

Small Group Ministry by the Numbers

The founders of the Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry/Covenant Group movement in the late 1990's brought the focus of spiritual deepening with small group relationships in congregations to Unitarian Universalism. From the very beginning, there was the question of, "Who is doing –or involved with – Small Group Ministry or Covenant Groups"?

At General Assembly 2010, the Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network invited congregations to submit a profile or brief description of their experiences with Small Group/Covenant Group Ministry.

Of the 151 congregations that were included in the General Assembly publication *Celebrating Congregations*, 89 submitted information about their programs, and others had submitted session plans and/or articles and resources to the Network. The congregations were from 38 states, Canada and Mexico, and the world-wide perspective of the Church of the Larger Fellowship. They range from congregations involved with Small Group Ministry since 1998 to some that are in the process of starting a of starting a program. They cover all sizes of congregations, from 72 members to 1650 and the Church of the Larger Fellowship with 3500 members.

In preparing for the General Assembly 2018 Networking Session on Small Group Ministry, we noted congregations that have connected with the Network in some way, or that are known to be involved with Small Group Ministry at some level. Our counts are incomplete, but as of this publication show:

- Congregations*: Over 425 congregations are known to the Network to be or have been involved in some phase of Small Group Ministry, from exploring to having ongoing programs, including forty-eight states, four Canadian Provinces, Australia, England and Mexico.
- Session plans*: Over 1000 session plans from congregations and individuals are on or linked to the Network website, and more are waiting to be added.
- Articles*: Over 400 articles involving at least 200 individuals
- Subscribers to Covenant Group News (CGN)**: 600
- Network Facebook**: 270

The Network is continuing to connect with congregations and other organizations that are involved with Small Group Ministry. This includes reviewing websites, inviting people to contact the Network, and trying to increase connections through the UUA Regions.

We frequently measure impact by the number of groups and number of participants in those groups. Counting the number of people who *engage with SGM* in the small groups would give a broader picture of impact. For example, Augusta had an intergenerational series throughout the year. One session included five options of topics co-facilitated by an adult and a youth. About half of the participants had not experienced Small Group Ministry! Using statistics to define or demonstrate effectiveness or impact undermines the impact.

To capture this, we need to include:

- Number of ongoing groups and participants – as presently
- Participants in short-term or series of meetings, such as session on the UU Principles, etc.
- Note special events, such as using Small Group Ministry in events that use session plans

While there may be some duplication, the intent of the data is to indicate where Small Group Ministry is involving people within the congregation, and possibly where its use can be increased.

The importance is not the statistics but the impact made by those that are represented by the statistics.

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