

# **U.U. Small Group Ministry** **Quarterly**



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## **Recruiting New Members for Your Small Group Ministry Program**

**By Rev. Calvin O. Dame**

Augusta, ME

Small Group Ministry continues to transform congregations and to deepen the spiritual and community life of the people who participate. One important challenge for congregations, however successful their program may be, is the **recruitment and retention of new group members**. A common report is that following an initial period of enthusiasm as a program is planned and introduced, participation in the groups begins to wane and the overall number of groups declines. Or, the number of groups and group membership holds steady, but Small Group Ministry does not fulfill its potential to be a dynamic resource in the wider life of the congregation.

The first consideration in recruiting new members lies in **the vision that the leadership in a church, both lay and professional**, shares about the place of covenant groups in the life of the congregation. **The more central that vision is to the goals and aspirations of a congregation, the easier it is to recruit and retain members**. When there is a shared understanding of the value of small groups in the ministry of the congregation, and a commitment to promoting this part of congregational life, then interest will remain high and there will be people for new groups and members to replace the natural attrition in older groups.

And, while there may or may not be anything we can codify as "best practices," I do think there are ideas and approaches that can foster growth and connect more people to groups. When someone says their church started with five small groups but now they are down to three, these are the questions I ask:

- \* Is an invitation to investigate Small Group Ministry a regular part of the welcome at worship?
- \* Does SGM have a regular column in the newsletter, a SGM news where group members can share their excitement, new leaders be introduced, upcoming topics be announced, group activities celebrated?
- \* Are there SGM brochures in the brochure rack?
- \* Do your facilitators meet regularly for training, fellowship and support?
- \* Is there attractive information on you website?

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## **What Can You Do In Six Months?: The UU Small Group Ministry Network Is Off to a Strong Start!**

**By Peter Freedman Bowden**

Newport, RI

Six months ago the UU Small Group Ministry Network was just a vision and a collection of links on smallgroupministry.net website. Today, it is a new and rapidly growing organization supporting shared ministry in our congregations! Below is a summary of our first six months.

**Three's a Charm:** After a year of talking about forming a network to support SGM, Calvin Dame and Peter Bowden found a third person who shared the vision while attending the April 2004 SGM conference in Arlington, VA – Mellen Kennedy. With a core group of three things started to happen fast.

**Launch at GA:** By June we had growing board and set of advisors. During GA we held our first board meeting, Peter and Mellen provided free consultations all week long in the exhibit hall, and our membership program was launched to help fund resource development.

**Today:** We now have a growing membership, a fabulous board, new resources online and in development, multiple regional conferences in the planning stages and one already completed at Devon, PA (see p. 6), a week long program to be offered at Ferry Beach this summer (see p. 7), and have applied to become an official independent affiliate with the UUA which will grant us the ability to sponsor GA workshops. Not bad...

### **To Our Current Members**

A special thanks to all of our members. Whether you joined because your desire for more resources or to help fund our work, together we are making a difference in our congregations. The stronger our shared ministry is, the stronger our congregations are.

### **To Potential Members**

Regardless of where you picked up this issue of the SGM Quarterly, we are glad you did! We hope the articles and information in this journal help you lead a stronger small group ministry. We would also like to encourage you to

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## Recruiting New Members

by Rev. Calvin O. Dame  
(Continued from page 1)

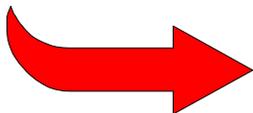
- \* Do you celebrate your facilitators a couple of times a year in the course of worship, maybe thank them for the important work they do?
- \* Is Small Group Ministry included in the letter that goes out to visitors as an important opportunity to get to know people that the visitor might want to know about?
- \* Do you celebrate your group's Service Projects in the Sunday service, in the newsletter, or on the bulletin boards?
- \* Is there a Small Group Ministry bulletin Board, maybe with pictures of people engaged, working and having fun?
- \* Is there a sermon once or twice a year taking about the promise of SGM?
- \* Is there a Sign-up table at Fellowship Hour that Sunday and maybe a couple of other times a year.
- \* Do you have well publicized "Drop In and Try Out SGM" events from time to time
- \* Is SGM mentioned in your weekly newspaper listings?

These are particular ways that a congregation can promote Small Group Ministry. The congregations that I know of with vibrant programs regularly incorporate some mix of these practices and think of new ways as they go along. My congregation in Augusta includes almost all of these approaches. Every newsletter includes a chatty article, every welcome on Sunday includes and invitation, every service projects get some accolades.

And, I have to say; we get new members the old fashion way as well. **We ask people if they would like to be in a Small Group.** We look for people who seem in need of the warmth and embrace of this particular ministry. We look at a group and think whom they might need for some balance and then we make a phone call to see if we can connect the right person.

In the end, I don't think it is complicated, I think it is a matter of taking seriously the promise of Small Group Ministry, and then applying those church practices we know will help a program be successful.

**You're Invited to Join the UU Small  
Group Ministry Network**



**Why Not Join Today!**

## What can you do in six months?

by Peter Freedman Bowden  
(Continued from page 1)

look at the many resources on our site. There are shared resources anyone may view, links to resources on other sites, and resources for our members. These are accessible by joining our network for a small yearly fee. In time we expect these resources to be published and sold in book form. But why wait? You can learn more and join by visiting our website - [www.smallgroupministry.net](http://www.smallgroupministry.net).

### Donations & Other Funding

Our members are funding the production of this journal and the development of some new small group resources. However, there is more work that can be done to support our congregations. And we want to do it!

In order to take on these research and resource development projects we are welcoming donations. We are now identifying a UU congregation to be our fiscal agent so that your donations may be tax deductible. As our network grows we will move towards having our own non-profit status. Again, we thank our members for their support and welcome all additional financial contributions. For more information on making tax deductible donations, please contact Peter Bowden (401 855-0037).

### The Benefits of Membership

What are the benefits of joining the UU Small Group Ministry Network?

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. Accessing great new members-only resources through our website.
4. Receiving registration discounts when you attend UU SGM Network sponsored events.
5. Planning assistance for when you offer a regional or cluster small group ministry event.

**Annual Membership** Individual: \$35US  
Congregational \$60US  
(Congregational Membership includes  
6 copies of the Quarterly)  
Contributing Membership \$100US  
Founding Membership \$250 \$500 \$1000US

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Please circle the membership level above.  
Please mail your check made out to UUSGMN to  
155 Evarts Street, Newport, RI 02840  
or email [peter@smallgroupministry.net](mailto:peter@smallgroupministry.net).

## UUSGM Network Board & Staff

Rev. Calvin Dame, President  
Elizabeth Barrett, Treasurer  
Sue Stuke, Secretary  
Rev. Helen Zidowecki

Advisory Board  
Rev. Bob Hill

Co-Coordinators:  
Peter Freedman Bowden  
Mellen Kennedy

### Our UU SGM Network Mission:

*To help create healthy congregations by  
supporting Small Group Ministry.*

### The UU SGM Quarterly:

The UUSGM Quarterly is a journal which offers information, explores issues and shares resources. It provides a venue for conversations, questions, practical tips and resources. We welcome your request for future topics and your submission of potential material for the newsletter. **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 ideas and submissions to [mellen@smallgroupministry.net](mailto:mellen@smallgroupministry.net).

### è Feature Articles in Upcoming Issues:

Winter 2004    Developing Session Topics  
Spring 2005    Grounding Groups Through  
                    Service Projects  
Summer/GA 2005    Cultivating Leadership  
Fall 2005    Topic To Be Selected  
                    Based on Members' Requests

**Let Us Know What Topics  
You Would Like to See Covered  
in Future Issues**

*“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful,  
committed citizens can change the world.*

*Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.”*

*Margaret Mead*

## SGM Resources Online

[www.smallgroupministry.net](http://www.smallgroupministry.net)

Looking for resources on the web? We maintain the only comprehensive website on Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry. Here are just some of the new and popular resources you can find through our site:

[Designing and Implementing a "Small Group Ministry" Focus for Your Congregation](#) By the Rev. Glenn H. Turner. Updated October 2003.

SGM Resources by the Rev. Calvin Dame:

- \* [A Small Group Ministry Resource Book](#)
- \* [SGM Participant's Handbook](#)
- \* [Small Group Ministry in the New Millennium](#)
- \* [What Makes Small Group Ministry Different?](#)

[A Covenant Group Source Book](#) 📖 by the Center for Community Values.

[Adapting Small Group Ministry for Children's Religious Education](#) By Gail Forsyth-Vail. For purchase.

[Campus Ministry Covenant Group Manual](#) 📖 by UUA Young Adult & Campus Ministry Office

[Finding Your Path](#) 📖 session series by Michael Tino. June 2004.

[Starting and Nurturing Covenant Groups](#) by Mellen Kennedy.

[Tips for Great Small Groups](#) 📖 A growing list of tips & ideas for small groups.

[Deep Facilitation](#) 📖 Simple ideas for making small group sessions more meaningful.

["ELEMENTS OF SMALL GROUP MINISTRY"](#) 📖 Excerpt from the Rev. Bob Hill's new book the Complete Guide to Small Group Ministry.

[Adventures in Small Group Ministry](#). An online journal (blog) with tips, suggestions and challenges by Peter Bowden.

[UU Identity Series](#) Session series for Young Adults by Kate Erslev.

[Deep Fun: Games and Icebreakers](#) A classic UU resource on community building and group fun.

**Get news / web updates:** New resources are being submitted to us all the time. Would you like to know when resources are posted to our site? Visit our website and subscribe to our monthly electronic news and web update list.

## An Island of Calm in the Midst of Frenzy: Covenant Groups at General Assembly

**Elizabeth Barrett,  
First Unitarian Society of Madison, WI**

I had the awesome experience of facilitating a Covenant Group at the Unitarian Universalist 2004 General Assembly (G.A.) in Long Beach, California. This was the first time Covenant Groups were offered at GA. A special thank you to the CCV, the Center for Community Values, who sponsored this experiment which was a great success!. Being an extravert who enjoys crowds and workshops (and especially crowded workshops), loves to dance and attend worship services, I always have a fabulous time at General Assembly, but not much opportunity for reflection and listening to the “still, small voice” within. **Being with a Covenant Group each day provided that spiritual time for me and many other GA participants;** I find that time seems to stand still during a covenant group meeting, because there is no “work” that must be accomplished

My eight-member Covenant Group gelled amazingly fast. We chose our meeting times and agreed on the provided covenant with ease. We shared our answers to such thought-provoking questions as “How do your actions reflect your values?” **We shared laughter and tears as we found common ground as Unitarian Universalists.** One member of my group was especially in need of a small group during GA, because she was grieving the very recent death of her closest friend. We provided her with support as we listened deeply, creating a circle of caring. Through being present for her expression of grief, I began to confront some of the unresolved grief in my own life.

Imagine walking through a large conference center hotel, seeing groups of about 10 people meeting in hallways, lobbies and even on a large staircase landing or in the hotel bar. You see people sitting in circles, tucked into various nooks and crannies, each group huddled around a chalice, each group having an aura of closeness and caring. Having Covenant Groups convene during GA gave the week a dimension of congregational life that we usually don’t get there; – **that of calm and peacefulness, time to breathe and listen deeply to our fellow religious seekers as well as to our own souls.**

**Next year’s General Assembly  
will be in Forth Worth, Texas  
June 23-27, 2005  
For more info, visit [uua.org](http://uua.org)**

## Resource Spotlight

One of the primary purposes of the Network is to collect, develop and share small group resources for Unitarian Universalist congregations. Make sure you keep an eye on our website for new public and member resources.

### ***The Role of Confidentiality***

by Peter Bowden, September 2004

This resource identifies the key ways confidentiality impacts group life and the shared ministry of congregation. Do your groups set their own level of confidentiality? If so, take a look at this resource. High levels of confidentiality can lead to closed groups and encourage therapy like levels of sharing.



### **Logos and Graphics**

Do you have a logo for your small group ministry? A logo is a great way to make SGM related information stand out. Visit our website at to see our growing collection of resources. Look for the “Logo Showcase” on the main resource page. The logo above was submitted by the UU Community Church of Santa Monica. If you have one to share, please email it to Peter at [peter@smallgroupministry.net](mailto:peter@smallgroupministry.net).

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***“It is one of the most beautiful  
compensations of this life  
that no man can seriously help another  
without helping himself.”***

***Ralph Waldo Emerson***

## Toward a True Lifespan Ministry:

### Why we lose them

By Peter Freedman Bowden

In our Unitarian Universalist congregations, we retain only 10% of the children we raise as UU's. Why do we lose 90% of our born UU's? I believe it is because they are not integrated into our community early enough and that ministry to children and youth is perceived as being significantly different from our adult offerings. Though our culture is starting to change, historically we have maintained a system that is designed to encourage them to leave.

Ministry with children has a tradition of strong small groups (classes) and worship (chapel). After coming of age, ministry for our youth has focused on a single strong group (the youth group) lead by adult advisors, with little worship outside of the group and minimal connection to the larger church. Our adult ministry has been centered on Sunday worship.

In the context of small group ministry the problem of retaining born UU's makes sense. We start children off with strong small groups and dynamic participatory worship, move them to a nearly 100% small group experience, and then ask them to move to attending adult church services. **For the majority of born UU's, pew-based church isn't going to cut it.** Once you give them intimate and meaningful small groups you can never take that away. If you do, you lose them. It doesn't matter how old they are. As an adult who has participated in a small group ministry would you attend a church without a small group ministry?

Where does this leave us today? **To retain them we have to create small groups for adults of all ages – youth, young adults, and adults.** In doing so we can create continuity in the ministry we offer and move youth into our adult community efficiently, preferably before they have the chance to graduate from high school.

### How to keep them

It is my opinion that we need to focus our attention and resources on cultivating an explicit culture of small group ministry in our congregations for people of all ages. Just as we talk about integrating small group ministry into the life of the church (the adult church), so too must we integrate it into our children and youth ministries. This involves using similar meeting formats and language with people of all ages and starting formal small group ministry at an earlier age.

**Small Groups:** Instead of talking about classes, talk about small groups. This alone will create a connection with "small group" ministry and further serve to distinguish church groups from school classes.

**Common Format:** Right now a huge percentage of all groups in our congregations have adopted a basic format for their gatherings. This includes an opening ritual, check-in, core topic or activity, likes/wishes (a group process check) and closing ritual. Regardless of what core content is covered, this basic format can be used with children of all ages.

**Empowerment with a goal:** When our children "come of age" we start to shift from teaching to empowering and advising. *In many congregations the meaning of empowerment.* Leadership development is very clear in the small group ministry model. We empower individuals to lead small groups of 8-10 people, ask them to mentor less experienced group members helping them step into leadership roles, and expect new leaders to share our faith with others by leading new groups. Can we do this with youth? Absolutely! Go ahead and ask them...

### Creating Continuity

In our youth small group ministries we can share a lifespan vision of small groups, give all youth experience both participating in and leading small groups, show them how to mentor their peers as leaders and equip all outgoing youth with the resources they need to start small groups wherever they go.

**Closing the Gap:** The best place to create leaders for our young adult and campus groups is in our youth small group ministries. When our youth leave youth group as seasoned small group leaders they will start ministries wherever they go. We need to equip them to do this important work.

**Adult Ministry:** An important step in creating a continuous lifespan shared ministry model is to see that our youth and young adult ministries are adult ministries. Instead of being the end of our children's ministry, these should be intentional starts to participation in adult ministry. *When we use a more intentional small group ministry model with youth leaders and advisors may be included in the support structure of the adult small group ministry system.*

**Age Affinity Groups:** There is no question that many youth and young adults desire to be in groups with their peers. When we support these age affinity groups but include them in a larger adult small group ministry system, youth will no longer be looking to get away from children. Instead, they will feel valued and respected as participants and leaders within the adult community. They will know they belong with us.

Send questions and comments to  
[peter@smallgroupministry.net](mailto:peter@smallgroupministry.net)

### Subscribe to the Covenant Group News

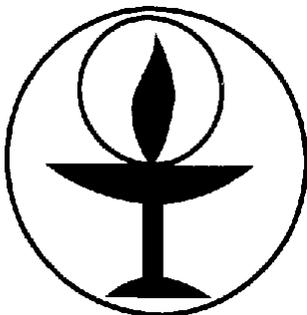
Keep up on news about small group ministry and covenant groups with the monthly e-news, "Covenant Group News." The newsletter was started by Bob Hill and is now published by the UU Small Group Ministry Network. If you're not already a subscriber, to sign up, visit our website [smallgroupministry.net](http://smallgroupministry.net)

**Regional Conferences  
on Small Group Ministry:  
Main Line Unitarian Church, Devon, PA  
Hosts the First One**

Could your congregation, your region or district benefit from a conference on small group ministry? Such a conference is an opportunity for area congregations just considering the idea, as well as congregations with already existing programs, to receive help and encouragement to be successful in their endeavors. The UU Small Group Ministry Network is offering assistance in planning such conferences around the U.S. and Canada. Main Line Unitarian Church in Devon, PA, graciously hosted the first such conference on October 9<sup>th</sup>. Jennifer Campbell and Susan Hollister, as well as others of the congregation's SGM program, provided the wonderful groundwork and organizing for the event. Co-leaders of the conference, Calvin Dame and Mellen Kennedy, received the following feedback from organizer, Jennifer Campbell:

*"Thank you so much for the wonderful job you did this weekend! The compliments on your great work keep pouring in! Susan and I are very confident that this gave our program a much-needed boost, as well as help all the other SGM programs in the area move onto their next level of commitment and engagement in the process."*

The 55 people in attendance included Main Line's minister, Stephan Papa, who enthusiastically celebrated the success of the conference and Main Line's SGM Program at the Sunday service the following day. Could your program use such a boost? If you'd like to plan a conference in your area, please contact us at [peter@smallgroupministry.net](mailto:peter@smallgroupministry.net) or [mellen@smallgroupministry.net](mailto:mellen@smallgroupministry.net).



**Facilitators' Corner:  
Is Your Group Too Polite?  
The Balance Between Safety and Risk**

**By Mellen Kennedy  
Burlington, VT**

*"Something opens our wings.  
Something makes boredom and hurt disappear.  
Someone fills the cup in front of us.  
We taste only sacredness."*

*Rumi*

Participating in Small Group Ministry offers us the opportunity for deep spiritual exploration and for spiritual transformation. Our job as facilitators is to cultivate an environment conducive to deep exploration. How do we do this? We often focus on the importance of creating a "safe space." **The paradox is that we need the safe space in order to take risks.** Too much safety leads to feeling bored and stifled. Too much risk leads to feeling fearful and hesitant. Our aim is that balance in between.

The adage states, "The truth will set you free." Indeed, it is the search for truth that powers the engine of our spiritual exploration. In a workshop I lead recently, a participant talked **about excessive politeness in a group as an indicator of low trust.** I think he was right on in this. If your group is "too polite" members will not be able to delve deep enough for meaningful exchange. What to do? You may want to do a session in your group on politeness and risk, to engage the group in the issue. You may want to revisit your groundrules about confidentiality to see if there is lack of clarity, or confusion. You may need to model appropriate risk taking yourself to invite the group members to go deeper. You may also want to brainstorm about the issue in your monthly meeting with the minister and other facilitators in your congregations (assuming you have one).

To create an environment conducive to both risk and safety, as facilitators, we ourselves, need to become comfortable with just witnessing. When someone is struggling or in pain, we tend to either retreat away from that person, or to try to "fit it". **In our small groups we cultivate the art of just being present, just witnessing.** As facilitators, we need to cultivate the practice of breathing, listening and just being present without judging. Speaking the truth is essential for real transformation. When a person knows that she or he can struggle to articulate the truth from his or her own experience in an environment of acceptance, then powerful stuff happens. Religious educator, Nelle Morton calls this process "hearing each other into speech." Part of the power of small group ministry is the witnessing of this sacred process. Wishing you the best in developing a healthy group that finds that energizing balancing between safety and risk.

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*"God offers to every mind  
its choice between truth and repose."  
Ralph Waldo Emerson*



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155 Evarts Street,  
Newport, RI 02840**

**[Smallgroupministry.net](http://Smallgroupministry.net)**

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155 Evarts Street,  
Newport, RI 02840**