

# SGM QUARTERLY

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A publication of the UU Small Group Ministry Network

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## News from the Network

### **Ten Years of UU Small Group Ministry Now Available!**

This new publication from the Network showcases the inspirational writings of clergy and lay leaders who brought Small Group Ministry to our congregations in the late 1990's. The magic of SGM holds true today!

### **Thank you, Diana Dorroh**

The members of the UU SGM Network Board of Directors would like to express their appreciation and gratitude to Board President Diana Dorroh, who completed her two year term on June 29, 2009.

### **General Assembly 2009, Salt Lake City, UT**

Thank you to Rev. Melissa Carvill-Ziemer, UU Church of Kent, OH; Rev. Bret Lortie, UU Church of San Antonio, TX; Rev. Justin Osterman, Main Line Unitarian Church, Devon, PA; and Diana Dorroh, Unitarian Church of Baton Rouge, LA, for presenting the Network's highly popular GA workshop, *Facilitator Training: The Key to Small Group Ministry Success*.

### **Welcome New Board Member!**

Christine Trigeiro is the Covenant Group program coordinator and a group facilitator at Chalice UU Congregation in Escondido, CA. She's interested in promoting greater depth of connection and personal growth for UU's through Small Group Ministry. We're delighted to welcome Christine to the Board of Directors! Read about our Board members' passion for SGM on our website. We look forward to an exciting year!

### **See Network Member Congregations on the Web**

Network with other congregations in your district, share best practices in small group ministry, and consider hosting a joint facilitator training or workshop.

### **SGM On Facebook**

The Small Group Ministry Network is now on Facebook! Join us and contribute to the ongoing conversation around Small Group Ministry and Covenant Groups. <http://groups.to/smallgroupministrynetwork>

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*INSERT: President's Report*

**Our Mission:**

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

## Join Us in the Adventure!

### *To our members:*

My name is Steve Becker, and the Small Group Ministry Network recently elected me the new President of our Board at our Annual Meeting during General Assembly. If you stopped by our booth, I had the honor of greeting you. Let me tell you a little about myself. I am a lifelong Unitarian, having grown up with parents who were married at the Unitarian Church in St. Louis, Missouri. I have been active in several congregations over the years, including the Abraham Lincoln Fellowship in Springfield, Illinois and East Shore Unitarian Church in Bellevue, Washington.

I have been a member of a covenant group since 2003, served on a Covenant Group Theme Team for two years, and last year, at my home Westside (Seattle) UU Congregation, Reverend Peg Morgan asked me to coordinate our Covenant Group Program. I have served as the Vice-President of the Small Group Ministry Network Board of Directors for two years.

We extend our appreciation to outgoing Board members Alicia Hawkins, Rev. Melissa Carvill-Ziemer, Mary Ann Terry, and Walter LeFlore for their valuable contributions in 2008-09. This year we offer small group ministry another excellent Board of Directors. (*See list in sidebar, this page.*) We also have two excellent staff, Beth Tiewater, our Quarterly Newsletter Editor, and Eric Zidowecki, our Webmaster. A great group! We have an exciting year planned, so watch this Quarterly for updates!

Please contact me at [stevebecker7@comcast.net](mailto:stevebecker7@comcast.net) if you have any questions, concerns, or need help with your program. I look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

Steve Becker

#### **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.

#### **Board and Staff**

Steve Becker, President  
 Rev. Helen Zidowecki, Vice President  
 Diana Dorroh, Secretary  
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#### **Advisory Board**

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 Rev. Glenn Turner

#### **Quarterly Editor**

Beth Tiewater

#### **Webmaster**

Erik Zidowecki

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

## *From our members.....*

### **A Role for Drop In Groups**

*By Carolyn Holt,  
Community Church of Chapel Hill, NC*

Small Group Ministry began at Community Church of Chapel Hill, NC, as traditional two-hour groups. We called them Covenant Groups, because members covenanted (agreed) to meet monthly during the Church Year. Members in the groups liked them, but a ten-month commitment to an unfamiliar process discouraged others from joining; integrating newcomers during the year was also challenging. As a result, our Covenant Program was static in size over a several year period, generally serving about thirty church members and friends in a church of 350 pledging units. During the 2008-09 church year, our Religious Education Program began offering Small Group Ministry one Sunday evening a month: one-hour, drop-in groups, followed by a family potluck. Childcare was provided as adults met in small, deep listening groups. With its family emphasis, the primary audience for this program was parents of children in RE, but the program was open to all adults in the church. An evaluation in June of this well-attended (35 adults, plus their children), drop-in program reported feedback which was not only positive but essentially similar to evaluation results from our ongoing, two-hour groups. *(For more information on this program for families, contact Marion Hirsch: [Hirsch.marion@gmail.com](mailto:Hirsch.marion@gmail.com))*

As a result of these findings, we are adding more Drop-In groups to our Small Group Ministry Program for the 2009-2010 church year. These groups will meet once a month, for two hours, but church members and friends are free to attend as schedules permit; no ongoing commitment is required. The covenant involved in drop-in groups is to the process, which provides a safe container for individual spiritual exploration in a group setting. These new, two-hour drop-in groups will be staffed with two or more facilitators, so that if more than nine attend on a given night, two or more groups can meet concurrently. We are advertising these groups in the monthly church newsletter, and there will be a followup announcement on the Sunday just before our "Third Thursday Drop-In Covenant Groups." Every month our Minister, Maj-Britt Johnson, develops a topic for use by all the groups described in this article; she also preaches on the topic towards the end of the month. Our hope is that as new members and friends find Community Church at various points during the church year, they will attend a Drop-In Group. We believe that the healing power of deep listening will not only deepen spiritual life, but serve as a bridge into active church membership. *(For more information on Drop-In Groups at Community Church, contact Carolyn Holt: [carolynholt@mac.com](mailto:carolynholt@mac.com))*

## **SPOTLIGHT ON.....**

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

*Service projects from Small Group Ministry programs across the denomination.*

### **UU Congregation of the Grand Valley, Grand Junction, CO**

"We planted bulbs in the front flower beds at church, followed by a potluck meal for our group. There was a lot of cooperative work involved that led to good bonding. We saw individual's talents and it was a fun interaction. We felt good about contributing to the congregation, and the eating activity provided a fellowship experience."

### **Tennessee Valley UU Church, Knoxville, TN**

"Some of our groups have provided receptions for memorial services of their members. It helped them celebrate a dear friend, served the family and loved ones of the deceased, and strengthened already strong bonds."

### **Unitarian Church of Baton Rouge, LA**

"Every 'Branches' group ushers and brings flowers for the Sunday Service for one month each year. In addition, our group donated a dinner for eight at the annual Auction. That experience really bonded the group and it raised \$600 for the church."

## *CONNECTIONS..... CONNECTIONS..... CONNECTIONS.....*

*with Steve Becker*

Starting with this edition, our Quarterly will offer a new column called “*Connections*”, a humorous and sometimes irreverent look at the way we connect in small groups. It’s all about connecting with ourselves in spiritual ways, connecting with others along their way, connecting with our congregations, connecting with our communities, and the ultimate connection with the force that gives us love, drive, faith, and whatever else keeps us going!

### **FREE ADVENTURE TRIP OFFER!**

Are you bored with yourself? Are you looking for more adventure in your life, but can’t afford the cruise fare? Come along with a group of trusted friends on an exciting journey into your deeper self. Your voyage begins with a two-hour stay at a friend’s luxurious villa or church with all amenities included! Free water! You’ll experience an exciting Check-in where you will be privy to all the secrets of the world! Then, a thrilling Topic Introduction that sets the stage for the stirring descent into the spiritual world. Yes, your very own quest for truth! And no one knows where your journey will take you: examining how you live the Seven Principles; discovering new ways to find meaning in your life; or articulating your faith. Each thought-provoking topic will help you to take another step on your own quest for truth! You’ll sit on the edge of your seat as you discover who you really are - your attitudes, values, and beliefs - without ever having to stand in long lines at the airport, tip your guide, or sleep in uncomfortable beds! And, best of all, you’ll be able to take away an unlimited number of mementos duty-free! But wait, there’s more! For no extra charge, a *free* set of Closing Words designed to keep your journey memorable for days to come! Money-back guarantee! Get yours today! Join us for an exciting adventure! Contact your minister for trip details; journeys start in September; sign up today!

*Steve is the Small Group Ministry Program Coordinator for the Westside Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Seattle, Washington. He currently serves as the President of the Small Group Ministry Network Board of Directors.*

### **From The Mountain**

By Helen Zidowecki, UU SGM Network Board

To paraphrase the song, “Turn the World Around”  
(#1074 in *Singing the Journey*)

*We came to The Mountain,  
Lived on The Mountain,  
Went home from The Mountain  
To turn the World Around.*

The Small Group Ministry Institute has the educational components of a conference, but it has become an *Institute* where participants share knowledge and grapple with the meaning and implications of Small Group Ministry. The August 2009 Institute at The Mountain Conference Center focused on individual experiences, program structure, group process and dynamics, session plans, and community service.

We looked at congregational context from several perspectives, beginning with age: All the congregations represented had been started within the last 60 years! A congregation’s history is interrelated with the culture that influences the development and implementation of SGM. Next, we considered how congregations respond to changes in size, physical site, and ministerial leadership, and the role of SGM in moving congregations through internal and external interruptions.

Third, we discussed the timing of starting or rejuvenating programs and the placement of SGM ministry within the organization.

Finally, we looked at applications of SGM in congregational life and its power to change entire congregations. This is evident in the way people speak and listen to each other, how they approach situations, and the importance placed on shared ministry.

Materials developed for the SGM Institutes frequently become resources. For example, information from our discussions have been incorporated into the October 1 revision of “Implementing Small Group Ministry.” We even discussed the terms used in the session plan format, with appreciation for the power of language. Further, a description of SGM’s impact on individuals, groups, and the broader UU Community is being developed.

Plan on coming to the 2010 Small Group Ministry Institute, probably in late August in California. Details will be announced as soon as they are available. Being part of such an Institute provides new learning and the opportunity to contribute to this dynamic and evolving part of Unitarian Universalist life.

## SGM RESOURCES AND EVENTS

### **FACILITATING SMALL GROUP MINISTRY Saturday, October 10, 2009 10-4**

**UU Fellowship of Harford County, Churchville, MD.** Sponsored by the Joseph Priestley District, this workshop for program coordinators and facilitators focuses on enhanced facilitator skills and group development with a review of the basic elements of small group ministry. Visit [www.jpduua.org](http://www.jpduua.org) to download a flier and registration form.

**COVENANT GROUP NEWS** is a free interactive e-newsletter sent monthly to 1300 subscribers. Features articles by ministers, facilitators, group members, and coordinators. Share your insights and experiences with fellow practitioners. Submit articles and questions to the *CGNews* editor at [diana\\_dorroh@hotmail.com](mailto:diana_dorroh@hotmail.com).

**Share Your Experience - Join a Network Committee!** Much of our work takes place in subcommittees – Membership, Publications, Education/Conferences, Financial, and Grants. Meetings are bimonthly via phone conference. The time commitment is minimal, yet the work is vital to furthering the Network's outreach. For more information, write to [office@smallgroupministry.net](mailto:office@smallgroupministry.net).

### **NETWORK ONLINE** [www.smallgroupministry.net](http://www.smallgroupministry.net)

- Select session plans and contribute your own.
- See the listing of Member Congregations.
- Read *Covenant Group News* archives from 1999 to the present
- The 2009 Summer Quarterly is now posted on the site.

## UU SGM Network Publications

Order forms available from [www.smallgroupministry.net](http://www.smallgroupministry.net)

**NEW! *Implementing Small Group Ministry: For Starting, Restarting and Enhancing A Program.*** This evolving document presents 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. This volume incorporates information from congregations, the Summer Small Group Ministry Institutes, and *CGNews*. Available October 2009  
*Network Members: \$6 plus \$2 shipping Non-members: \$10 plus \$2 shipping*

**NEW! *Ten Years of Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry*** June 2009  
 A companion to the 2008 book, this anniversary collection traces the rational, vision and magic of the spiritual revolution and presents the rich history of the small group ministry movement in classic articles and conference proceedings from its earliest proponents.  
*Network Members : \$20 plus \$5 shipping Non-members: \$30 plus \$5 shipping*

***Facilitator Training and Development Manual*** December 2008  
 The manual is two books in one. Part One is a guide for developing and implementing an in-house training program. Part Two, the *Facilitator's Guide*, is a 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*, *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 the application of SGM principles in multiple 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*

***Small Groups, Deep Connections.***

## MINISTER'S PAGE

### Successfully Run Programs

by Rev. Russ Savage

Excerpted from *Strategies and Solutions for Small Group Ministry Challenges*,  
presented at General Assembly, June 2008

Over the course of ten years, I've worked with vibrant small group ministry programs in congregations of varying sizes. My experience has taught me that several things are essential to a successful Small Group Ministry program. First among them is the involvement of the minister. Ministerial support provides visibility, legitimacy, and even prestige to the SGM program. One of the most powerful things you can do is to have a Small Group Ministry Sunday, with the minister preaching about the program and some participants giving testimony about their own experience with it.

A second essential to a successful program is a lay person or team to oversee and coordinate the program, keep records of group status, communicate with the facilitators, and manage the integration of new members into groups.

Finally, your program needs to be visible to everyone who takes part in the life of your congregation if it is to be understood as a real and vital part of the life of the church. Are there frequent newsletter items about your SGM program? Are there opportunities for new people to sign up? Are there attractive, inviting messages about the SGM program for visitors and others to see? Is Small Group Ministry included in annual reporting to the congregation, with an invitation and information about how to join?

Are there periodic mentions of Small Group Ministry from the pulpit? This is one of the most effective ways of convincing people of the value and importance of the SGM program. Do you have a table staffed with a volunteer during coffee hour on at least some Sundays? This is another good face-to-face way to spread the word about SGM.

Do you have a brochure that tells in an inviting way about your Small Group Ministry program and provides the mechanism for signing up? This is good for the bashful visitor who doesn't want to talk to a stranger but picks up things from your literature rack. Finally, is your Small Group Ministry program prominently featured on your church website, with a way to sign up on-line?

What outcomes would you be able to observe if you had a successful Small Group Ministry program? I think there are several good indicators. One is simply that there is a reasonably good level of participation. Another is that, whether they are presently participating or not, people in the congregation know about the program and appreciate its importance.

I have this dream of a perfect answer from some member of my congregation who is asked by a visitor or a stranger or a neighbor or a co-worker, "What do you do in your church anyway?" And this well-informed and involved member comes back with this answer: "Every Sunday morning we have a stimulating worship service, with thoughtful and well-researched preaching and beautiful and uplifting music. We have a Religious Education program to provide our children and young people with the knowledge and spiritual tools they need as they move through the stages of development. We do the work of Social Justice, striving to make the world a better place especially for those who have been most marginalized in the world. And we have a Small Group Ministry program, to foster closer bonds of connection and provide a place for each person to progress along the path of individual spiritual development." Wouldn't it be great to have our SGM programs ranked right up there along with all our other important areas of activity? May it be so in your congregation and mine.

Rev. Russ Savage  
Assistant Minister  
UU Church of Annapolis, MD  
*Printed with permission*

*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.*

## Jumpstart Your Small Group Ministry Program *by Alicia Hawkins, Albuquerque, NM*

Often our small group ministry programs start off with a bang, then lose momentum after a few years. Participation lags and program management now seems more like work. In this article we will explore what some of you have done to ignite a dwindling small group ministry program: what has worked, what has not, and what your process has been.

First, let's look at signs of a dwindling program. Rev. Lucy Ijams, minister of the UU Church in Meriden, CT, speaks of becoming aware that the SGM program was getting a bit "ossified". Numbers go down, it becomes harder to find "fired up" facilitators, and there is a general feeling of "same old, same old" to monthly facilitator meetings. Excitement has been replaced by tedium. Some of the areas to focus on in reviving your program are facilitators, meeting structure, visibility in the church, and program logistics. We will concentrate on the first two in this article. Bringing new life to a program will involve changes in some areas and, perhaps, some resistance to change.

**Facilitators** are at the core of SGM. Groups thrive with great facilitators and flounder with weak facilitators. Some say that great facilitators are naturals. In most cases, however, we find that great facilitators have had great training. Pay attention to options for training and provide initial training for new facilitators who have previously been group members, ongoing training through monthly meetings where facilitators share "joys and concerns" of their groups and help one another with issues, and coaching for new facilitators from your "veteran/ace" facilitators. Pairing up co-facilitators is an art, putting together all the varied skills of each facilitator - young/old, male/female, organized/spontaneous, calm/emotional, first-time/veteran - there are lots of pairing possibilities!

How do you find good facilitators? Kathy McVoy of First Unitarian Church of St. Louis suggests asking people who are already good facilitators who they might recommend. Often this can bring to light good facilitators from other areas of the church. Also, ask your facilitators to suggest possible new facilitators from their existing groups. Almost always one person will come to mind.

Make it easy for facilitators to do their job by supplying them with everything they need, starting with great materials. We have a writing team busy doing that at First Unitarian Church of Albuquerque and Main Line Unitarian Church. Provide logistic support to form the groups, help with room reservations, provide name tags and chalices.

Give facilitators recognition all along the way. Consider honoring them in worship services, listing their names in the church newsletter, and hosting a recognition dinner for them. Create a "thank you" note from their group. The covenant groups did this in Albuquerque and facilitators were deeply touched by group member comments. Give them a token gift. Ask clergy to write them a note of thanks emphasizing how facilitators are part of the leadership of the church.

**Meeting structure** varies across the U.S. Be aware of what variations may be helpful and what areas should not be tinkered with. For example, maintaining a safe space for sharing is crucial for SGM and cannot be changed. Here are some areas that *can* be modified: Change the style of material used. If the group is used to coming to the meeting with little forethought to the topic, give some material with quotes and questions ahead of time. On the other hand, if your group has been using "ponder ahead of time" materials, try session plans that present a topic on the spot. If your groups use free choice for topics, try changing to all groups using the same topics and a couple paired with the minister's sermon.

Change the sharing process. Here's one possibility: Start with a round of brief comments on an aspect of the topic from each group member (kind of a "starter sharing"). Follow with a second round of deeper sharing on the topic. A third round may include sharing brought to mind from others' sharing or may come from a question such as, "What realization have you come away with about this topic?" Vary the sharing process to find out what works best for your groups.

Meet for a 6-8 month series. A limited time frame is helpful and may encourage participation since some people find it stressful to leave an ongoing group. Let groups that want to continue indefinitely do so. Supply them with top-notch materials and suggest they try rotating the facilitator role. You may get some new facilitators from this practice.

Tinker with all aspects of the meeting. Invite members to bring their favorite opening reading. Try a chalice extinguishing ritual. Vary the silence process by using a walking meditation or a visualization. Instead of a closing reading try this: Ask the group to come close together around the chalice holding hands. Invite each person to say a word or phrase that describes how they are feeling right now.

*Alicia Hawkins is the SGM Program Director at the First Unitarian Church of Albuquerque, NM, and co-author of the book, HEART TO HEART: Fourteen Gatherings for Reflection and Sharing. Skinner House Books, UUA Bookstore*

**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 discounts on publications and Network-sponsored events, and have a voice and a vote at our annual meeting at GA.

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Newtown Square, PA 19073. Download the form online at [www.smallgroupministry.net](http://www.smallgroupministry.net)

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

## President's Annual Report

UU Small Group Ministry Network - June 27, 2009

*from Diana Dorroh*

We were excited to add four new Board members at the 2008 Annual Meeting: Alicia Hawkins, Rev. Melissa Carvill-Ziemer, Rev. Bret Lortie and Rev. Tamara Lebak. They joined Susan Hollister, Steve Becker, Rev. Helen Zidowecki, Anne Haynes, Mary Ann Terry, Walter LaFlore, and me. The Board later selected Rev. Helen Zidowecki as Secretary; Susan Hollister as Treasurer, Steve Becker as Vice President; and Diana Dorroh as President. Over the course of the year, we lost several Board members for a variety of reasons. Nevertheless, it was an active Board and an active year for the Network.

**The UU Small Group Ministry Institute at The Mountain** was a high for the year for me. We had about 35 participants, and it was an exhilarating experience for most everyone. The faculty learned as much as the participants, and we decided to hold a 2009 Institute at The Mountain.

On August 26, 2008, our **501(c)(3) status** was granted. Thanks to Susan Hollister for collecting the information and filling out the forms, and to Steve Becker for assisting Susan.

**Membership Database** - Early in the year, Anne Haynes, as Chair of Membership, entered our membership information into a spreadsheet and began to maintain it for us. Processes and strategies for following up on lapsed memberships have been put in place.

The **Publications Committee**, chaired by Alicia Hawkins, had a very good year. We continued to work well with contract employees, Beth Tiewater, *Quarterly* Editor, and Erik Zidowecki, Webmaster. I have enjoyed being editor of *CG News* and coordinating articles and material with Susan Hollister, who works directly with Beth Tiewater. The committee managed to better integrate the website, *CG News* and the *Quarterly*. Helen and Eric have added numerous articles and sessions to the website and made it easy to access them.

In December, the long-awaited **Facilitator Training and Development Manual** went to press. Susan and Diana co-authored. Calvin Dame wrote a forward. In June 2009, we published *Ten Years of UU Small Group Ministry, UU SGM Network, June 2009*, an anniversary compilation of SGM articles published throughout 2008-2009, plus rediscovered articles from the earliest issues of *Covenant Group News*, beginning in 1999.

In the spring, Erik Zidowecki managed to find all of the oldest copies of *CG News*, created by Rev. Bob Hill. They are currently on our website.

Rev. Melissa Carvill-Ziemer chaired the **Education Committee** and planning meetings for our GA workshop, sponsored again by the GA Planning Committee. That committee is planning a conference at The Mountain in August of 2009, and a conference on the west coast in 2010.

We have been in contact with Harlan Limpert, Director of District Services. In the spring, the UUA Board abolished Affiliate Status for independent organizations and asked the UUA staff to work with the former affiliates (like us) to accomplish their goals. We are stronger now and looking forward to working with the UUA.

It has been fulfilling and exciting to serve as President of the UU Small Group Ministry Network for two years. It was very daunting to follow in Calvin Dame's shoes as President and to make our way without the other two founders, M'ellen Kennedy and Peter Bowden, on staff. But we've worked together beautifully and, I hope, made them proud.