

SGM QUARTERLY

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News from the Network

Facilitator Training and Development Manual Now Available!

The Network's long-awaited training manual is now available for purchase. This guide for implementing an in-house training program covers initial training and on-going facilitator support, and includes the *Facilitator's Guide*, a training module on CD to customize for your program. See page seven for ordering information.

UU SGM Network at General Assembly - Our Sixth Year!

The Network will present *Facilitator Training: The Key to Small Group Ministry Success*, at GA 2009 in Salt Lake City. Speakers include Diana Dorroh, the Rev. Melissa Carvill-Zeimer, the Rev. Dr. Justin Osterman, and the Rev. Bret Lortie. The workshop will provide a concrete plan for designing and implementing a comprehensive training program. The minister's role in sharing and blessing this ministry will be a special focus. We will sponsor a booth in the Exhibit Hall and look forward to talking with SGM enthusiasts. Our newest publications and resources will be available as well.

Save the Date – SGM Summer Institute, August 16-21, 2009

The Mountain Retreat & Learning Centers, The Highlands, NC

The 2009 SGM Institute incorporates the varied ways Small Group Ministry/Covenant Groups enhance our congregations and Unitarian Universalism. There will be basic and general information and in-depth sessions around special focuses (Example: facilitation or program coordination). We will include ever-emerging resources and developments. Discounts for early registration and UU Small Group Ministry Network membership. Information and a registration form are included in this issue.

The e-Newsletter - The Electronic Version of the Quarterly Journal

With this issue we launch the e-newsletter, available to Network members directly via email. It's faster, eco-friendly, and easy to forward to all your facilitators and program leaders. If you would like to receive future issues electronically instead of in print, please send your email address to membership@smallgroupministry.net. To continue receiving your copy by postal mail, write to quarterlyeditor@smallgroupministry.net.

Subscription Renewal

If your address label has "Time to Renew" printed on it, it means it's time to send your annual membership fee in to the Network Treasurer so there will be no lapse in your subscription. A renewal invoice is included in this issue. Please send with payment to the address on the form.

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

FACILITATOR'S TOOLBOX

Frequently Asked Questions

Excerpts from the *Facilitator's Guide*, within the *Facilitator Training and Development Manual*, UU SGM Network, December 2008

An important part of facilitation skill-building is learning how to manage uncomfortable situations in our small groups *before* they arise. Here is a selection of common occurrences with suggestions of how to defuse them and go on with your session.

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 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.

What if check-in takes up the entire time allotted for the meeting?

Occasionally a group member has important and pressing things to share and it takes longer than usual. In this case the facilitator should be sensitive to the member's need to speak and flexible enough to let his/her sharing time run its course. If this becomes the norm rather than the exception, however, the other members will become uncomfortable with the unequal use of meeting time. One solution is to agree to an approximate time limit, such as 3 or 4 minutes for each person to check in, and to make it part of your covenant. Some groups choose to use an egg timer, or to pass a stone or talking stick to the next speaker after 3-4 minutes. (A talking stick is a tool used in many Native American Traditions during council meetings so that all can be heard. It is passed from one speaker to the next; only the person holding the stick is allowed to talk at that time.)

What if no one speaks after a topic question is asked?

Many groups purposely allow one minute or more of silence after each question is read. Silence is OK; it means the group is taking the opportunity to reflect on their experiences related to the question. Learn to welcome and be comfortable with the silence; it is a gift to each other, a sacred space in time. The group will respond when they are ready. Observe when people start looking up, a cue that they're ready to move on. Also allow time between responses for everyone to reflect on what the last person said.

What if one person monopolizes the discussion?

The Facilitator can remind members of the promise to honor everyone in the group by hearing what each person has to say. Another strategy is to gently break in, thank the speaker, and ask what others have to say about the discussion question.

What are some non-verbal signs I can give to show that I'm listening? Lean slightly forward with light eye contact.

That it's time to move on? Lean back and look at the session plan.

That we'd like to hear from those who haven't yet spoken? Turn towards the person and ask gently if there is anything they'd like to share. Passing is an option.

What if a member of my group talks about what they've heard or read? What if a participant talks about another person's experience rather than their own? The Facilitator can ask, "How does that relate to you?" or "How is this situation affecting you?"

FACILITATOR TRAINING NOTES

Excerpts from the *Facilitator Training and Development Manual*, UUSGMN, December 2008

Training Covenant Group Facilitators

A critical piece of your covenant group program is the Group Leader. Facilitators must be chosen wisely, trained well, and supported in their ministry. According to Peter Bowden, small group ministry consultant, "...you absolutely must develop an in-house system for continually identifying, mentoring, recruiting, and supporting new group leaders. This is the engine behind small group growth." Your Facilitators want to be trained to start leading a group with your assurance that if they do as you have asked them, they will succeed. The more explicit the instructions and preparation you give your Facilitators, the more successful your SGM program will be.

The initial Facilitator training may be presented to a group or to an individual, and will prepare your Facilitators to lead their first covenant group meetings. Your agenda will include the most important points to cover: the purpose of Small Group Ministry, the Facilitator's responsibilities, preparation for the first meeting, leading a meeting, setting boundaries, problem-solving strategies, the importance of connecting the group to the church, and where to go for help when needed. The second level of training takes place in the actual group setting, at the monthly Facilitators Meetings, and through regular communications. Continued training and support will be needed to:

- a) help the Facilitators with problems and issues they encounter,
- b) allow Facilitators to appreciate their place in the overall ministry of the church,
- c) make the leadership experience more fulfilling and meaningful, and
- d) connect your Small Group Ministry program to the church.

The Facilitators Meetings

The Purpose of the Facilitators Meetings is to provide support, continued training and coaching for the Facilitators, and to connect your Small Group Ministry program to the overall ministry of the church. Small Group Ministry programs that are the most vital have active participation by the minister, particularly in training and supporting Facilitators. Having the minister lead the Facilitators Meetings is a form of support for your group Leaders and benefits everyone. The minister provides vision for the program and expresses appreciation for the ministry that takes place in the groups. The effect is a blessing and an endorsement of the Leaders.

Facilitators Meetings should be held at least every six weeks; one and a half to two hours in length is adequate. Program leaders often use the basic Small Group Ministry format for Facilitators Meetings. The agenda includes:

1. Opening Words and Visioning
2. Personal Check-in (if your time and format permit)
3. Participant Review and Program Housekeeping
4. Group Check-in
5. Issues discussion
6. Skills Training on special topics
7. Session Plan review as needed.
8. Closing Words

An ideal for the Facilitators Meetings is to make them so nurturing that the group Leaders look forward to each one. Be sure that the content follows that outlined above and that the Facilitators have an opportunity to connect on a personal level, share both challenges and successes, brainstorm solutions with fellow group Leaders, learn new skills, and go away inspired with a renewed vision of their shared ministry.

Training Topics for Facilitators Meetings

1. Review of Small Group Ministry program mission and purpose
2. Setting limits – cross-talk, check-in time, tardiness, etc.
3. The group covenant - purpose and development process
4. Difficult behaviors - approaches and interventions
5. Spiritual practices – chalice lighting, singing bowl, meditation, etc.
6. Transitions – new members, new facilitators, loss or death of a member
7. Facilitation guidelines and techniques
8. Qualities/Characteristics of a successful facilitator
9. Service projects
10. Shared leadership
11. Listening skills and deep listening
12. Group development and change
13. Unspoken communication - body language
14. Successful group multiplication and birthing
15. Welcoming rituals for new group members

The newsletter is now printed exclusively on white paper, which makes it easier to read and copy and is a cost-savings for the Network.

From our Members.....

FIRST MONDAY NIGHT OF THE MONTH

Facilitator/ Leadership Training

Mary Ann Terry, Charleston, SC

Several years ago at the UU Church of Charleston, SC, we created “Suggested Guidelines” for all our covenant groups, called Connecting Circles. This year those guidelines became the tools for our Facilitator training at our monthly Monday night meetings. One guideline was highlighted each month. Facilitators Meetings use the SGM format so we can practice as we learn.

Suggested Guidelines

Focus on Spiritual Development – A Connecting Circle is a small group that meets monthly in a member’s home to participate in *small group ministry*. The intent is to grow and appreciate the spiritual journey that is fundamental to our lives. The vision was that members would share philosophic and spiritual topics, respect each others’ views, share life experiences, have fun, and serve the church.

Making “I” Statements - One person at a time speaks while the group listens. It is best to speak from the “I”. There should be no interruptions and little feedback. This process allows the guidance to come from within. The speaker stands alone with the truth of his/her own experience and we learn to look inside rather than outside ourselves for direction. Trust yourself enough to allow what is there to just emerge. It is all right to pass. Sometimes there is nothing to say or nothing to say *yet*. Be careful not to talk to please others, but to listen to yourself and others.

Listening Without an Agenda – This sounds easy, but it isn’t. It requires that we suspend our own inner dialogue and refrain from assessing what the other person is saying. It doesn’t require agreement, disagreement, interpretations or solutions. We practice empathy and truly experience what the speaker’s world is like when they are speaking and the rest of the group is *actively and attentively listening*. It means focusing on the present moment, without thinking about what you will say when it is your turn, or how you can “help” the speaker.

Rotating Leadership – This practice allows each member to take the group in their own direction when their turn comes. It encourages members to step out of the roles we usually take and learn to expand in other ways. The shy can stretch to reveal themselves. The talkative can learn patience. It allows us to share investment and ownership in the group equally. Decisions are usually made by consensus rather than by a vote.

Confidentiality – The degree of individual growth that occurs in a group is dependent upon how much intimacy develops. That intimacy, in turn, depends on trust. People must know that what they say in the group will not be repeated outside the group. We can create a safe space where we feel comfortable sharing sensitive and fragile parts of ourselves as part of the growth and healing process.

Responsibility for One’s Own Needs – Many of us are trained to be co-dependent. To get away from this, it is important that each member ask for what they need rather than expecting the group to know and respond appropriately in all situations. It is acceptable to decline to participate in an exercise or topic; the group does not have to change its plans to keep everyone happy at all times.

Commitment – The group sustains itself because each member comes every time. The group cannot sustain itself without this commitment: agreeing to be together and to make the group a priority. There is accountability to each other and to ones self to show up. You are important to the group’s existence!

To continue successfully, the group should take time periodically to step back and observe itself. We can then assess if we’re growing, having fun, and staying aligned with our purpose as a group.

New from Skinner House Books:

available from the UUA Bookstore, www.uuabookstore.org, April, 2009, \$14

HEART TO HEART: Fifteen Gatherings for Reflection and Sharing, by Christine Robinson and Alicia Hawkins

Resources for fifteen group conversations on topics such as forgiveness, loss, nature, money, and friendship. A reimagined model of small group ministry, *Heart to Heart* offers readings, journaling suggestions, and thought-provoking exercises to help participants prepare for the spiritual practice of sharing in community.

Christine Robinson, senior minister of the First Unitarian Church of Albuquerque, NM, has participated in many versions of this spiritual sharing model, both as a leader and a participant. Most of the gatherings began as sermons on these topics.

Alicia Hawkins, an inveterate collector of quotations and resources for the spiritual journey, has led the SGM program of the First Unitarian Church of Albuquerque for five years. She is currently on the board of the UU SGM Ministry Network.

Announcing Small Group TUBE!

Peter Bowden, co-founder of our Network, has launched a new small group ministry video series, making the content of his consulting and trainings available to all our congregations, a boon to church budgets. Find the new videos and subscribe to the video channel on Youtube™ at <http://www.youtube.com/smallgroupministry>

The Evolving Website

In 2001 **Peter Freedman Bowden**, Co-Founder, UU Small Group Ministry Network, launched www.smallgroupministry.net to help Unitarian Universalists discover and explore SGM. Initially a personal site, Peter transferred the website to the Network upon its launch at the 2004 General Assembly. The management of the website has recently transferred from Peter, as he moves into new phases of his professional career. We are deeply indebted to Peter for the materials he collected and made available on the site. Your suggestions and contributions are helpful as we further evolve the site. Please visit it frequently!

Some of the new and evolving features of the website are:

- The home page gives an update of the website, with links to other sections. The site will be updated on the first and fifteenth of each month.
- The cataloging of resources aids access to the growing number of resources available on the site. The directories on the Small Group Sessions and Online Resources sections can be sorted by title, author/source and topic.
- The *Quarterly* is sent to members as it is published and its content noted on the Home page. When the subsequent edition is published, the past *Quarterly* will be archived on the site and its respective articles added to the Online Resources and directory. For example, as this edition is sent out, the Fall edition will be added to the website in its entirety and the articles added to the Resources as individual items.
- The interconnections between Network media - the website, *Covenant Group News* (e-newsletter), the Covenant Group Ministry list serve (on the UUA), and the *Quarterly* - are being coordinated by the Publications Committee of the Network. These are vital paths for interactions with all of you involved in Small Group Ministry.

Helen Zidowecki, Website content, and Erik Zidowecki, Website Technical Manager

WORKSHOP

***Building and Sustaining a Strong Small Group Ministry Program* by Rev. Dr. M'ellen Kennedy**

Mattatuck UU Society, Woodbury, CT Saturday, February 7, 2009

This workshop will provide information for those beginning a SGM program or for programs in need of revitalization.

Cost: \$40, \$35 for two or more. Lunch included. **Registration:** Rev. Lloyd at revlloyd@comcast.net, 860-930-4101.

MINISTER'S PAGE

Sharing the Ministry Through SGM by Rev. Melissa Carvill-Ziemer

I learned as a ministerial intern that in order to truly practice shared ministry, ordained ministers need to be willing to share the best parts of ministry. I have taken this wisdom to heart and endeavored to find multiple ways to invite members and friends of the congregation I serve into meaningful and satisfying experiences of ministry. One of the most successful ways I have found to do this is through Small Group Ministry.

During my first year serving as the minister of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Kent, I worked with a small group of leaders to design a Small Group Ministry program tailored for our congregation. We considered the congregation's history with identity-based covenant groups and determined that an intentionally diverse small group ministry experience might be a welcome and energizing addition to our congregational life. We articulated a mission and a vision for ourselves and drafted promotional materials. With their permission, we adapted SGM sessions that one of our number had experienced at another church to fit a frame that we thought would provide the right amount of structure for our congregation.

We identified, recruited and trained facilitators in our model and set up a series of facilitator's meetings. Once we were ready, we began recruiting participants for a six-session pilot program in the spring. The response was great. It was so good, in fact, that we determined we would need to recruit and train additional facilitator's for our full-year session beginning in the fall.

We are now in the midst of our fourth year of Small Group Ministry in this congregation and count this as one of the more dynamic programs in our church. People participate in this ministry through multiple points of entry. Some participate as members of the groups, reflecting theologically with one another and sharing the support of those who know one another's joys and sorrows. New and not yet members get to meet long term members and leaders in our congregation, forming friendly relationships that often go much deeper. Some participate as leaders in our groups. While we have a few facilitators who have been with us from the beginning, others have become facilitators after a satisfying experience as a participant in a group or after serving as an assistant to their group's facilitator.

Some participate as members of our Small Group Ministry Steering Committee, overseeing the program as a whole, preparing and reviewing sessions and planning for the future of SGM in our congregation.

When we began, I had a significant coordinating role as the minister and I was intimately involved in every step of creation and execution. As our program has grown, we have been fortunate to have a skilled and committed lay leader step forward and assume the coordinating role. She has availed herself of opportunities to receive in-depth training on Small Group Ministry practices and has applied her learning and organizational skills to strengthen our own program. As the minister, I remain actively involved in SGM by attending facilitators and Steering Committee meetings, writing and reviewing sessions, and inviting new participants into our groups. I no longer, however, hold the bulk of the responsibility for making SGM happen in our congregation. We make SGM happen together and in this way we all have the satisfaction that comes when ministry is truly shared.

Rev. Melissa Carvill-Ziemer is Minister of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Kent, Ohio

UU SGM Network Publications

Order forms available from www.smallgroupministry.net

NOW AVAILABLE! *Facilitator Training and Development Manual* \$25 plus \$5 shipping

The Network's most requested resource, published in December 2008. Part One is a guide for developing and implementing an in-house training program. Part Two, the *Facilitator's Guide*, is a training module to use in your training sessions and distribute to all group leaders. The *Guide*, included in both print and CD format, is easily customized and updated for your SGM program.

ALL IN ONE PLACE! *Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry* \$25 plus \$5 shipping

A collection of more than 50 SGM articles gleaned from 5 years of *Quarterly Journal*, Covenant Group News, and website publications assembled in one easy-to-use resource. The articles are arranged by topic: basic elements of SGM, program structure and design, starting and promoting your program, the minister's role in shared ministry, facilitation, group development, session plans, and the application of SGM principles in multiple aspects of congregational life.

YOUTH SGM! *Small Group Ministry for Youth* \$25 plus \$5 shipping

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!

Small Groups, Deep Connections.

SPOTLIGHT ON.....

Find out what's happening in groups across the country.

Service to the community is one of the covenants of SGM. When choosing a service activity, look for a need to fill, plan various levels of participation, and above all, select a project that has meaning for every member of your group.

Inspirational service activities are showcased here:

Holston Valley UU Church, Gray, TN

"We hosted a Star Trek themed luncheon at the church and charged admission. The money went to replace the children's RE supplies after our RE building burned down the previous year. We dressed as characters from the TV show, decorated the room, and served foods with Klingon and Cardassian names. In working and playing together for such a good cause, our group was strengthened, the congregation had a wonderful time, and we were able to purchase \$900 worth of RE materials."

First Universalist Church, Minneapolis, MN

"We created a sign-up sheet to provide meals for the family of one of our group members whose spouse had suffered a debilitating stroke. We later had a sign-up schedule shared by email for taking the spouse to rehab appointments. We enjoyed sharing our favorite 'comfort food' with others and giving our group member the gift of some time for herself. Taking her husband to rehab was a 'stretching' experience, observing his progress and learning about dealing with and recovering from a stroke."

UU Congregation of Columbia, MD

"Our group volunteered to do yard clean-up at a local domestic violence center (DVC) safe-house. We worked together in an informal way, allowing the group members to get to know each other. We saw each other in different roles than usual. We gained a better understanding of the DVC's activities in our community and felt we performed a useful service for them. As often happens in service projects, we felt good about the whole process of helping others in the community."

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

As a member of the SGM Network you:

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

Name

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Congregation

District

Program Coordinator

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E-mail

I would like to receive the newsletter electronically; YES NO

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