

SGM QUARTERLY

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News from the Network



The Network at General Assembly 2010, June 23-27, Minneapolis, MN

Enhancing, Revitalizing, Restarting Your Small Group Ministry

Presenting strategies used by congregations to sustain and enhance vibrant ministries, and to rejuvenate and restart programs that have decreased in vitality. Holding a vision, the minister's role, and assuring success will be highlighted. Speakers are Rev. Peg Morgan and Steve Becker, Westside UU Congregation, Seattle, WA, and Rev. Peter Friedrichs and Joyce McKee, UU Church of Delaware County, Media, PA. Moderated by Rev. Helen Zidowecki. Time and date TBA.

Booth # 733, General Assembly Exhibit Hall

Stop by the Network Booth Wednesday through Sunday during GA. Board members and Network member volunteers will be on hand to answer your questions and share practical information for small group/covenant group programs at every stage. Our newest publications and resources will be available. Volunteer at office@smallgroupministry.net

Small Group Ministry Institute 2010, August 31-September 3 Camp deBenneville Pines, Angelus Oaks, CA

Send a team and take home a vision and plan for small group ministry in your congregation. Details in this issue.

Is it Time to Renew?

Our Network members receive an email reminder one to two months before their annual membership expires. "Time to Renew" appears on the address label for our postal mail recipients. Don't miss an issue of the *SGM Quarterly Journal*. Renew today! Download a renewal form from our website or renew online with **PayPal** secure transactions.

Update Your Program's Information

Has your Small Group Ministry program's coordinator or contact person changed? If so, send us your new contact information so we can update our membership database and redirect the *SGM Quarterly*. Send changes to treasurer@smallgroupministry.net.

Share the Electronic Quarterly

If you currently receive paper copies of the *SGM Quarterly*, but would prefer the electronic version to forward to group leaders and your minister or staff liaison, tell us at treasurer@smallgroupministry.net.

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Our Mission:

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

From our members.....

Ministerial Involvement and Small Group Ministry Success

By Linda Thompson, Community Church of Chapel Hill, Unitarian Universalist

Covenant Groups at the Community Church of Chapel Hill, UU in North Carolina have become increasingly popular over the last two years. Our success, in large part, is due to the involvement of our minister.

At our monthly facilitators meetings, our minister, Rev. Maj-Britt Johnson, leads us through an abbreviated covenant group session that she has prepared. We then discuss what is going on in our groups and ask for suggestions. Our minister participates in the entire meeting, and it is extremely beneficial to have her feedback and perspective. She is aware of what we do, and she makes it clear that she supports this vital ministry.

Rev. Johnson asks for participation on another level by asking congregants who like to write to get involved in SGM. Each month, a theme emerges from small group ministry. The theme of the month is publicized in the church newsletter, and congregants of any age can choose to submit a meditation, chalice lighting, or poem to be used in small group sessions or church meetings during the month. Maj-Britt then uses this theme as the topic of one of her sermons.

Various kinds of small group ministry are encouraged by our minister. She leads a Friday Noon Minister's Sacred Reading Group. This is a "drop-in" group that meets for an hour each Friday. She reads a text from one of the world's religions or from poetry, and then the participants listen to each other's wisdom.

Another very successful addition to our church's SGM program is Sunday Family Group. Each month our Lifespan Religious Educator and other trained facilitators invite congregants to participate in a session of small group ministry. Child care is provided while parents participate in the hour-long session based on the theme of the month. Then everybody comes together for a simple meal. This has proved to be a very popular way to offer small group ministry. At times, there have been up to sixty people participating in Sunday Family Group!

The support and involvement of our minister and staff has resulted in a growing SGM program that attracts more and more people as we experience the benefits of deep listening and sharing from the heart together.

Linda Thompson is a facilitator of a covenant group at the Community Church of Chapel Hill, Unitarian Universalist.

Who We Are:

The UU Small Group Ministry Network 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 and related shared ministry models in UU congregations through developing new resources, networking, and training opportunities.

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The SGM Quarterly is published four times a year and supported by donations and memberships. Archives are available on the SGM website.

CONNECTIONS..... CONNECTIONS..... CONNECTIONS.....

with Steve Becker, President, Small Group Ministry Network

At the end of our church year, we invite all Covenant Group participants, facilitators, and our minister to a group potluck. Everyone volunteers to bring a dish and we gather at one of our homes and have a barbeque. We share discussions around favorite topics and have fun, but we also take time to evaluate our program. Here are the questions we have found to be most helpful. Feel free to use them.

Please circle the number for each item below that best describes your response:

1= Strongly Disagree; 2= Disagree, 3= No opinion, 4= Agree, 5= Strongly Agree.

About the Meetings:

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Meetings start and end on time: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. We meet according to our agreed schedule: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. The location is safe and comfortable: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Our Facilitator:

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4. was competent in facilitating our group: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. showed effective communication skills: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. allowed for individual differences: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Our Members:

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7. contribute responsibly: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. come willing to listen as well as share: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. support the facilitator's efforts: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

About the topics:

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10. Topic subjects were appropriate: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. Questions stimulated my spirituality: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. Topics helped me to grow: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

About the group dynamics:

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 13. We abided by the covenant we created: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. We got along well together: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. We offered support in times of need: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

On the back of the page give narrative responses to:

16. What did you like most about your group?
17. What, if anything, would you change about your group?
18. Will you participate in a covenant group in the fall? Why or why not?

Have an inspiring summer! Come by our booth in Minneapolis and check out our newest collection of 101 session plans!

Take care of yourself,

Steve

Facilitator's Toolbox

In the Face of Grief

By Rev. Craig Roshaven, Main Line Unitarian Church, Devon, PA

“The heart has its reasons of which the reason knows not.” - Blaise Pascal

This observation is especially true in the face of loss. Grieving has its own logic and timetable. Loss is part of life. It's inevitable that expressions of grief will challenge us in our small group ministries. How can a small group best support its members in the face of loss?

I believe what's most important is to be as fully present and emotionally available as possible. But, in my experience, that's far easier said than done. When someone has been very angry or very sad, sometimes I have just wanted to escape. I have often been tempted to minimize or even deny their experience. Even more frequently, I have been tempted to “fix” their problem by offering unasked for advice.

Some years ago, my brother was the victim of a violent crime and spent weeks on the brink of death in an ICU. I was at his side with his family. During that time of trial, I was comforted most by those friends who would patiently listen to me talk about what was going on. I didn't need advice or prayers or solutions. I just needed someone who cared enough to simply listen.

My primary method of pastoral care is to simply listen. I used to wonder if that was enough, if there wasn't something else I should be doing, e.g. offering a prayer, an insight, or a practice. But I've come to believe that most often the impetus for such “offerings” is more about reducing my discomfort than that of the person I'm supposedly comforting. That is why it is so important that our small groups honor the covenant of no cross-talk or unsolicited advice. This discipline, this spiritual practice, allows us to be present to one another in a way that is both rare and precious.

P.S. Most people, though devastated, eventually find their way through the emotional wilderness of grief. However, there are those who don't recover. After suffering a significant loss, some will experience intense distress and depression leading to self-destructive behaviors. If you fear that someone in your group is at risk, contact your minister or someone else who is in a position to assess their level of risk and/or provide an appropriate referral or intervention.

Rev. Craig C. Roshaven is the associate minister of Main Line Unitarian Church and supports its extensive small group ministry.

In addition to being printed exclusively on white paper, which makes it easier to copy and is a cost-savings for the Network, the newsletter is now printed on eco-friendly, recycled paper.

MINISTER'S PAGE

Small Group Ministry Service Ventures: Congregation & Community

By Rev. Dr. Jan Carlsson-Bull, with Dr. Jack Martin and Annie Spang, Circle Ministry Coordination Team, First Parish Unitarian Universalist, Cohasset, MA

Circle Ministry (CM), the name given to Small Group Ministry at First Parish Unitarian Universalist in Cohasset, MA, is in its fourth year, with six groups and 53 participants. It has become a strong and healthy heartbeat in the soul of this congregation.

Five years ago, we researched best practices in UU congregations across the country. One such practice that came to light was that of service ventures. How easy it is for small groups to become cliques. How easy it is for any group to lose a sense of larger community and the accountability that accompanies it. How to prevent this?

We prepared a Behavioral Covenant template for each group to use as a launching pad for its own Behavioral Covenant, understanding that the core elements would be common to all groups. These elements included: logistical; respect for one another's time; commitment to attend; sharing "airtime;" general respect (e.g. speaking from one's own experience, no advice giving); and service to others.

Red flags went up at "service to others". Comments of resistance ranged from "I'm so busy!" to "I thought the focus was on this group!" to "We already do so much *for* the church." Our prepared responses included: "We're all busy, this group operates in a larger frame, and no, this is not just about us!" A few moans and groans were heard before the brainstorming began: one venture serving the congregation, and one venture serving the larger community.

Surprise! As group members planned and implemented, they began to experience a deeper bonding with one another and a deeper connection with the congregation. In the early years, the congregationally focused initiatives took the form of hosting breakfasts, a plant sale, and an evening of sharing treasured letters and desserts. Community focused ventures took the form of preparing lunch for a nearby center

serving the economically challenged, transporting goods to a food pantry; preparing a meal for folks coping with cancer, and collecting clothing for wounded military personnel returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

Enthusiasm and delight replaced moans and groans. From year to year, these ventures have become ever more creative, with energy levels to match. A clean-up/fix-up Sunday was the choice of two of the groups for a congregational venture. Another group hosted an "Afternoon of Discovery," with members and friends participating in a "show & tell" of leisure-time interests and activities that many knew nothing about! For community-g geared ventures, one group arranged with a local supermarket to hand to shoppers printed requests with items needed by the local food pantry. Items were collected and delivered by group members. This past year, the same group joined forces with another group and tapped the willingness of two supermarkets to participate. The harvest was 150 boxes of needed food items delivered to two nearby food pantries! Other projects included a day with Habitat for Humanity, planting window boxes for the Community Center, and a day of volunteering at a local organic farm/education center. Giving and receiving have become indistinguishable as the circles defining Circle Ministry expand through heart and hand.

What is Circle Ministry about? Service is one of the answers. Our CM handbook says more:

"As human beings we seek to be of use and benefit to others. A healthy Unitarian Universalist congregation with the vision of religious liberalism needs to provide avenues through which we can live out our faith in service, justice making, and social witness. Small group ministry helps to energize a congregation's social action by including in the group covenant an expectation of service to the congregation and the larger community."

The gift of a small group—increasingly skilled in deep listening, mutual respect, and service to others—is a gift given and received.

To learn more, contact the Circle Ministry Coordination Team. Jan: JCarlssonb@aol.com, Jack: dtjandmrsg@verizon.net, Annie: aspang1@verizon.net,

Program Notes

On-going or Time-Limited Groups—Which Is Better?

*By Dan Grandstaff and Carolyn Worthing, Covenant Groups Coordinators
Eno River UU Fellowship, Durham, NC*

Is it better for Covenant Groups to meet for a year and then “reshuffle” everyone into new groups, or for groups to be on-going so they create a deeper bond and sense of identity? This is the question we faced at the Eno River Unitarian Universalist Fellowship (ERUUF) in Durham, North Carolina.

ERUUF launched its Covenant Group program almost 10 years ago using the “on-going groups” model. As members moved or dropped out, new members were added. When a group dwindled or dissolved, we assigned remaining members to other groups. And when there were more people waiting to join than spaces available, we launched new Covenant Groups. This model has worked well at ERUUF where we have grown the initial pilot program to 14 groups, with about 150 people actively participating. For many members, their Covenant Group is a core part of their ERUUF experience.

We were aware, however, that the on-going groups model had its disadvantages. It was not always easy for newcomers to integrate into a closely-bonded circle, despite our open chair policy. If a group developed problems or became lax in their commitment, it was sometimes difficult to get them back on track. In addition, some people found it intimidating to commit to a group which had no end point.

We discussed the advantages of the “start over each year” model, but most of our groups were well-established and some had been in place for 10 years. It did not make sense to force them to dissolve and re-shuffle. We made the decision to do both. Existing groups would continue as they were, and new Covenant Groups would form as “year-long” groups. We started two groups the next year. One, a daytime group, struggled with low membership and dissolved at the end of the year. The other group flourished, decided they were unwilling to disband after a year, and morphed into an on-going Covenant Group.

Back to the drawing board, we decided to offer a second type of group that would last for only a year. In contrast to Covenant Groups’ twice-monthly meetings and two annual service projects, it would meet once a month and do one service project. To avoid confusion, we called this group a “Chalice Circle.” We made it clear that becoming an on-going group was not an option. If Chalice Circle members wanted to continue past one year, they could either join an existing Covenant Group or be assigned to a new Chalice Circle. In our view, the Chalice Circle offered several advantages: preparation for Covenant Groups, the chance to experience community in a small group for a finite period of time, and the opportunity to meet and get to know more people, thereby expanding the circle of connections within the congregation.

We are now almost at the end of the first year of our Chalice Circle experiment. We had 12 people in the first group, which is a little larger than ideal. The commitment to once-a-month meetings has been a little harder to maintain than the more frequent meetings of Covenant Groups. We do not yet know how many will choose to join an on-going Covenant Group or continue in another Chalice Circle, but it has clearly been a positive experience for everyone.

We’ve learned that there is a place for both on-going and time-limited groups at ERUUF. They each meet slightly different needs, while providing an experience of community for everyone who participates. We’re still experimenting, and probably always will be, with how to keep small groups healthy, lively, and meaningful. We especially like being able to cultivate new members and new leaders, and to offer options that meet our members’ diverse needs. We plan to keep offering both on-going Covenant Groups and year-long Chalice Circles. That’s what works for us.

Small Groups, Deep Connections.

Spotlight On:

How Small Group Ministry Enriches my Congregation

By Cynthia W. Corboy, Main Line Unitarian Church, Devon, PA

In the spring of 2002, the Main Line Unitarian Church was almost 50 years old and well-established. MLUC had grown into a large congregation with approximately 750 members. Although people were friendly, and long-time members knew each other from many years of working and worshipping together, it was difficult for some members to have a sense of connection or to feel the spirituality of a deep conversation. Newer members were sometimes finding it overwhelming, and some old members were leaving, saying they just didn't know anybody anymore. The timing was perfect for Small Group Ministry!

The goals of the Small Group Ministry included: (1) Providing members the opportunity to belong to a group of 6 – 10 people where they could develop a sense of connection. (2) Providing a place where spiritual and philosophical questions could be explored in a structured setting. (3) Enabling groups to perform service projects, both inside the church and in the larger community, fostering group cohesiveness. (4) Attracting new members and retaining old members.

The SGM program has been enormously successful, with more than 130 members in small groups. In January 2010, over 50 new members signed up for a trial mini-series of meetings. Although members are allowed to rotate to another group once a year, people generally love their groups and insist on staying where they are. The service projects are a lot of fun – even if done only annually. One group enjoyed raking flower beds and planting flowers last spring at a local medical clinic, and they bought, painted and assembled a picnic table for the summer volunteers. Of course, work was followed by lunch at a Thai restaurant, and since it was Kentucky Derby Day, mint juleps. This month the group will be preparing meals for homeless families who will live in the church for a week.

Some members report that SGM is the glue that seals them to the church, especially during difficult or transitional times. The service projects enhance the image of the church's work in the community and create goodwill for MLUC. Both new and old members sing the praises of their participation in this program. The search for intimacy and ultimacy, as well as the need to better serve our members and the community at large, motivated the beginning of the SGM program. The benefits of the program are ongoing and growing, and we continue to give it our strong support.

Cynthia Corboy served on the implementation team and helped launch MLUC's small group ministry program. She is currently a member of the SGM Steering Team.

SGM RESOURCES

Small Group Ministry Discussion Group – Join the UUA List Serve

The UUA list serve, Covenant Group Ministry, provides an opportunity to share questions, comments, and experiences with others engaged in small group and covenant group ministry. Subscribe to the mailing list on the Network's website.

Covenant Group News, a free e-newsletter sent monthly to 1300+ subscribers, features articles by and for ministers, facilitators, group members, and coordinators. Read back issues and subscribe on our website.

Networking Opportunities

Network with other congregations in your district, share best practices in small group ministry, and consider hosting a joint facilitator training or enrichment workshop. To view a complete list, visit our website and click on Who We Are: Our Members.

NETWORK ONLINE www.smallgroupministry.net

The source for session plans, resources, news of events and workshops, membership renewal forms, and back issues of *Covenant Group News* and the *SGM Quarterly Journal*. The Winter 2010 *Quarterly* is now posted on the site.

Summer Institute Goes to De Benneville Pines, Angelus Oaks, CA

Tuesday, August 31 to Friday, September 3, 2010

Registration Information at www.smallgroupministry.net

Don't miss the fifth Small Group Ministry Summer Institute! The Institute began as a way of introducing congregations to SGM and providing resources for program development. Small Group Ministry is in various stages within congregations, from just an idea to a program. Within established programs there are also phases, and we are learning together as we move into the second decade of UU SGM. Congregations have found that sending several people to the Institute allows for congregational assessment and planning, as well as having people able to attend consecutive sessions.

The Institutes are designed on the premise that we all have things to share and are willing to gain knowledge and understanding. This is what we expect in our Small Group/Covenant Group Sessions – why not at the Institute?

Sessions planned include:

- Group dynamics and developing and maintaining sound groups
- Daily Small Group Ministry sessions
- Starting, restarting and growing Small Group Ministry
- Developing and evaluating sessions
- Assessing your own program and building on your strengths
- Multigenerational Small Group Ministry - a “cutting edge” topic this year

<p>Cost: Lodging and Program Fee: \$350 \$25 discount for registration before July 1 \$25 discount for UU SGM Network members</p>
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<p>Contact Helen Zidowecki at office@smallgroupministry.net or 207-582-5308 with questions and comments.</p>
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Camp de Benneville Pines is a retreat and conference center located in the Barton Flats area of the San Bernardino National Forest, about 90 miles east of Los Angeles. At an elevation of 6,800 feet, the camp is surrounded by a forest of towering pines, cedars, and oaks and is affiliated with the Pacific Southwest District of the Unitarian Universalist Association. Facilities include a swimming pool, a hot tub, children's playground, an archery range, and opportunities for many outdoor sports. Cabins are all equipped with modern bathrooms and hot showers, and offer comfortable sleeping quarters. Meals are prepared by kitchen staff and served in the main lodge. Visit uucamp@aol.org for more information.

Read what others have to say about the Summer Institute:

Great practical ideas to take home. The times for sharing beyond the presentations were a fantastic opportunity! Lots of information. Really worthwhile experience.

The conference really reinforced for me the power of the small group ministry process. Three things about the experience made it memorable: the things I learned, the people I met, and the idyllic setting.

In addition to what was "taught," the most enriching aspect was being able to hear and dialogue about what others were doing in their SGM programs and why.

The program was well-planned; the variety of presentation styles kept interest high, as did the continuing movement in and out of different groups and places.

UU SGM Network Publications

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

NEW! *Small Group Ministry 2010: Celebrating Congregations*

The 2010 compilation acknowledges and celebrates the work of over 80 congregations that have contributed to the UU Small Group Ministry movement since 2004. Now all in one place, this collection features articles published in *Covenant Group News*, the *SGM Quarterly Journal*, and the UUA e-list in the last year. Each article is introduced by a profile of the contributing congregation, including when and how their program started, how many groups and participants, and their unique challenges and success stories. The vitality of covenant group ministry programs across the denomination is clearly demonstrated in this compilation, the only one of its kind. Available at General Assembly and for mail order in June 2010. Advance orders welcome.

Network Members: \$15 plus \$5 shipping Non-members: \$25 plus \$5 shipping

NEW! *Spiritual Journeys: 101 Session Plans for Small Group Ministry Programs*

Looking for fresh, inspiring topics for your program? This exciting new book offers a wide range of original, ready-to-use sessions covering Getting Started in a Group, the UU Seven Principles, Spiritual Journeying, Attitude Adjustment, Personal Beliefs and Values, Spiritual Challenges, Holidays, Just for Fun, Being Human, and Special Use subjects for events and national tragedies that affect our lives. Themes are drawn from art, literature, UU liturgy and hymnals, current events, and religious scriptures. Available at GA and for mail order in June 2010.

Network Members: \$20 plus \$5 shipping Non-members: \$30 plus \$5 shipping

Implementing Small Group Ministry: For Starting, Restarting and Enhancing a Program. October 2009

How do congregations decide on group duration and meeting frequency? Does it take a team to manage a program? Drawing on current information from congregations, the SGM Institutes, and *Covenant Group News*, this evolving document presents a series of considerations for Small Group Ministry program development, ongoing administration, groups, facilitators, session plans, and visibility, with a new section on uses of small group ministry in multiple settings. Mix and match features to build a SGM program that meets your ministry objectives.

Network Members: \$6 plus \$5 shipping Non-members: \$10 plus \$5 shipping

Ten Years of Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry June 2009

In celebration of the Network's fifth anniversary, this collection traces the Small Group Ministry movement through classic articles from 1998 to the present. The book focuses on the introduction of the small group ministry concept, the rise of enthusiasm, the facilitator's role, the nature of groups, and the element of service. A special history section features the visionaries who made UU Small Group Ministry a reality.

Network Members : \$15 plus \$5 shipping Non-members: \$25 plus \$5 shipping

Facilitator Training and Development Manual December 2008

Facilitator training and ongoing support are the keys to a successful small group ministry program. This training manual guides you through the process from recruitment and initial training through Facilitators Meetings and coaching. Part One is a plan for developing and implementing an in-house training program. Part Two, the *Facilitator's Guide*, is an interactive training module on CD to customize for your program, use in your training sessions and distribute to all group leaders.

Network Members: \$15 plus \$5 shipping Non-members: \$25 plus \$5 shipping

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry June 2008

A collection of 50+ articles from 5 years of the *SGM Quarterly Journal*, *Covenant Group News*, and website publications. Articles are arranged by topic, from basic elements of SGM, through the minister's role in shared ministry, sustaining your program, and applying SGM principles in all aspects of congregational life.

Network Members: \$15 plus \$5 shipping Non-members: \$25 plus \$5 shipping

Small Group Ministry for Youth

This dynamic format for middle and high school youth includes a session and discussion for facilitators and session plans for the Five Steps to Building Community and the Six Components of a Balanced Youth Program. Twenty-five session plans in all!

Network Members: \$15 plus \$5 shipping Non-members: \$25 plus \$5 shipping

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

As a member of the SGM Network you:

Get the current issue of the *Quarterly* 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

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I would like to receive the newsletter electronically; YES NO

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Download the form online at www.smallgroupministry.net

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