

SGM JOURNAL

Vol 9 No 1

Fall 2012/Winter 2013

A publication of the UU Small Group Ministry Network

NETWORK NEWS



SGM Summer Institute 2013 at Murray Grove

Monday, July 22 - Friday, July 26, 2013

- Tracks for programming and leadership
- Daily Small Group Ministry sessions
- Evening sessions on SGM Best Practices
- Meetings for professional and lay leaders

See flier and registration information inside!

NEW Social Justice Work Through Small Group Ministry

Explore faith, relationships, and meaning in the context of social justice. Includes 34 session plans. See ordering information on page nine.

Network Publication Schedule Changes

Beginning with this issue, the SGM Journal (formerly the Quarterly) will be published bi-annually in November and April. Covenant Group News will be published bi-monthly, starting with the Nov/Dec 2012 issue.

Network in Your District & Region

SGM leaders in Joseph Priestley District hold joint trainings and present topics at each other's facilitator support meetings. Network with your near neighbors. See the list at <http://www.smallgroupministry.net/membership.html>.

CONNECT with SGM via Social Media

Share ideas and enrich the SGM community:

Small Group Ministry Network Group

<http://www.facebook.com/groups/158837360893790/>

Small Groups, Deep Connections Blog

<http://www.smallgroupministry.net/wp/>

UU Small Group Ministry Lab

<http://www.facebook.com/groups/343817605638090/>

In this issue:

Welcome to the Congregation.....	2
10 Things They Never Told You.....	3
Family and Children's Groups.....	5
Preparing to Experience.....	6
Assigning Groups.....	8
Network Publications.....	9

Our Mission:

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

Welcome to the Congregation!

From the SGM Journal Editors

Who We Are:

The UU Small Group Ministry Network, a UUA Related Organization, is a non-profit, tax-exempt charitable organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. We provide support to small group ministry programs in UU congregations through training opportunities, networking, and the development of new resources.

Board and Staff

President

Rev. Helen Zidowecki

Secretary

Diana Dorroh

Treasurer

Susan Hollister

Members-At-Large

Steve Becker

Rev. Dr. Jan Carlsson-Bull

Linda Serra

Rev. Michelle Collins

Advisory Board

Rev. Bob Hill

Rev. Glenn Turner

Journal Editorial Staff

Beth Tiewater, Susan Hollister

Webmaster

Erik Zidowecki

World Wide Web

www.smallgroupministry.net

Changes of Address

Send new postal and email address to membership@smallgroupministry.net

The SGM Journal

(ISSN 1945-2683)

is published seasonally by the UU Small Group Ministry Network and is supported by memberships, donations and resource sales.

Archives are available on the SGM Network website.

One of the many benefits of small group ministry is giving newcomers a place to belong from the very beginning. In addition to forming connections right away, newcomers in covenant groups have the opportunity to learn about Unitarian Universalism, observe how UUs live their faith, and commit to an organization that shares their values.

In this article we'll hear from three congregations that offer newcomer covenant groups as a point of entry to congregational life. Roxie Morison facilitates Newcomer's Chalice Circles at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Wilmington, NC, and regards the Circles as a valuable part of the welcoming process. During Coffee Hour, Roxie seeks out and invites anyone who "feels like a newcomer" to participate. She also provides NCC information for the Membership Committee to share with visitors.

The Circles have 6 to 9 members and meet two evenings a month from September to May. The group creates and adopts a covenant over the course of three meetings. They begin with the topic "What Brought You Here?" (to Wilmington, to Unitarian Universalism, to this Chalice Circle). Group members then rotate responsibility for "hosting" the CCs: choosing the topic, notifying all members, bringing and lighting the chalice candle, choosing the topic readings, timekeeping, and extinguishing the chalice. Roxie provides the meeting agenda and resources for topics and readings, and reminds each host of their responsibilities before their turn.

At the Unitarian Church of Baton Rouge, LA, greater than 60 % of the congregation participates in covenant groups, called *Branches*. Graduates of the member orientation class, *Roots*, are strongly encouraged to join a group. The Branches program is publicized on the website, in the weekly and monthly newsletter and Sunday bulletin, and a sign-up card is included in the Roots packet. The Branches administrator invites all Roots graduates to join a group that meets their availability. New groups are formed for Roots graduates when there are no openings in existing groups. Experienced church members are chosen to lead the new groups, which greatly enhances the introduction to covenant groups, UUism, and the congregation, and facilitates the assimilation of new members into the life of the congregation.

The UU Community Church of Washington County in Hillsboro, OR, offers a five session Newcomer's Covenant Group in addition to their longer-term groups. The groups are started when at least six people have signed up. Kathy Foldes, leader of the Newcomer CGs, then contacts each person to see what day and time works best for everyone. Session topics relate to being new in a group: "Getting to Know You, Starting with Your Name" and "Deep Listening." Each group does one service project during their time together.

Newcomer's CGs are formed two to three times a year at UUCCWC, even in December and July! New Covenant Groups are intentionally started just after the Newcomer's group ends so that participants can continue along with others who have been in the church longer. The congregation's Membership Team reports that participants of the Newcomer's CG become involved in the life of the church while those who did not join a CG tend to drift away over time. As Kathy says, "There's something about that bonding and learning a new way to relate in a small group. People become more involved, join as members, and step up in our church and in the outside world."

10 Things They Never Told You About Being a SGM Facilitator

From Unitarian Universalist Church of Delaware County, Media, Pennsylvania

In preparation for some in-house training for new and potential Small Group Ministry facilitators at our church, the SGM Team got together to compile a list of the top ten things about the job that the training cannot fully prepare you for. We presented this in the format of a David Letterman Top Ten skit. Our thanks to our friends at Main Line Unitarian Church in Devon, PA, for allowing us to pilot this with them. So here goes....

Number 10. Covenant Schmovenant - Can't we all just get along?

We are taught that one of the first things to establish is the covenant for the group, but we rarely start from scratch because, for many group members (and facilitators!), this is not their first rodeo. However, we should always take the opportunity at the first meeting to review and refresh our memories of the content and function of the covenant. In particular, the group is empowered to invoke the covenant and it is not set in stone; it can be changed if the need arises.

Number 9. Food Glorious Food

What would seem a simple decision for the group can be the source of some disagreement and needs to be clarified at the outset. Do we have food at all? If so, what? Who provides it? Brown bagging? When do we eat? Grazing or take a break? How do we respect food preferences and allergies?

Number 8. The Art of Herding Cats!

Outside of the meetings, how do we maintain communication with the group? Some of our members are technologically challenged and even email can be problematic. Resorting to individual phone calls, while personal, can be time-consuming and makes sending pre-reading materials difficult. At the opposite end of the spectrum are the folks who are "jiggy with it" when it comes to technology: the Smartphone generation who would prefer to use any IM/Twitter/Facebook/Cloud Collaboration.

Number 7. Size Does Matter

Can a group be too big or too small, and does it matter? We had a group that declined to 4 members. We tried all avenues to recruit more people, but when we failed, we mutually agreed to suspend the group. At the other extreme, a coordination hiccup resulted in 14 members being assigned to a group. This proved to be untenable: members were not realizing the full benefit of the program and some diplomacy was required in implementing re-assignments.

Number 6. Speak Softly, Carry a Talking Stick

We typically covenant to show respect for each other when we are talking. This is particularly important to enforce during check-in, keeping the group on topic and controlling interruptions. Remind the group that they are all empowered to apply this aspect of the covenant. One member was difficult to stop from interrupting during check-in, yet during "Likes and Wishes" at the end of one meeting, she said she wished people would stop interrupting her! To establish order, one group introduced a soft toy. Members could only talk if they were holding the "Talking Giraffe." Interestingly, this highlighted the problem and over time the giraffe became unnecessary.

Number 5. Service Projects - the Abilene Paradox

I first encountered the Abilene Paradox in business school. A group of managers could not agree on the location for a meeting, so ended up in Abilene where no one wanted to go, but no one could object to. The idea of

performing a service project as a Small Group is easy to accept in principle. Finding the project that everyone can support is more problematic. As strong minded UUs, we struggle with achieving consensus and then committing to a project we cannot fully support for personal or physical reasons. The concept of providing a social service or value and working together as a group is often lost in the fog of the selection process.

Number 4. Tardiness is next to Godliness

The members show respect for each other by being on time for the meeting, staying for the duration, and generally adhering to the time allocation for each component of the meeting. The art of the facilitator is to be flexible and recognize the direction of the group. An extreme example was a member who was regularly late. One time she arrived 90 minutes into the meeting and expected the group to repeat everything she had missed during the topic discussion.

Number 3. There is no TEAM in I

SGM group members' contributions represent their personal experience and feelings and this is especially true at check-in. Enforcing this is one of the most difficult facilitator roles. The very best method is to set an example in your own check-in. We need to emphasize the "self-interest" of the individual, the one time when we encourage selfishness. It also important to think about check-in before arriving, making check-in personal, meaningful, and succinct. One member prepared a list of activities he had attended and proceeded to read them, complete with plots of plays and book reviews. He was quite offended when he was told that he was expected to share something personal about his feelings.

Number 2. There's no crying in SGM?

Every SGM group is different in terms of personalities, behavior, bonding and openness. But there will be times, often unexpected, of extreme emotions, highs, lows, and traumatic stories. We must resist the temptation to diagnose or resolve, although follow-up after the meeting is OK. We need to develop skills in identifying body language signals, active listening and eye contact. I was in one group that achieved a level of comfort and security with each other to share some of their deepest emotions. On one memorable occasion a member shared a story of an attempted suicide as an angst ridden teenager. It was a story that had the group in tears but was the beginning of a very tight relationship that lasted beyond the group and allowed others to feel confident about sharing some pretty raw feelings. Handling these situations well can be incredibly rewarding for the facilitator, but **don't forget the Kleenex!**

and finally....

Number 1. I Could Have Laughed All Night

Laughter is a powerful medicine. Humor can be a great ice breaker, infectious, eclectic, variable, limiting, distracting and therapeutic. One of our session topics led to a member talking about being bullied at school. To lighten the mood, I described a recent high school reunion where the geeks who had been the target of bullies got their revenge by having the most successful careers, beautiful families, and fabulous lifestyles. This started a series of humorous school reunion stories from the group, usually involving bad clothing and hair choices, that had everyone chuckling!

Try not to take yourself too seriously ... be careful out there ... and remember to have FUN!

Prepared and submitted by Peter Cooke on behalf of the dedicated team of SGM Organizers and Facilitators at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Delaware County in Media, Pennsylvania.

Family Covenant Groups

By Susannah Krug, UU Community Church of Washington County, Hillsboro, Oregon

For three years now, I've been the facilitator for the Family Covenant Group at UU Community Church of Washington County in Hillsboro, OR. Due to busy young families' schedules, we find it impossible to meet twice a month. Therefore, we meet eight times a year for three hours on a Saturday evening. We have childcare for the first two hours which serves as our session time. During the last hour we have a family potluck dinner and socialize with each other. Our kids and families have grown much closer with this format.

To maximize participation, we are more flexible with attendance than most groups. We find that husbands are often reluctant to commit to coming every time, while wives feel they are taking away valuable family time when they attend without their spouse. In general, if there is no representation from a family for more than two months, I gently advise them to rejoin in the future when they feel they can commit more fully to attendance.

At the first group meeting, I help everyone get to know each other, establish the covenant, and offer three or four topic themes for consideration. At the end of the first session, we vote on which theme we want to focus on for the year. Last year it was Sustainability and the year before it was Parenting Through UU Principles. The Family Covenant Group is very popular at UCCWC and remains one of the longest-running groups at our congregation.

Small Groups for Children A Covenant

*From Kathy Cronin, Director of Lifespan Religious Education
Eno River Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, Durham, NC*

Method: On a easel pad, draw a large person with the stated body parts. Explain the promises using the picture as a guide. Review weekly. Eventually the children will be able to remember the promises themselves.

Head: Open your mind to exploring things you do not know or people you do not know.

Eyes: Make eye contact with others when they speak and when you speak.

Ears: Listen when others are speaking.

Lips: One person speaks at a time.
Talk about what you think and feel.
Ask for what you need.

Heart: Open your heart and be kind, treat others
as you would like to be treated.

Hands: Offer a helping hand when someone asks for your help.

Legs: Try to understand what a person is saying by walking in that person's shoes.



Preparing to Experience

By Wendy Sapp, Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga, Tennessee

As we prepared for our recent church-wide kickoff to Small Group Ministry, I once again struggled with how to explain Small Group Ministry to people who have never been in a small group. I finally realized there is a simple answer: It can't be done. I can explain the purpose and the format and the philosophy behind the concept, but people still arrive for their first group meeting feeling unprepared and uncertain. SGM is not an easily encapsulated program; Small Group Ministry is an experience.

Though there is something truly ineffable about Small Group Ministry, there are steps we can take to prepare facilitators and participants, and there are strategies that facilitators and participants find useful in preparing for each session.

Program planning: The first step in preparation is to have a clear picture of what Small Group Ministry is in your church. Every congregation will have a slightly different version of the program. My church uses a steering team that meets for two months each summer to evaluate our program, make revisions and changes, and introduce these changes to the facilitators. The steering team consists of coordinators, facilitators, participants and occasionally someone completely new to Small Group Ministry. The range of voices allows us to look at our program with fresh eyes each year and ensure that Small Group Ministry is meeting the needs of the congregation.

Preparation before groups begin: Once we have clear direction for Small Group Ministry from our steering team, we prepare facilitators through careful selection and training. With the exception of the first year of our program, we have required that all facilitators have experience as participants in SGM. We require all facilitators, new and returning, to attend a one-day training session, which paints a picture of the program as envisioned by the steering team, clearly delineating the roles and responsibilities of the facilitators and others involved, and provides concrete strategies and tools for facilitating groups.

On a less intense scale, we prepare all new group participants. The steering team staffs a registration table after service for several Sundays to explain Small Group Ministry and answer questions. People who have never participated are called by the coordinators and/or the facilitators who explain SGM and the level of commitment that is expected. When participants enter a group with the understanding that they are committing to regularly attend, arrive on time, and participate in two service projects outside of their usual group time, they seem to approach the experience with a more intentional frame of mind than would be present if we had a less demanding group structure.

Preparation for sessions: In addition to the information and skills we can offer facilitators and participants before groups begin, we try to provide optional strategies for facilitators and participants to mentally or spiritually prepare before each session.

Each fall, we begin our new year of SGM with each group using a session on deep listening. We have used several different listening sessions, but the main purpose of all of them is to provide an introduction to the concept of deep listening and deep sharing and provide an opportunity to practice both. This sets the stage for the group to understand the expectations of the SGM format and be better prepared for future sessions.

Facilitators are asked to prepare for sessions well in advance so they do not enter the room unsure of what they will do or frantic because they spent the last hour trying to locate a session. They are also encouraged to arrive well before the start time to set up the room (chairs in a circle, chalice and lighter in the middle) so a calm environment is established when participants arrive. Additionally, when facilitators enter the meeting with the expectation that they will share deeply, they provide a model of sharing for other participants that can lead to more meaningful sessions.

Closely following the format helps participants prepare to be more focused during sessions. Opening words and moments of silence encourage participants to slow down and be in the moment. We often use a check-in of “What are you leaving at the door to be fully present with us tonight/today?” which keeps the check-in focused on the more critical components of someone’s life rather than a laundry list of minor happenings. After exposure to these components for several sessions, many participants begin to mentally prepare themselves by slowing their minds and setting aside distractions before arriving for their session. We encourage all participants to facilitate one session during the year and this experience often deepens their understanding of SGM and helps them enter future sessions better prepared for the experience.

Some groups choose to use sessions that require work prior to coming to the session. This could be something as simple as bringing a treasured object or as detailed as completing several readings and exercises related to the session topic. Participants of groups that require preparation appreciate the added experience of the exercises. Other participants prefer that the SGM experience remain contained within the session and find required preparatory work to be an unnecessary added stress that detracts from their experience.

Conclusions: On a programmatic level, facilitators and participants should be given sufficient information to enter Small Group Ministry with a basic understanding of the expectations. Facilitators can prepare themselves, the session, and the meeting space to enhance the SGM experience for all participants. Participants learn to set aside the outside world and remain focused on the moment. When the session begins, preparation makes the experience deeper and more meaningful for all.

What if we were to be together and listen to each other's comments with a willingness to expose rather than to confirm our own beliefs and opinions?

What if we were to willingly listen to one another with the awareness that we each see the world in unique ways? And with the expectation that I could learn something new if I listen for the differences rather than the similarities?

We have this opportunity many times in a day, everyday. What might we see, what might we learn, what might we create together, if we become this kind of listener, one who enjoys the differences and welcomes in disturbance?

I know we would be delightfully startled by how much difference there is. And then we would be wonderfully comforted by how much closer we became, because every time we listen well, we move towards each other.

From our new thoughts and our new companions, we would all become wiser.

~Margaret Wheatley, mid-20th century

A Good Method for Assigning Groups

*By Simon Kaplan, Eno River UU Fellowship,
Durham, North Carolina*

In years past, the Covenant Group Leadership Team at ERUUF has struggled with the group assignments, but this year we lit on a process that is easy, efficient, and quick.

At the end of the sign-up period, we had 52 new applications, with requests fairly evenly mixed between Covenant Group (meet twice a month), Chalice Circle (meet once a month for 8 months) and no preference. Each applicant's main details were transferred from their sign-up form to a 3" x 5" index card: blue for Covenant Group (CG), yellow for Chalice Circle (CC) and green for no preference. These included, in big letters, name, availability (days and times), preferred location (at the fellowship or in homes), gender and age (15-year spreads), to allow for diversity in the groups. Making all the cards took about one person-hour.

Some couples had requested they be in the same group; their two cards were taped together so when one was placed, the other was too. Others had requested they be in different groups; we used a jagged shaped outline on the card to alert us to that, or to someone with particular transportation issues.

We started with CGs (blue), since several groups were looking for new members. We prepared a purple index card for each existing group, showing how many people they needed and where and when they meet. We spread these out across a table top, Monday on the left and Sunday on the right. Then we looked at the blue cards.

The first consideration was always availability, so we looked first for people with few options. One person could make Thursday evenings only, and by good fortune a Thursday evening group needed another member, so that was an easy assignment. Same again for Sunday night. Monday is a very popular evening in our program, and more than one of those groups needed people, so we scanned the blue cards for people who could do Monday. That took care of nine more applicants. Now we looked at the green cards ("no preference"), and continued looking at the times a person could do and placing them where there was a need.

We noticed that there were a good number of people available on Sunday afternoon, and were able to form a new daytime Covenant Group, with a new purple card for the group and a red card for the group leader.

Once we had placed all the blue cards and some of the green ones and it looked as though we had roughly the right number in each group, we looked at the spread of men (who, alas, are all too rare in our program) and shifted a few people around, again always checking they could do the time we were shifting them to. We moved one or two people to get a better age mix, and we looked at the makeup of each group just to make sure there was an overall good fit. We double checked that everything was as it should be with the jagged shape requests, then wrote the abbreviation for each group on each card. We gathered and paper clipped the cards for each group, purple on top, and put them aside.

Then on to the Chalice Circles (yellow). We laid out cards for days of the week across the top, again Monday on the left, and placed people—including leaders on red cards—under evenings they were available. It was quickly apparent that there was very little interest in a daytime CC. At one point we noticed we had about 5 people in one group and about 15 in another, but it didn't take long before we had three more-or-less evenly sized CCs.

We checked the application form of the jagged shaper with transportation issues, and looked for a matching zip code. By good luck we quickly found a fellow group member in the same zip; a look at a map told us she lived just a few blocks away. We called her from our meeting and she readily agreed to offer a ride. We then tweaked the CCs for a good mix of gender and age, gathered and paper-clipped the cards, made an aqua card for each new group, and put them aside.

There were only two people—both with narrow availability—whose desired time could not be accommodated. We called them from our meeting and offered alternative times. Neither person could make these; they were disappointed but understanding.

Each member of the Leadership Team agreed to pass on to a couple of group leaders the contact details for their new members. Our database keeper took the cards and application forms for keying into Excel, and after less than 90 minutes we were done!

Small Groups, Deep Connections.

UU SGM Network Publications

Order forms available from <http://www.smallgroupministry.net>

Social Justice Work Through Small Group Ministry (June 2012) Features 34 covenant group sessions for preparation, action and reflection on topics of multiculturalism, radical hospitality, immigration, racism, marriage equality, and earth justice. Includes a guide for creating session plans from workshop materials, curricula and other formats.

BOOK *Network Members: \$15 plus \$6 S&H Non-members: \$25 plus \$6 S&H*

CD *Network Members: \$15 plus \$2 S&H Non-members: \$20 plus \$2 S&H*

Small Group Ministry with All Ages Implementation strategies, leader training, session development, and session plans for children through elders.

BOOK *Network Members: \$20 plus \$6 S&H Non-members: \$30 plus \$6 S&H*

CD *Network Members: \$15 plus \$2 S&H Non-members: \$20 plus \$2 S&H*

Don't be left in the dark...
There's a wealth of information
on the SGM website.
Check us out!

Soul to Soul: Fourteen Gatherings for Reflection and Sharing Topics such as addiction, aging and personal resilience offer new opportunities to explore life issues with others. *Skinner House Books, \$14.*

ALSO AVAILABLE See our website for details.

Facilitator Training and Development Manual. A guide for training and support plus a handbook on CD to customize for group leaders and facilitators.

Spiritual Journeys: 101 Session Plans for Small Group Ministry Programs

Sessions on Spiritual Journeying, Personal Beliefs and Values, Spiritual Challenges, Just for Fun, Being Human, Holidays, and Special Use subjects for life events.

Small Group Ministry for Youth. Twenty-five sessions for middle and high school youth.

Implementing Small Group Ministry. Download from Online Resources.

In the News

UU SGM Network noted in UU World Magazine and InterConnections, the UUA's monthly newsletter for congregational leaders
Our thanks to Editor Donald E. Skinner

“Small Group Ministry Network offers variety of resources:

Leaders of small group ministry programs and groups are encouraged to join the UU Small Group Ministry Network. Members receive a monthly newsletter and a quarterly journal. Both include practical information about small group ministry. Other resources include many free session plans, several books and other publications available for purchase, and an online discussion group where ideas can be shared with others.”

UU World, Winter 2012, page 54. Adapted from InterConnections, October 2012

It's true, membership has it's privileges!

As a member of the SGM Network you:

Get the current issue of the *Journal* before it's on the website, provide financial support for the SGM movement, receive discounts on publications and Network-sponsored events, and have a voice and a vote at our annual meeting at GA.

Name		_____
Address		_____
Congregation		_____
District	Program Coordinator	_____
Phone	E-mail	_____
I would like to receive the newsletter electronically;		YES NO
Congregational Membership (\$100 year)		_____
Individual Membership (\$40 year)		_____
Additional Tax-deductible Donation		_____
Total Enclosed: \$		_____

We rely on donations from members and supporters like you! Your continued financial support allows us to better serve our members. Please consider making a tax-deductible gift to the Network.

Send completed form and check made out to **UU SGM Network** to 4303 Swarthmore Road, Durham, NC 27707.

Download the form or join online at www.smallgroupministry.net

UU Small Group Ministry Network
4303 Swarthmore Road
Durham, NC 27707