

Observations and reflections on twenty years of Small Group Ministry

The change and challenge in ministry.

The work of Bob Hill and Glenn Turner coincided with the emergence of “shared ministry” that broadened ministry from being the purview of the minister to the including congregants in a process of congregational life. Both Bob and Glenn defined the role of the minister to include selecting and training facilitators, and meeting with them regularly, developing session plans. As Small Group Ministry has grown, lay leadership has developed, such as in the role of the Coordinator. This person shares these functions with the minister as determined in their respective setting.

Shared ministry and the changing role of the minister was discussed in “Small Group Ministry: The Critical Role of the Minister” SGM Journal Fall 2017, and may be summed up as:

“Shared ministry encourages the minister to take more of a support rather than administrative role. Assists with selection and development of leadership, including modeling ministry, is available to the lay leadership for group and faith development. Works with a designated lay leader who assumes the coordinating function. To the degree possible, the structure of SGM is in the hands of laity, especially the facilitation of the Small Group Ministry groups.”

Ministry is different from other groups in the church.

Ministry is act of caring or being present with another. It relates to the spiritual as well as the physical and emotional well-being of the group participants, and the balance between Intimacy (community) and Ultimacy (spiritual exploration) is crucial. Listening without needing to respond frees us to interact from the heart. Moving this listening practice to the topic of the sessions allows the sharing of another to increase our understanding without the need to agree or discuss. This practice is a spiritual way to confront the expectation to respond. Indeed, being open to the sharing of others allows space for connecting. We can extend the practice of sharing at the beginning of a session into our consideration of a topic. In this respect, we share from our own perspective, rather than in response to another’s sharing. This ultimacy, or considering topics of importance enhances the spiritual and ministerial way of living and interacting.

Leadership roles are defined.

Group Leaders see the overall health of the group and connects the group with the congregation. They are chosen and trained by the minister and/or designated Small Group Ministry Coordinator as part of shared ministry. Group Leaders meet with the minister and coordinator for spiritual support, enhance group development, and awareness of new resources.

Session Facilitators guide the session in accordance with the basic elements of Small Group Ministry. Increasingly, groups are rotating the facilitation role among the group members; those who are interested in leading a session are able to do so. Group members may take leadership roles in other parts of the congregation.

Resources show the growth, breadth and influence of Small Group Ministry.

The Network website has a library of sessions and other useful information.

The UUA website has: Small Group Ministry (<https://www.uua.org/small-group>), also Virtual (Online) Small Group Ministry for UUs of Color

Reflections on SGM from GA 2018:

While our small groups can be used to explore aspects of UUism, it’s not a setting for indoctrinating or convincing someone that some particular way of thinking is right. In these times of political and social

activism, with its increasing stridency, small groups provide a safe sanctuary where civility and respect for differences can be nurtured. Glenn Turner

Moving beyond our congregation's walls, we can harness what we've learned to engage our communities with today's justice issues and their underlying spiritual, moral, and ethical questions. Small group ministry can be Unitarian Universalism's engine as we work to face the challenges of our time. To use it, we must take our calling, the power of this ministry, and our potential seriously.
Peter Bowden

I am committed to amplifying our UU small group ministry movement out in the world, because as one younger woman writes: "we'll be safer and stronger together." Marti Keller

-Taken from the Small Group Ministry Network Journal, Summer 2018