SGM Resource Available Commissioned by the UUSGM Network Written by the Rev. Helen Zidowecki

The Small Group Ministry format has been used effectively with Youth to create powerful group experiences. **Drawing on her years of experience working directly with Youth, Helen Zidowecki has created “Small Group Ministry with Youth”, a useful booklet for those wanting concrete help.** This resource includes a session for facilitators, and discussion and session plans for The Five Steps to Building Community and Six Components of a Balanced Youth Program. A total of 25 session plans are included. The resource costs \$25 plus \$5 shipping and handling. All proceeds from this resource, in excess of development cost, go to support the ministry of the UUSGM Network. **You can order the resource on-line at smallgroupministry.net or contact Susan Hollister at sbhollister@juno.com**

Importance of Using “I” Statements In Our Small Group Ministry

Mary Ann Terry, Charleston, SC

Each month as a topic at our Facilitators meeting, we focus on one of our basic guidelines for keeping small group ministry effective. Last month we focused on the importance of making ‘I’ statements. We do this not only as a part of our check-in, but throughout the whole meeting. After a topic has been presented each member of the group reflects on it and then shares their unique experience. Their statement begins with “I...”

The importance of this guideline is that when “I” statements are used, the group becomes a place of real sharing and sincerity. When it is an “I” statement it is a personal witness to your own life. This invites respect then for the person who is speaking. When it is the “real” person sharing, there is an honoring of their truth. In a church where we honor diversity, another’s sharing of his or her sincere thoughts is a gift to one’s life.

Sometimes groups get into advice giving where statements can begin with “you”. Sometimes, there are statements that create distance and start with “they.” It is best to speak from “I”, specifically owning and describing your own experience.

One person speaks at a time while the group listens. There should be no interruptions while the person speaks and little questioning from others, except for something they want to clarify. This process allows the expression to come from within, without fear that someone will correct or advise the expression. The speaker stands alone with the truth of their own experience. The speaker is allowed to speak from insides rather than getting directions from outside.

We hope that this will encourage our group member to trust themselves and to allow what is there to emerge. It is alright for someone to not speak in the group. Sometimes there is nothing to say or nothing to say, yet. We want to be careful that people are not speaking to please others, but listening to themselves and others.

Stay in the Loop! Subscribe to Covenant Group News

Covenant Group News is a free electronic newsletter on Small Group Ministry and Covenant Groups read by 1300 forward-looking Unitarian Universalists. CGNews is edited by Diana Dorroh, distributed by the UU Small Group Ministry Network. To submit your ideas for future topics, contact diana_dorroh@hotmail.com

To subscribe send an email with the word “subscribe” in the subject line to

Cgnews-request@smallgroupministry.net

Invite Every New Member To Join a Small Ministry Group and Provide Growth and Strength for Your Church.

Diana Dorroh, Baton Rouge, LA

If you're not already doing so, consider intentionally inviting every new member of your religious community to join a small group ministry group. This has the advantage of giving them an immediate connection to eight to ten other community members and a chance to be listened to on topics they may never have been able to discuss with any other group in their entire lives. In James Luther Adams' terms, it will give them a chance for "intimacy and ultimacy." **I predict that it will greatly improve the percentage of new members that you retain.** It gives the church a connection to them, through the group leaders. It also helps the membership committee or other leaders know how the new members' first year is progressing. If you do new member follow-up, you can trust your group leaders to provide the church's connection to their new participants. Then your church can concentrate the formal follow-up on the people who didn't say "yes" to the invitation to join a group. **It is also invigorating for existing groups, giving them a chance to get to know the new and often younger members.** And it will "grow" your small group ministry program. **You may soon find that most of your church members are participating in a small ministry group and that your church community is reaping the benefits.**

These invitations seem to work best when they come from the group leaders themselves, but new community members do not always make contact with a group leader who has an opening in their group. One way to organize these invitations is to make them part of every newcomers class. **The class leader should explain during each session why it's recommended that the participants join a group.** Then you can have some group leaders who have openings attend the last class. They can invite the new people on the spot. If your existing groups don't have enough openings to accommodate the whole class, open a new group. This requires that you have "leaders in waiting" or a process that allows you to tap new leaders, as needed.

At the Unitarian Church of Baton Rouge, we've had success with this strategy and we've been able to keep the commitment to offer a small group ministry group slot to every person who takes our newcomers class. Our minister, Steve Crump, conducts the newcomers class and promotes our small group ministry program in every session of the classes. Eight years ago, it meant we had to concentrate on leader recruitment and training, as opening a new group was the norm for the first few years of our program. This training was usually done "just in time" for each set of new leaders. Now we have 17 groups and

about 190 people participating. Our membership is 350, so our small group ministry program is more than half the size of our membership. **It has definitely helped with membership retention, made follow-up with new members easier, and has enhanced our church.** We have had a way to immediately process our feelings about events, like 9/11 and hurricane Katrina, as well as our own church issues, in a way that gives each member a chance to be listened to and gives immediate general feedback to the leadership. In addition, the processing is led by experienced lay ministers, our group leaders. **With so many people either in groups or having been in a group, the listening and being in right relationship that is being learned in small group ministry has spilled over into our community.**

I'd be happy to talk to you about implementing this at your church. Please feel free to contact me at Diana_dorroh@hotmail.com or 225-766-2764

Starting a Revolution: Roots of the Small Group Ministry Movement An Audio Interview with Rev. Glenn Turner Peter Bowden, UU PLANET

Rev. Glenn Turner who retired from ministry a few years ago, was one of the original leaders in the UU small group ministry movement. This CD is an oral history, 70 minute interview of Glenn conducted by Peter Bowden. This is a great starting point for those of you interested in getting to know more about our SGM movement's history. Glenn shares his experiences with small groups and working with facilitators, and his thoughts on where all of this is going. The interview is divided into fifteen tracks. You may listen to samples of each track and order the audio CD at www.smallgroupministry.net.

Enhance Your Program With A Local or Regional Training

A regional Small Group Ministry workshop gives the perfect opportunity for congregations in a given geographic area to get together, to receive training and guidance from experienced old-timers and experts, and to hear about each other's program successes, challenges and ideas. A workshop may be for those starting new programs, for those in existing programs or a combination, depending on local needs.

The UU Small Group Ministry Network helps local leaders plan such conferences.

To explore the possibility of a local or regional conference in your area, please contact us at conferences@smallgroupministry.net.

**Beyond The Basics:
Moving Forward with Your Small
Group Ministry Program
Saturday, February 23, 2008, 10 - 4
Sponsored by NH/VT Community for SGM
Hosted by the North Universalist Chapel
Society, 7 Church St., Woodstock, VT**

This workshop is designed for lay and professional leaders working with a functioning Small Group Ministry (SGM) Program -- that is a program that has been in existence for at least a year. The workshop will offer an opportunity to gather for mutual support, in depth sharing and advanced training. Topics will include:

- * celebrating SGM strengths,
- * addressing common challenges,
- * developing strong facilitator training,
- * facilitation as a spiritual practice,
- * actual SGM experience,
- * assumptions & theological underpinnings of SGM.

Leader: Rev. Dr. M'ellen Kennedy, UU community minister and community psychologist; co-founder and editor of UU Small Group Ministry Quarterly. Rev. Kennedy has been working with la-led small groups for over 20 years and has offered facilitator training to hundreds of lay and professionals leaders. **Cost:** \$40 for one member of a church to attend and \$35 for each additional person from the same church. Lunch is included. If you have questions, contact M'ellen Kennedy at mellenken@aol.com or 802-453-5469. **Registration:** You can download the form at www.nhvt.uua.org.

**Small Group Ministry:
Building and Strengthening Programs
March 1, 2008, 9 4
Sponsored by Main Line Unitarian Church
U U Small Group Ministry Network
Joseph Priestley District of the UUA
Main Line Unitarian Church
816 South Valley Forge Road, Devon, PA**

The Small Group Ministry (SGM) movement is continuing to grow in Unitarian Universalist Churches as groups of ten gather with a facilitator to consider issues of spirituality, life stories and challenges. Small Group Ministry strengthens congregations by building connections among individuals, engendering compassion and supporting commitment to serve. Whether you are considering starting SGM or have an established program, join us for a full day

of training and inspiration to further your efforts in SGM. A special focus will be on developing skills of current facilitators.

CoLeader: Diana Dorroh, Program Director and Rev. Steve Crump have led the Baton Rouge Program since its beginning in 1999. She participated in several workshops organized by Rev. Bob Hill. Her special interest is in using small group ministry to strengthen and grow congregations. She currently serves as volunteer staff at the Unitarian Church of Baton Rouge. Diane is President of the Small Group Ministry Network.

CoLeader: Rev. Helen Zidowecki has been involved with Small Group Ministry for 10 years in Maine and in the Augusta congregation, where she is a facilitator and on the Topic Committee. Her special interest is Small Group Ministry in Lifespan Faith Development, and as a process in changing congregations. She was the Program Consultant for the Northeast District until July 2007. Helen resides in Litchfield, ME.

Registration Fees: \$35/one registration includes breakfast and lunch; \$100/three registrations; \$25.00 each additional registrant: Discount of 10% for UU Small Group Ministry Network Members.

**Building and Sustaining a Strong
Small Group Ministry Program
Saturday, September 20, 2008 9-4
Hosted by the Unitarian Society of
New Haven CT**

Many Unitarian Universalist congregations are trying Small Group Ministry (or Covenant Groups) as a way to strengthen congregations. This workshop is for lay and professional leaders who are: 1) considering beginning a Small Group Ministry Program, 2) in existing programs in need of revitalization and/or 3) seeking a way to integrate SGM into the core of congregational life. The following topics will be covered: the power and purpose of Small Group Ministry; the essential components of a Small Group Ministry program; addressing common challenges in an SGM program; developing shared leadership within a small group; development stages or facilitators and groups; handling group difficulties; and a hands-on experience in an actual small group.

Leader: Rev. Dr. M'ellen Kennedy, a UU community minister and community psychologist. who has been working with lay-led small groups for over 20 years and has offered facilitator training to hundreds of lay and professionals leaders. (see more under Feb 23 Workshop above).

Registration and Cost: For more info contact M'ellen Kennedy at mellenken@aol.com.



Small Group Ministry Institute

August 17 – August 22, 2008
The Mountain Retreat & Learning Centers, Inc.
The Highlands, North Carolina

An opportunity for teams and individuals from congregations of all sizes to learn and practice Small Group Ministry (SGM) with experienced practitioners and leaders. Sessions are designed for new and experienced program organizers, facilitators, ministers and congregational leaders. The week will include presentations, hands-on workshops, small group ministry experiences, sharing, networking, informal “porch chats,” worship – and time to enjoy what The Mountain has to offer!

- ❑ **Explore the powerful impact that Small Group Ministry is having in congregations.**
- ❑ **Build the skills of new facilitators and enhance skills in problem resolution.**
- ❑ **Participate in Small Group Ministry as Spiritual Practice.**
- ❑ **Explore Small Group Ministry as related to Social Justice and Faith in Action**
- ❑ **Create and select effective sessions, including the use of art, music, and movement.**
- ❑ **Learn how to lead your church’s small group ministry program**
- ❑ **Take home a vision and plan to explore, begin, enhance or expand Small Group Ministry.**

The format will include presentations, discussion and workshops, and the **opportunity to meet daily in a small group**. Come yourself—and bring a group from your congregation! Participants will receive a packet of material and resources.

Comments from Participants of previous conferences:

"Thank you so much for all the great useful information. I enjoyed the variety of presenters and topics . I feel I have the tools I need to start SGM in my church. I also appreciated tips for how I might modify the approach to fit my home congregation."

"I will take back to my church tons of info and insights into how to be more effective. I have more confidence in my abilities and purpose."

"The experience filled my head with information and my heart with inspiration. I feel confident that I can now enhance the spiritual lives of members of my congregation."

Cost: The Mountain, shared occupancy, and Program Fee: \$492; after July 1, \$517
To Register, visit www.mountaincenters.org or Call (828) 526-5838

Sponsored by the **Small Group Ministry Network**, see www.smallgroupministry.net
For questions about conference content, contact Rev. Helen Zidowecki at hzmre@hzmre.com

Small Group Ministry Institute

CONFERENCE LEADERSHIP TEAM

Steve Becker has been involved with small group ministry since 2003 in the Seattle, Washington area, where he has offered facilitator training, served as a member of the Theme Team, and has facilitated a group for persons with special needs. His special interest is developing topics for covenant groups. He is the Vice-President for the Small Group Ministry Network. Steve lives in Seattle.

Diana Dorroh, Program Director, and Rev. Steve Crump have led the Baton Rouge program since its beginning in 1999. That program now has 200 participants. She participated in several workshops organized by Rev. Bob Hill, when he was District Executive of the Southwest District. Her special interest is in using small group ministry to strengthen and grow congregations. She currently serves as volunteer staff at the Unitarian Church of Baton Rouge. Diana is President for the Small Group Network.

Susan Hollister has been a Unitarian Universalist for 27 years and is a member of Main Line Unitarian Church in Devon, PA. She helped launch Small Group Ministry at MLUC and is past coordinator of the Program. She co-facilitates a group, assists the current coordinators, and serves on the session writing team. Susan promotes small group ministry as an ideal way for newcomers to meet people and make connections. Susan is the Treasurer for the Small Group Ministry Network.

Walter LeFlore is a third year seminary student at Andover Newton Theological School. He's focused on enhancing spiritual development and building authentic communities, using the SGM process. He has over twenty years experience using small group process as an organization consultant and as a facilitator in the SGM program at First Parish Stow/Acton, MA. Walter is on the Small Group Network.

Rev. Helen Zidowecki has been involved with Small Group Ministry for 10 years. She is a member of the Augusta congregation, where she is a facilitator and on the Topics Committee. Her special interest is Small Group Ministry in Lifespan Faith Development, and smaller congregations. She was the Program Consultant, Northeast District, until July 2007. She leads workshops and writes materials on Small Group Ministry. Helen resides in Litchfield, ME. She is secretary for the Small Group Ministry Network.

Other leaders may be added. Conference participants will be involved in the facilitation of the Small Group Ministry Sessions throughout the week.

Small Group Ministry At General Assembly June 25-29, 2008 Fort Lauderdale, Florida For more info, visit uua.org



The UU Small Group Ministry Network will present the following workshop at General Assembly this year. In addition, we hope to offer a booth in the Exhibit Hall.

Strategies and Solutions For Small Group Ministry Challenges

Many congregations are using Small Group Ministry to meet the needs for intimacy and spiritual growth. We will provide strategies to successfully run programs to prevent and avoid common pitfalls. We'll focus particularly on handling "extra grace needed" members, and hidden cultural biases that can limit program effectiveness.

**Do You Want
to Subscribe to this Quarterly?
Become a Member of
The UU Small Group Ministry Network!**

Individual: \$40US Annually (1 copy of Quarterly)
Congregation: \$100US Annually (6 copies of Quarterly)

We need your donation beyond your annual membership fee to make our larger efforts possible -- such as research and development of resources.

Additional Donation: \$100 \$250 \$500 \$ _____
Total Enclosed: \$ _____

Name _____
Address _____

Congregation _____

District _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Please complete the form above and mail with your check made out to "UU SGM Network" to the UU SGM Network, Attn: Susan Hollister, 3313 Goshen Road, Newtown Square, PA 19073.

You can also join and renew on-line: smallgroupministry.net

Benefits of Membership

1. Experiencing the joy of helping our grassroots Small Group Ministry movement flourish!
2. Getting the SGM Quarterly mailed to your home or congregation four times each year.
3. Receiving registration discounts when you attend UU SGM Network sponsored events.
4. Receiving assistance when you plan and offer a regional small group ministry event.
5. Participating as a voting member in the UUSGM Network Annual Meeting at General Assembly.

Please Consider Giving a Gift to the Network.

To continue developing excellent resources to promote and enhance this movement, we need your support.

The UUSGM Quarterly

Editor: Rev. M'ellen Kennedy

Please let us know what topic would you like to see covered in feature articles in future issues.

**UU Small Group Ministry Network
3313 Goshen Road
Newtown Square, PA 19073**