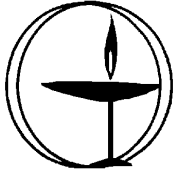


# **U.U. Small Group Ministry** **Quarterly**



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## **Starting WellSprings Congregation with Small Group Ministry An Interview with Rev. Ken Beldon**

**Susan Hollister, Devon, PA**

When Ken Beldon accepted the appointment as lead minister of the new WellSprings Congregation in the summer of 2005, he embraced the foundational element of this new faith community: commitment to small group ministry. This congregation actually started meeting using SGM for a year and a half before conducting their first Sunday morning worship! A truly revolutionary approach to starting a church. Ken had initiated SGM at his former church in Florida, having been introduced to the concept at General Assembly and through workshops given by Rev. Calvin Dame and others. Ken knew first-hand the benefits of small group ministry: significant relationships, new member retention, and spiritual deepening. In addition, SGM was the ideal vehicle to allow time for discernment of the new congregation's DNA—it's core identity. Even before growth and planning tactics, a small group of committed people covenanted to grow together spiritually, get clear on their mission, then follow through with the larger creation of WellSprings. As Ken says, "We could only hope to share with others what we already possessed ourselves."

Soon after his arrival in August, 2005, Ken gathered focus groups of people from the area to discern the vision for liberal religion in the community, located in the northwest Philadelphia suburbs. The initial small group, the Planting Team, sprang from that process and was devoted to building a healthy, vibrant community that would grow. Made up of both long-time Unitarian Universalists and unchurched seekers, the Planting Team met weekly for seven months, focusing on personal spiritual growth and the development of WellSprings' core values and beliefs. Their charge was to provide the breadth of UUism people love, as well as the depth of spiritual growth and sense of purpose they seek. It's a different way of beginning than some have been accustomed to in UU congregations. Initially, it was "church as small group."

The Planting Team spawned four new groups in May, 2006. These small groups for spiritual growth were named Springboards, which refers to "diving in" as well as to a starting point. Springboards used the ten week curriculum called "Listening to Our Lives," centered around recurring themes of spiritual life: god, morality, person gifts, dealing with suffering, the fullness of life, service, and sources of inspiration. The groups met twice a month through September, with an additional session to discuss next steps.

(Continued on page 2)

## **The Stow and Acton Model of Small Group Ministry**

**Walter LeFlore, Stow, MA**

During the spring of 2004, The Rev Tom Rosiello of the First Parish Church of Stow and Acton, Massachusetts, formed a committee to help plan and implement a Small Group Ministry program. We spent several meetings discussing our intentions and the primary functions SGM would serve for the congregation.

With a congregational population in the vicinity of 250, we had grown a bit too large for most people to operate as if "I can have meaningful relationships with everyone in the church community, as I have done for years." Like most other on-going communities, natural cliques had formed around friendships, interests and life circumstances. We also understood that a mid-sized church needed an active lay ministry and that it would become increasingly difficult for any one minister to adequately "minister" to all the needs of the community.

In a relatively short period of time, the planning committee identified and studied the various benefits of SGM. We focused on building a program that would help create deeper interpersonal connections across the various dimensions of the church community. We wanted a program that created a structural mechanism that allowed people to be heard, known and affirmed for their life experiences, viewpoints and feelings. We believed, and continue to believe, that in creating a safe place for people to become better known and better know others, we minister to each other in significant ways. Simultaneously, we help strengthen our connection to the community.

Since one of the important reasons for creating an SGM program was to knit the community together, we designed a structure that all groups would operate under. We decided that each group would meet monthly for approximately two hours and use the same session plan. We consciously decided not to use an affinity group model or let groups operate independently because we were concerned that approach might tend to segment the congregation. We wanted to create the possibility that people in different groups could continue to address the month's session topic at coffee hour or in other settings.

During the summer of 2005, the majority of the planning group attended a Small Group Ministry training program at Ferry Beach, the UU camp and conference center in Saco, Maine. The training was offered by the UU Small Group Ministry Network. We were

(Continued on page 2)

## Starting Wellsprings with SGM Susan Hollister (Continued from page 1)

On completion of Listening to Our Lives, group members had the opportunity to engage in gifts discernment, assisted by Kathy Ellis, Director of Equipping, who joined the Staff in September, 2006. Kathy facilitated their discovery of motivations and aspirations and helped to connect their unique gifts with areas of service. A major objective at WellSprings is to define areas where people can serve effectively while growing personally at the same time.

**Congregational leaders grew directly out of the initial Springboards small groups, going on to serve on teams to further prepare for WellSprings' launch.**

**The staff and founders of WellSprings were intentional about starting with small groups.** Life change happens, says Ken, when people really get down to the nitty-gritty. "We know, day in and day out, it's about incorporating the DNA into our lives beyond Sunday morning. **Small Groups are our opportunity to make connections with the whole of our lives.**" SGM allows people to apply spiritual practice to their everyday lives. It is the large vision, not numbers, which define congregational growth. **A congregation will grow when people are growing spiritually and in service and interpreting religion in their own calling. Numbers will follow.** "Growth," Ken believes, "is about never sacrificing the personal." Sunday worship services started at WellSprings in late January of 2007. Now, just five months later, 80-100 adults and youth attend services each week.

**A second generation of Springboards began in March.** Each of the four groups concentrates on a particular theme: Praying, Living, and Loving; A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity; Not so Random Acts of Kindness; and Meditations from Buddhist Traditions. Kathy Ellis and Ken lead two of the groups; the meditations and creativity groups are led by congregation members with interest and experience in the area. Leaders design the curriculum with guidance from Kathy and Ken. The groups will meet weekly for twelve weeks, either in homes or at the church; meetings last two hours.

**Ken and Kathy set the expectations for group covenants at the initial Leader Training: trusting, showing up, keeping in touch, and treating what is shared with discretion.** Additional training, such as interpersonal relationships, continues at monthly Leader meetings where Ken and Kathy act as coaches. The meetings are also a time to identify future leaders and to reflect on members' spiritual growth and life transformation.

**In contrast to the so-called "marathon model" where small groups continue for years at a time, Ken describes WellSprings' model as more like weight lifting: stress and release; intense, but short-term.** People know going in that they will have twelve intensive, wonderful weeks in which to grow spiritually and get to know people. It will come to an end, but there will be another small group to connect intimately with. Ken says, **"Instead of defining the small group experience in a scarce way—like there may never be another group like the one I know now—we offer an abundance of opportunities for people to grow and connect."** Springboards will be a growth

engine for the congregation; new folks will always find a place in a small group as generations of Springboards continue. Future themes are Adult Children as Caregivers and Money & Meaning.

**All Springboards focus on practice and include "homework" between meetings.** For example, members of the Not-So-Random Acts of Kindness group report back on what acts of kindness they performed in the community since last time. Members of the Meditation group report on their progress during the week. The reporting takes the place of check-in in the meeting format. Members tell their stories as they describe what meditation is bringing up for them; or the fears, tentativeness, and joys resulting from acts of kindness. In this way, the content is used to reveal the depth of members' lives. In addition, it provides the opportunity to share strengths, be held accountable, and encourage each other to continue doing and growing.

**Service is built into the content as well, particularly in the Kindness group.** Ken's weekly Kindness practice is to leave lunch money for the next person in line at the local sandwich shop. One group will donate materials for seedbeds and planting materials to gardeners at the Gleanings Program farms, WellSprings' community service partner. Other groups are planning a free car wash and a riverbed clean-up. WellSprings intends to be "a go and do kind of congregation," one that answers people's yearning for connection. **As Ken says, when we drop a pebble, we never know how far the ripples will go.**

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## The Stow & Acton Model of SGM Walter LeFlore (Continued from page 1)

exposed to a number of different models, approaches and confirming ideas. We also gained helpful insights on the "hows" of SGM and training in group facilitation. **The Ferry Beach SGM Training was a wonderful learning, and bonding experience for our planning group.** We went home with a bucketful of ideas and a definite sense that we were on solid ground in our design and strategies.

**The planning group then focused our attention on training facilitators and planning the implementation stage of our program.** Again, attempting to reach the total church population, we asked facilitators to sign up for different time slots. We offered a small group meeting on virtually every day of the week, including Saturday and Sunday. Meetings were held mostly in the evenings, but we also offered a few during daytime hours.

We sent out informational letters to the entire congregation with sign up sheets, asking for 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> choices for day/time slots. We intentionally did not associate facilitator names with time slots in order to help stay focused on enhancing community. The minister mentioned the program regularly at Sunday morning worship and in other communications. **To our amazement, we had over one hundred people sign up during the first year;** ten groups and eleven facilitators. We expected five or six groups with two facilitators each. The second year's numbers increased by several people and we increased the number of groups to decrease the size of each group. In January, we began our third year and the program continues to have over one hundred participants. (Continued on page 3)



## The UU Small Group Ministry Network (UUSGM Network)

### *Our Mission:*

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

The UU Small Group Ministry Network is a membership-based, independent affiliate organization of the Unitarian Universalist Association (see [uua.org](http://uua.org)). The purpose of the Network is to support small group ministry and related shared ministry models in Unitarian Universalist congregations through developing new resources, networking and training opportunities.

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### Joining the Network

For info on joining and benefits of membership,  
see the back page of this Quarterly,  
or visit [www.smallgroupministry.net](http://www.smallgroupministry.net)  
Time to renew? Check your mailing label.

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### Board & Staff

Rev. Calvin Dame, President  
Susan Hollister, Treasurer  
Rev. Marti Keller, Secretary  
Diana Dorroh  
Walter LeFlore  
Rev. Helen Zidowecki

#### Advisory Board

Rev. Bob Hill  
Rev. Glenn Turner



Co-Coordinators  
Peter Bowden  
M'ellen Kennedy

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### Need Help with Your Youth Group? Youth SGM Resource Available Commissioned by the UUSGM Network Written by the Rev. Helen Zidowecki

The Small Group Ministry format has been used effectively with Youth to create powerful group experiences. Drawing on her years of experience working directly with Youth, Helen Zidowecki has created "Small Group Ministry with Youth", a useful booklet for those wanting concrete help. This resource includes a session for facilitators, and discussion and session plans for The Five Steps to Building Community and Six Components of a Balanced Youth Program. A total of 25 session plans are included. The resource costs \$25 plus \$5 shipping and handling. All proceeds from this resource, in excess of development cost, go to support the ministry of the UUSGM Network. You can order the resource on-line at [smallgroupministry.net](http://smallgroupministry.net) or contact Peter Bowden at (401-855-0037).

## Regional Conferences Offer Ideal Opportunity for Local Small Group Ministry Training

As more congregations develop Small Group Ministry Programs, the need is increasing for local training for facilitators and other congregational leaders and members. A regional workshop gives the perfect opportunity for congregations in a given geographic area to get together, hear about each other's program successes, challenges and ideas, and to get some tips from experienced old-timers and experts.

The UU Small Group Ministry Network helps local leaders plan such conferences tailored to the current needs of the congregation(s) attending. Here are some comments from attendees at various Network conferences:

*"I will take back to my church tons of info  
and insights into how to be more effective.  
I have more confidence in my abilities and purpose."*

*"The experience filled my head with information  
and my heart with inspiration.  
I feel confident that I can now enhance the spiritual lives  
of members of my congregation.  
Having done some teaching myself,  
I am well aware of the time, effort, and dedication  
the presenters gave to the workshops and participants."*

To explore the possibility of a local or regional  
conference in your area, please contact us at  
[conferences@smallgroupministry.net](mailto:conferences@smallgroupministry.net).

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### "Building and Sustaining a Strong Small Group Ministry Program"

Saturday, September 15, 2007 9-4

Second Congregational Society,  
Unitarian Universalist, Concord, NH

The Concord UU Church and the NH-VT Small Group  
Ministry Task Force are pleased to offer a training  
opportunity for SGM enthusiasts.

The workshop will cover the following topics: the power and purpose of Small Group Ministry (or Covenant Groups); the essential components of a Small Group Ministry program; addressing common challenges in an SGM program; developing shared leadership within a small group; handling group difficulties; and a hands-on experience in an actual small group.

The workshop leader is Dr. M'ellen Kennedy, a UU community minister and community psychologist. She is co-founder and co-coordinator of the UU Small Group Ministry Network. The cost of the workshop is \$40 for one member of a church to attend and \$35 for each additional person from the same church. Lunch will be included. If you have questions, contact M'ellen Kennedy at [mellen@smallgroupministry.net](mailto:mellen@smallgroupministry.net).

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*"When we listen to people, our own language softens.  
Listening may be the cardinal act of giving...  
I think it is the source of peace." Paul Hawken*

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# ***U.U. Small Group Ministry Network***

155 Everts Street  
Newport, RI 02840  
Spring, 2007

Dear Small Group Ministry Friends,

We are writing to you on behalf of the Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network because we all share a common passion: making our congregations healthier and happier through Small Group Ministries or Covenant Groups.

The mission of the Network is “to help create healthy congregations and a vital Unitarian Universalist movement by promoting and supporting Small Group Ministry.” We do that by developing new resources, training leaders, and providing opportunities for small group participants to get together and share experiences. Our website has a wealth of free, practical resources such as session plans, event listings, the monthly Covenant Group e-Newsletter, and the SGM Quarterly journal. Please visit us at [www.smallgroupministry.net](http://www.smallgroupministry.net).

An independent affiliate of the Unitarian Universalist Association (recently identified on “Lay Leader Drive Time Essays 2,” as one of the top ten resources for congregations) our Network was initially funded by the Fund for Unitarian Universalism, but we receive no other Association funding. Most of those doing the work of the Network are volunteers. Support for this important ministry has to come from gifts, and individual and congregational memberships.

Now we need to ask for your help. We know that many of you take a special collection monthly in support of various causes. Many of you also hold an annual Small Group Ministry Sunday in which you recognize and honor the facilitators and participants who make up your small groups. (If you don't do that now, we hope you will consider scheduling such a Sunday program.) Our request is that you pass an open plate for contributions to the small group ministry program, yours and ours, during your Small Group Ministry Sundays. We ask that you forward part of that collection to the UU Small Group Ministry Network so that we may continue to help congregations start Small Group Ministry programs and to support these programs where they are already helping our congregations expand and deepen.

All of us associated with the Network appreciate deeply your continued leadership in the Small Group Ministry movement.

Sincerely yours,

Rev. Glenn Turner,  
Rev. Robert L. Hill,  
The Advisory Board of the U. U. Small Group Ministry Network

## Publicize Your Program With a Small Group Ministry Webpage

Susan Hollister, Devon, PA

In these days of cyber information, church shoppers and members alike look to the Internet to find what they need. Your congregation most likely has a website that showcases your ministers, sermons, religious education, and programs. **Why not add a Covenant Group webpage to publicize your small group ministry program?** Here are things to consider as you build your webpage. 1. Make it easy to find and use. List it as a link on your congregation's homepage. 2. Make it colorful and inviting. Use graphics, photos, a logo, and interesting type font. 3. Give the history of the small group ministry movement, both nationwide and at your church. 4. State the purpose of SGM and the benefits to the congregation and individuals. 5. Explain the meeting format and how Covenant Groups are organized; talk about group covenants and service activities. Consider using a Question & Answer format. 6. Give examples of recent discussion topics. 7. Tell how to join a group; list program leaders and contact information. Give a mailing address for completed forms. 8. Make it easy to download a sign-up form or fill one in online. 9. Include testimonials from enthusiastic participants. 10. Cite links to [www.smallgroupministry.net](http://www.smallgroupministry.net) and other websites for further information.

**For inspiration in designing your Small Group Ministry webpage, look at how these congregations publicize their program on the web. All are inviting, comprehensive, and user-friendly.**

UU Church of Arlington, VA: [www.uucava.org](http://www.uucava.org)  
(→Covenant Groups)

UU Church of Rockville, MD: [www.uucr.org](http://www.uucr.org)  
(→Church Life→Small Group Ministry)

UUs of Sterling, VA: [www.uusterling.org](http://www.uusterling.org)  
(Ministry→Small Groups→Covenant Group)

UU Congregation of Fairfax, VA: [www.uucf.org](http://www.uucf.org)  
(→Covenant Groups)

BuxMont UU Fellowship, PA: [www.buxmontuu.org](http://www.buxmontuu.org)  
(→Small Group Ministry)

The UU Church in Cherry Hill, NJ:  
[www.uucinch.org](http://www.uucinch.org) (→Who We Are→Fellowship Groups)

## Integrating Service Projects Into An Existing Program: A Success Story

Betsy Tabor and Lauren Katz  
Unitarian Universalist Church of Portsmouth  
Portsmouth, NH

**The small group ministry program at South Church has had a wonderful fourth year.** We started strong with Kick-Off Sunday in September: the pump was primed with references to covenant groups as well as a testimonial during the service and we had sign-ups afterward during the social hour. New folks volunteered on the steering committee, joining with experts from the past years. A new minister came upon the scene with new energy, new people signed up, and new groups were formed. We have nine in all now.

**Just when we thought we really had the hang of it, our minister, Rev. Roberta Finkelstein, announced that each group needed to participate in a group service activity. She said that doing a community service project together was an important element in the small group ministry experience.** Oh no! There was a feather missing from our cap. The Covenant Group Ministry Committee decided to introduce the concept gently, suggesting that groups consider hosting a Sunday social hour. **Some groups were uncomfortable and even fretted over that. But we pushed ahead.** By now we were experimenting with convener meetings, which was new to our program. We brought conveners together every couple of months, and one of our agenda items was to explore the benefits of service or social action as a small group. **As further support, we added a session plan this winter on service.**

**The grumblings changed to rumblings! To our surprise, covenant groups were becoming powerful vehicles for service.** Brainstorming ways to move beyond cookies and coffee, one group added a twist to the social hour with an ice-breaker game to encourage people to break out of their comfort zones and make new friends. Several groups who had already hosted a social hour began thinking of doing a second activity. One group collected personal care items, toys and luggage for our local Interfaith Hospitality Network, which provides housing for homeless families. Another group volunteered their time for our annual auction, which proved to be a great financial success for the church. **Groups were no longer worried about having to do a service activity. Instead, they were having trouble deciding how many to do and how to pick a day when everyone could attend!**

**What our committee thought would take two or more years to incorporate into the program, has become a success story for community service through small group ministry. We are delighted that social service projects are now a key ingredient to each group's connection and strength.**

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## Starting a Revolution: Roots of the Small Group Ministry Movement An Audio CD Interview with Rev. Glenn Turner Peter Bowden, UU PLANET Ministry and Media

Rev. Glenn Turner who retired from ministry a few years ago, was one of the original leaders in the UU small group ministry movement. This CD is an oral history, 70 minute interview of Glenn conducted by Peter Bowden. This is a great starting point for those of you interested in getting to know more about our SGM movement's history. Glenn shares his experiences with small groups and working with facilitators, and his thoughts on where all of this is going. The interview is divided into fifteen tracks. You may listen to samples of each track and order the audio CD at [smallgroupministry.net](http://smallgroupministry.net).

# Small Group Ministry at General Assembly & Ferry Beach 2007

Portland, OR, June 20-24, 2007

For more info, visit [uua.org](http://uua.org)



Representatives and members of our Unitarian Universalist congregations and organizations will be gathering for our General Assembly (GA). Programs about Small Group Ministry or Covenant Groups are among the many exciting offerings at GA in Portland, OR, this year.

## The UU Small Group Ministry Network Is Offering the Following Workshops:

### #2043 Emerging Models of Small Group Ministry

Thursday, June 21, 1-2:15 PM, Rooms D133-134

Congregations across our denomination are developing successful and exciting variations on Small Group Ministry or Covenant Groups. This panel of members and friends of the Small Group Ministry Network will share our significant innovations including theme groups, short-term groups, groups in the community, use in Religious Education and by religious professionals. Panelists are Rev. Ken Beldon, Dr. M'ellen Kennedy, Rev. Helen Zidowecki, and others.

### #3053 Facilitator Training for Small Group Ministry

Friday, June 22, 2:45-4 PM, Room E145

Small Group Ministry or Covenant Groups are transforming how we do congregational life. One of the challenges that lay and professional leaders face is how to adequately train facilitators. In this workshop, members of the Small Group Ministry Network will share our collective wisdom on what makes for quality leadership development. Presenters: Dr. M'ellen Kennedy, Rev. Marti Keller, Diana Dorroh and Peter Bowden.

## UUSGM Network Annual Meeting

The Annual Meeting of the UU Small Group Ministry Network will be held at GA in Portland. We will vote on a slate of officers for the coming year. Details on the Meeting will be available at the SGM Network Booth.

## UUSGM Network Booth #852 "Small Groups, Deep Connections"

The UU Small Group Ministry Network is offering a booth in the Exhibit Hall at General Assembly. Come learn more about Small Group Ministry, receive free consulting about your SGM questions, talk with the experts, hear mini-workshops, join the Network, pick up free materials, purchase materials, meet SGM enthusiasts from around the country, and tell us about your SGM Program. See You there!

Hours: Wednesday: Noon to 7 PM

Thursday through Saturday: 11 AM to 7 PM

Sunday: 9 AM to 4 PM

## Covenant Groups at GA On Hiatus In Portland 2007

Harlan Limpert, Director for District Services of the Unitarian Universalist Association, has announced that a decision has been made to take a one-year hiatus from having covenant groups at General Assembly. Plan on covenant groups returning to GA in 2008 -- bigger and stronger than ever. (Around 300 people participated last year!) If You have a story to share about your Covenant Group experience at GA in past years, please send it to [mellen@smallgroupministry.net](mailto:mellen@smallgroupministry.net) for inclusion in future issues of this Quarterly or in our Covenant Group News. We'd love to hear from you.

## "Exploring Feminist Theologies:" Small Group Ministry Week

August 11 -17, 2007

Ferry Beach, Saco, ME

M'ellen Kennedy will be offering a Small Group Ministry related workshop this summer at Ferry Beach, the UU Camp in Saco, Maine. The workshop is part of the weeklong camp "In The Company of Women." This experience will be an opportunity for women to explore together feminist theologies and women's spirituality using the Small Group Ministry format. Along the way we'll reflect on issues such as the feminist tradition, images of the divine feminine, community, and more. Much of the time we'll work in small groups balancing discussion with expression through drawing, poetry, art and music. We'll finish with each woman sharing on an important theological insight gained from the week's experience.

**The week will also provide training opportunities with workshops on an introduction to SGM and SGM facilitation skills** The workshop leader, M'ellen Kennedy, is a UU community minister and community psychologist. This project stems in part from funding from the UU Women's Federation through a Margaret Fuller Award.

For more information about the week

<http://spaces.msn.com/members/itcw>

To register visit [www.ferrybeach.org](http://www.ferrybeach.org)

**Time To Renew?  
Check Your Mailing Label!  
Do You Want  
to Subscribe to this Quarterly?**

**Become a Member of**

**The UU Small Group Ministry Network!**

Individual: \$40US Annually (1 copy of Quarterly)  
Congregation: \$100US Annually (6 copies of Quarterly)

New & Existing Members: To make our larger efforts to support this ministry possible, such as research and development of resources, we need your donations above your annual membership fee.

Additional Donation: \$100 \$250 \$500 \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
Total Enclosed: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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Donations to the Network are tax deductible. Please complete the form above and mail with your check made out to "UU SGM Network" to the UU SGM Network, Attn: Peter Bowden, 155 Evarts Street, Newport, RI 02840

You can also join and renew on-line: [smallgroupministry.net](http://smallgroupministry.net)

**The Benefits of Network Membership:**

1. Experiencing the joy of helping our grassroots Small Group Ministry movement flourish!
2. Getting the SGM Quarterly mailed to your home or congregation four times each year.
3. Receiving registration discounts when you attend UU SGM Network sponsored events.
4. Receiving assistance when you plan and offer a regional small group ministry event.
5. Participating as a voting member in the UUSGM Network Annual Meeting at General Assembly.

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**Please Consider Giving a Gift to the Network.**

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**The UUSGM Quarterly**

**Editor: M'ellen Kennedy**

**è Feature Articles in Future Issues**

Summer 2007 Facilitator Training & Report on GA

Fall 2007 Please let us know

what topic would you like to see covered.

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**Subscribe to the Covenant Group News**

Keep up on news about Small Group Ministry and Covenant Groups with the monthly free e-news, "Covenant Group News." The newsletter was started by Bob Hill and is now published by the UU Small Group Ministry Network. If you're not already a subscriber, to sign up, visit our website [www.smallgroupministry.net](http://www.smallgroupministry.net)

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Newport, RI 02840**