

U.U. Small Group Ministry Quarterly



Vol. 1, No. 3, Winter, 2005
Published by the U.U. Small Group Ministry Network

Creating Small Group Ministry Sessions

By Rev. Calvin O. Dame

Augusta, ME

After a congregation gets their Small Group Ministry Program up and running, the next question is **how to provide good "content" for group discussion?** Some congregations use an affinity group model, i.e. quilting, Buddhism, women's groups, social action, writing, etc. With this approach, the challenge of finding session topics is likely narrowed and groups may not use common sessions.

But most congregations form groups specifically to encourage spiritual exploration and depth. Even here, practice varies: some groups chose topics on their own, some adopt existing curriculum, others explore books chapter by chapter. In some congregations groups are assigned a common topic for each meeting. In at least one program, the sermon, the RE program and the small groups all explore a common theme each month!

Still, the most common practice seems to be creating or finding Small Group Ministry Sessions. In Augusta we have a loose leaf notebook of topics that groups work through at their own pace, and we have been sharing our topics in various ways since we started. I encourage congregations with good topics to make them available, with the strong caveat to respect copyright laws (see page 2).

We have a **Topics Committee responsible for creating and approving session topics.** Groups and individuals also create and submit topics to the committee for editing and distribution, and I think that our committee is good at shaping sessions to work well for small group ministry! Here is how we work:

We aim to make our sessions facilitator friendly, so we seldom require any kind of preparation on the part of the facilitator. Busy facilitators should be able to get to their group, pull out the topic for the day and start to read. Then, almost any subject can make a good session. If it would make a sermon, a column, an article a discussion at coffee hour or a self-help book, it will work in a group. **The trick is asking the right questions in the right way.**

First, keep it simple: groups meet for two hours, at most, and a good part of that time goes, appropriately, to checking in and connecting. So the **topics need to be focused.** Solitude, for instance, can be loneliness or creative retreat, each will work better as a topic than muddled into one session. Then, **keep the questions in a session to a minimum.** Three questions at most, two can be plenty. No group can work through five or more questions in any
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Growing Support for Small Group Ministry: UU Small Group Ministry Network

Makes Big Strides

By Mellen Kennedy

Burlington, VT

Are you looking for help in starting a small group ministry program or in strengthening an existing one? Perhaps you'd like to learn some of the basics of what small group ministry is, or want to network with others involved in this exciting form of ministry? Well you're in luck. That is just what the U.U. Small Group Ministry Network is for -- **AND, we just passed two significant milestones putting us in a better position to serve you.**

First, we are delighted to announce that **the UU Small Group Ministry Network has been named as an Independent Affiliate Organization** of the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations (U.U.A.). Among other things, this means that we will be able to offer two sessions on small group ministry at General Assembly (see page 5). Being an Independent Affiliate Organization also means that we're listed on the UUA website list of affiliates, which will make it easier for folks to find us. Passing this milestone means that this organization and all the Small Group Ministry Programs out there in our congregations -- like yours -- are being recognized as an important part of the landscape of our denomination! That's a great step forward for all of us.

Second, we are thrilled to announce that **the UU Small Group Ministry Network has been awarded a grant of \$9,000 from The Fund For Unitarian Universalism.** The award letter states:

"The Fund for Unitarian Universalism is committed to strengthening Unitarian Universalist institutions and community life, to nurturing and celebrating our liberal religious heritage, and to encouraging a generosity among UU s that is reflected in commitments of time, money and energy. We believe that the work that you do exemplifies these values in action. On behalf of the Panel members, thank you for the opportunity to express our faith in action through this grant."

We are honored by this award and we receive it on behalf of you and all of our members. **We agree whole-heartedly with the Funding Panel that Small Group Ministry exemplifies some of what is most hopeful and vital in our**
(Continued on page 2)

Creating Session Topics

by Rev. Calvin O. Dame

(Continued from page 1)

depth in any one meeting. We do not write multi-session topics, though groups sometimes mine a topic for several meetings.

Then, **questions need to open out into discussion rather than direct attention towards a particular conclusion or telescope a right answer.** When you look at a question, you should be able to imagine discussion going in a couple of directions.

Also, groups need variety so topics need diversity. There are timeless and serious themes: God, heaven, moral choices, death. **Then there are topics that are amusing or warm and fuzzy:** pets, most embarrassing moments, a group learning everyone's favorite dance. Our sessions begin and end with readings. These can be thematic to introduce, support or enlarge a session's topic, but they do not need to be. A reading can aim to reconvene the group, quiet the mood or simply celebrate our lives. If anything, I would tend to choose readings that are broader and more general. Thematic readings may work better as part of the topic section.

Finally, keep a sense of perspective. Small group ministry is about connecting people, deepening our spiritual lives; creating community, strengthening our congregations and creating opportunities to serve. We are not creating graduate theological courses, nor should we mimic new age fads. **Small group ministry sessions should aim to provide real questions to engage real people in discussions that matter in the living our real lives.**

Let me again mention the importance of respecting copyrights and encourage you to become familiar with the law, particularly if you intend to share topics online or in print. The amount of prose you can quote is different, for instance, from poetry. And if you want to reproduce (as opposed to reading from a book) material written by one of our ministers or lay people, ask for permission. No one has ever told me no, and I have always been honored to be asked. However I, and many of my colleagues, have been dismayed to see our work used without our knowledge. -C.D.

You're Invited to Become a Member of The UU Small Group Ministry Network The Benefits of Membership

What are the benefits of joining the UU Small Group Ministry Network?

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. Accessing great new members-only resources through our website.
4. Receiving registration discounts when you attend UU SGM Network sponsored events.
5. Receiving assistance when you plan and offer a regional or cluster small group ministry event.

UUSGM Network Makes Big Strides

by Mellen Kennedy

(Continued from page 1)

liberal religious tradition. **We are especially pleased that the grant means we'll be able to serve you better.** Among other things, we plan to use the funding to develop the programs and materials which you've been telling us are needed. In particular we plan to develop resources on coaching facilitators and a manual for facilitators. Please continue to let us know through our website, at our workshops and at our booth at GA what you need to improve or launch your Small Group Ministry program.

In addition to these milestones, **the UU Small Group Ministry Network was also featured in the January 2005 edition of "InterConnections"** a publication for Lay Leaders of UU Congregations. Visit the uua.org website for archived articles from InterConnections. And, as we announced in our last Quarterly, we are also honored to be given the opportunity to spread the word of Small Group Ministry through **a week long course at Ferry Beach** (see page 7).

It's been a dynamic past few months for the UU Small Group Ministry Network and the next few months promises to be a time of fruition. **Thank you to the Funding Panel, to the UUA, and to all of you involved in Small Group ministry, particularly our member supporters for actualizing the promise and power of Small Group Ministry. The time is right for the next stage of growth for this burgeoning, movement.** We feel honored to be given the opportunity to serve you and collaborate with you in creating healthy congregations through Small Group Ministry

Please Join

The UU Small Group Ministry Network

Annual Membership Individual: \$35US
Congregational \$60US
(Congregational level includes 6 copies of the Quarterly)
Contributing Membership \$100US
Founding Membership \$250 \$500 \$1000US

The easiest method is to join on line at

www.smallgroupministry.net

Otherwise fill out the form below

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Please circle the membership level above.
Please mail your check made out to UUSGMN to
155 Evarts Street, Newport, RI 02840

Why Not Join Today?!

UU Small Group Ministry Network Board & Staff

Rev. Calvin Dame, President

Elizabeth Barrett

Marti Keller

Sue Stukey, Secretary

Rev. Helen Zidowecki

Advisory Board

Rev. Bob Hill

Rev. Glenn Turner

Co-Coordinators:

Peter Bowden

Mellen Kennedy

Our UUSGM Network Mission:

*To help create healthy congregations by
supporting Small Group Ministry.*

The UUSGM Quarterly

Editor: Mellen Kennedy

The UUSGM Quarterly is a newsletter which provides information, explores issues and shares resources on Small Group Ministry. **Do you have a SGM experience to share, or a testimonial, or an exciting aspect of the SGM program in your congregation?** Please send your requests for topics, your ideas and submissions to mellen@smallgroupministry.net.

è Feature Articles in Upcoming Issues:

Spring 2005 Grounding Groups Through
Service Projects

Summer/GA 2005 Small Group Ministry
By Congregation Size

Fall 2005 Cultivating Leadership

Winter 2005 Topic To Be Selected
Based on Members' Requests

Donations & Other Funding

This Quarterly is funded in part by our members and also by the Fund for Unitarian Universalism. However, there is more work that can be done to support our congregations. And we want to do it! In order to take on these research and resource development projects we are welcoming donations. We are now identifying a UU congregation to be our fiscal agent so that your donations may be tax deductible. As our network grows we will move towards having our own non-profit status. We thank our members for their support and welcome all additional financial contributions. For more info on making tax deductible donations, please contact Peter Bowden (401 855-0037).

Regional Conferences On Small Group Ministry: Strengthening the Grassroots Movement

Could your congregation, your region or district benefit from a conference on small group ministry? Such a conference is an opportunity for area congregations just considering the idea, as well as congregations with already existing programs, to receive help and encouragement to be successful in their endeavors. **The UU Small Group Ministry Network is offering assistance in planning such conferences around the U.S. and Canada.** Here are the conferences just occurring or in the planning stages.

Providence, Rhode Island January 22, 2005

This workshop was conducted by Mellen Kennedy and Peter Bowden for congregations in Southern New England.

Madison, Wisconsin -- Fall 2005

Presented by The Central MidWest District and the UU Small Group Ministry Network

A Regional Conference and
Enrichment Program for Small Group Leaders
At First Unitarian Society of Madison, WI
Saturday, November 5, 2005
9:00 AM - 4:00 PM

Save the date for this day long small group ministry enrichment program for lay and professional Unitarian Universalist leaders! We've designed this program to help UU congregations with small group ministry programs take the next step in deepening and expanding these ministries. Ministers, DRE's, lay coaches, facilitators, facilitators in training, and lay ministers of every label and classification - we welcome you. Calvin Dame and Mellen Kennedy of the UU Small Group Ministry Network will lead this day of exploration, problem solving, connection, inspiration and growth. Topics will be based on emerging patterns in small group ministries throughout our association and issues raised by participants.

Portland, Oregon – Fall 2005

We're excited to announce that a regional conference is just in the beginning stages of planning for congregations in the Portland area. If you're interested contact Mellen Kennedy at mellen@smallgroupministry.net or Kathy Foldes kfoldes@easystreet.com

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Subscribe to the Covenant Group News

Keep up on news about small group ministry and covenant groups with the monthly 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

Small Tasks, Big Ministry

By Peter Bowden

Newport, RI

I am thankful for all the people who are writing sessions for our small group ministries. I have written some recently and found it to be harder and more time consuming than I expected. Yet it was a very rewarding experience. Writing sessions is important. I think it is essential that we all contribute to our collective pool of sessions. One of my resolutions this new year is to write more myself and to encourage people in the groups I lead to produce them. I hope you will too. It feels good sharing sessions with UU's worldwide!

But there is a lot more to small group ministry than the session. In fact, the community and ministry emerging from the groups I've worked with have been because of what my co-leaders and I have done outside of the group. There are many times when the ministry is in the smallest of acts.

Whether you are a group participant, leader or minister, I invite you to consider how doing some of the following would impact the relationships in your group(s).

1. **First Contact** When my congregation first launched its small group ministry I started a practice that has served me well. I got together for coffee with each person interested in joining my group. Why? Half the people joining the group I had known for years but knew little about. The rest had come out of no where and were strangers. I thought it would be easier for them to become integrated as a group if I knew them as individuals. That one cup of coffee made a huge difference. It helps newcomers feel comfortable with me as the leader, I answer questions on issues they didn't quite get about the groups, and offered a brief orientation. Later this served to spare existing groups from repeated orientations. When people arrive at the group they have had their questions answered, know at least one other person (me) and are ready to go. Sometimes I even give them some of the previous session to look over.
2. **Use the Phone** Email is easy and safe and generally time efficient. The phone is more personal. For these reasons I intentionally try to use the phone with members of my group. Think about who calls you at home, especially now that we have the "do not call list". Generally it is friends, colleagues, family – people we are connected to. The act of calling a person at home and maybe even talking to them in person increases the sense of caring and connection.
3. **The "Are you alive?" Call** Though I admit I've failed to do this on occasion, I always try to contact a person who misses a session the same night. With cell phones I'm getting better at making these calls. I even let everyone in the group know that someone from the group – it doesn't have to be me - is going to call them if they miss a session to make sure they are okay. Imagine missing a group meeting because you were hit by a car and no one called! This shows that we care, reduces the likelihood people will skip a session "just because" and increases the ability of group members to respond to real ministry needs.
4. **Going to Church** I think it is an important practice to

end every group session with an invitation to attend church. Small groups alone do not cut it. I ask people if I'll see them on Sunday. You might consider sitting together in service with group members if you can. If not, plan on catching up in your fellowship hour. Though church attendance is not "required", it does make a difference. If a person in my group stops going to church – or never has – without being pushy, I make a point of finding out why. I assume that many people come to our church hoping to be full participants in the community and assume that if this doesn't come to pass, there is a reason. Finding out what the reason is shows that you care and gives you the chance to help or at least bring feedback to the church.

5. **Hand Out Session Plan** If you use prepared sessions, I suggest making copies to hand out to all of your group participants. There are many good reasons to do this. It makes it easier to share the tasks of reading openings, closing, chalice lightings and so on. Many people are visual learners and will get more out of the session with the plan in hand. Some people do better writing thoughts down and will enjoy scribbling thoughts on the sheet you hand out. Every session I participate in there are multiple things that people share which I want to ask more about or follow up on in some way outside of our group. Giving each person a session sheet and having pens on hand will increase what I call "follow up ministry". Two of my favorite reasons for sharing plans is that it encourages people to tell others about the group and makes it easy for people to come back to the session topic between sessions. I had a man join a group after reading three of our sessions. Each time his wife brought a session home she'd show him and then he'd want to talk about it. Finally she said "No! Join a group." He did.
6. **Share a Meal** There is something about eating together that transforms a community. My goal, though I don't always realize it, is to have one meal with group members per season. I'm talking about getting together outside of the group time either in a home or a restaurant.
7. **Share the Care** The reality is that there is no way I could do all of the above alone. Fortunately we are called on to share these tasks. Yes, I strive to do all of the above, but only for half of my group. I have a co-leader who is working with the other half and each of us are developing a new leader to work with us. When you split these ministry tasks between co-leaders and then work with an apprentice on your half suddenly the "burden" becomes very light. In fact, it is so light that you have room in your heart and schedule to care for more people.

For the New Year From the UUA Website: Five Ways to Live U U Values

Be It Resolved...

- Learn More about the 2004-2006 Study Action Issue on global warming.
- Become involved in a covenant group/small group ministry in your congregation.**
- Become a more active lay leader in your congregation.
- Talk to other Unitarian Universalists and share information and learning.
- Nurture your spirit - read a Skinner House book!

Small Group Ministry at General Assembly 2005

This year's General Assembly (or GA) will feature a number of opportunities for Small Group Ministry or Covenant Groups. It will be held in:



**Fort Worth, TX
June 23-27, 2005
For more info, visit uua.org
Registration opens March 1**

UU Small Group Ministry Network Sponsored Programs at GA 2005

We are pleased to announce that the UU Small Group Ministry Network will once again have a booth in the Exhibit Hall. In addition, as a new UUA Affiliate Organization, this year we'll offer two events. The Annual Meeting of the Network as well as a Beyond the Basics Workshop: Descriptions follow. For details watch future issues of this Quarterly, and our and the UUA Websites.

"Creating An Effective Small Group Ministry Network"
Small Group Ministry is re-vitalizing our movement. This Annual Meeting of the UU Small Group Ministry Network (UUSGMN), is an opportunity: to connect with other SGM fans; to learn how we can help each other create vital SGM programs; and to learn about and get involved in the UUSGM Network.

"Small Group Ministry: Beyond the Basics Workshop"
The UU Small Group Ministry Network provides energizing information and ideas to move your small group ministry program to a deeper level of health and vitality. We'll discuss integrating small group ministry into the life of your congregation, deepening facilitator training, understanding various models of small group ministry, and more!

Experience Covenant Groups at GA 2005

By Rev. Connie Grant

Covenant Groups at General Assembly 2004 in Long Beach earned rave reviews from participants, proving to be a highlight of the GA experience for many. **This year's Covenant Group program at GA in Fort Worth promises to be a little bit bigger and a little bit better.**

Whether you are an experienced GA attendee or a first-timer, whether you are a member of a Covenant Group in your congregation, or new to Covenant Groups, this program offers the opportunity to enhance your GA experience. In these groups, six to eight people will meet four times for one hour with a facilitator trained in helping participants experience the intimacy and community that are the heart and soul of Covenant Groups.

Watch for more information in General Assembly registration materials or contact the Rev. Connie Grant, GA Covenant Group registrar at GAcovenantgroups@aol.com to be put on the mailing list.

Small Group Ministry for Large Congregations

Congregations in Good Company: The 6th National Conference for Large Congregations in the Unitarian Universalist Association Boston, Massachusetts February 17-20, 2005

The special gathering for large congregations offered by the UUA will feature three presentations on covenant groups or small group ministry.

The Conference program states: "After several years of rapid adoption of Small Group Ministry techniques, we now have greater basis for judging the extent to which Covenant Groups, by whatever name, **enrich, deepen, and widen church programs and the lives of individuals. We can also see where programs have faltered and some reasons why.**

"Three practitioners of this new (to us) type of ministry have agreed to share their successes, disappointments, and insights. **Rev. Michael McGee, Lead Minister of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Arlington, Virginia; Rev. Jennifer Brower, Minister for Pastoral Care at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Shelter Rock, Manhasset, New York; And Rev. Calvin Dame, Minister of the Unitarian Universalist Community Church in Augusta, Maine.**" Rev. Dame is also a member of the Board of Trustees of the UUA, and the president and co-founder of our UU Small Group Ministry Network.

For more info, visit the UUA website:
<http://www.uua.org/cde/largechurch2005/CongregationsInGoodCompany.pdf>

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SGM Resources Online Check Out Our Excellent Website: www.smallgroupministry.net

Looking for resources on the web? We maintain the only comprehensive website on Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry. You're invited to look at the many resources on our site. There are shared resources anyone may view, links to resources on other sites, and resources for our members. The latter are accessible by joining our Network for a small yearly fee (see page 2). In time we expect these resources to be published and sold in book form. But why wait? You can learn more and join by visiting our website - www.smallgroupministry.net.

Get news / web updates: New resources are being submitted to us all the time. Would you like to know when resources are posted to our site? Visit our website & sign-up for our monthly electronic news and web update list.

Small Group Ministry Revolutionizes Lifespan Faith Development!

By Rev. Helen Zidowecki
Litchfield, ME

The power of the small group ministry format is transformative in n taking adults, children and youth deeper into development of their spiritual journeys! This power comes from the focus on giving and sharing from individual perspectives, opening of our own selves to new thoughts and emotions, engaging in small group ministry as spiritual practice.

In the last six months, I had the opportunity to present Small Group Ministry in various settings, and came away from each more convinced than ever of the power of the process.

Gail Forsyth-Vail, Director of Religious Education, North Andover, MA, and I used Small Group Ministry as a methodology in the Curriculum Renaissance Module at Star Island Religious Education Week last July. For example, a session titled "Layers of Clarity" was used to experience explicit, implicit and null curricula. Gail included discussion of why and how they use Small Group Ministry for their entire religious education program in a larger congregation. I focused on how this can be used for the any sized congregation.

I had an opportunity to co-lead the Teacher Training Renaissance Module with Rev. Elizabeth Strong, Program Consultant for Mass Bay District, at Ferry Beach. We incorporated several Small Group Ministry sessions, such as one on "Safety." **Small Group Ministry is a way of deepening teacher development.** As a follow-up, I used this methodology in orientation for people interested in participating in a religious education program in a congregation. I encourage small group ministry to **be part of ongoing meetings of Religious Education Committees and teaching team meetings.**

Fresh from our summer experience, Gail and I also presented Small Group Ministry at the LREDA (Liberal Religious Educators Association) **Fall Conference** in Chicago in October. We had an opportunity for presentation to the total group (about 200), followed by a more specific workshop with over 100 participants. Most of the participants had basic understanding of Small Group Ministry, so that our focus was on how **Small Group Ministry in religious education can range from a methodology for engaging people in religious education to transforming the setting from 'religious education' to the more encompassing 'educational ministry'.**

I am continuing to develop session plans for teacher development. Please look for these, as well as my ongoing presentation of Small Group Ministry and Lifespan Religious Education, on my web site, at <http://www.hzmre.com/sgm/>. I would also like to communicate with any of you around this focus for hzmre@hzmre.com

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"By their groups you shall know them."

James Luther Adams Facilitators' Corner: Inviting the Silence

By Mellen Kennedy
Burlington, VT

*"Our task is to listen to the news
that is always arriving out of silence."
Rainer Maria Rilke*

As I pause from my writing at the round, oak dining room table, I find myself in unexpected stillness. The dog sleeps restfully on the sofa after our morning excursion in the woods. The typically boisterous cat perches motionless in the window surveying the winterscape. The subzero world outside amplifies the stillness. **We are suspended for a moment in tranquil, healing silence.** A minute later the cat is stalking the unsuspecting dog from the top of the sofa and the stillness is broken. While it lasted, that moment seemed infinite.

Perhaps you can recall spontaneous moments of silence like these in your experience? **Perhaps you've experienced these moments in your small group?** To me they seem to be rare gifts.

We live in a time and a culture where silence is often viewed as a void to be filled, particularly in groups. **"Silence is something like an endangered species"** remarks therapist, Gunilla Norris. In our quest for efficiency, silence seems like a waste of the precious resource of time. We quickly become uncomfortable and jump to "fix the problem" with words.

Other times and other cultures have viewed silence differently. The mystical traditions of the world teach us that silence is a to be cultivated. They teach us that our **spiritual flowering is nurtured by spontaneous and intentional moments of silence, even in groups.** Rather than an absence, silence is seen as full and rich. Silence can invite us to slow down, relax and go deeper. Perhaps that's actually why it can make us so uncomfortable.

I'm a member of a covenant group of fellow seminarians and seminary graduates who "meet" together once a month by conference call. I especially appreciate one member who will **invite us into silence** at what feels to me to be just the right moment. The quality of the conversation from that moment on, seems to be enhanced by that pause.

I think that as facilitators, the more we become comfortable with silence in our own lives, the more we can allow silence to unfold in our groups. I'd like to invite you to think about the place of silence in your life and in your group. **If you're uncomfortable with silence, why?** How have you experienced silence in your group, considering both negative and positive instances? You might even consider doing a session on silence with your group.

The Trappist monk, Thomas Merton wrote **"It is in deep solitude and silence that I find the gentleness with which I can truly love my brother and sister."** Although most of us are not called to the profound silence of monastic life, as Thomas Merton was, I think we, as facilitators, can still learn from his words. Wishing you the best in cultivating silence and gentleness in your important work as a group facilitator.

**To Join the UU Small Group Ministry Network
Or to Subscribe to this Quarterly
visit our website www.smallgroupministry.net**

**Or Contact the Network at:
UU Small Group Ministry Network
155 Evarts Street, Newport, RI 02840**

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***Fondness for Small Groups*
by Kathy Foldes
Portland, OR**

*Dancing through possibilities, singing to a new tune
Small groups live their own lives.
Riding the waves better than dinghies, sleek yachts of
progress, of hope.
Living their own lives while buoying us up*

*Imagine the imagining, the permission we readily grant the
group
But not ourselves when we're alone.
Every cloud is a unique animal, every stone an amphibian.
Living a special life while opening us up.*

*Combining and sparking, the fireworks of joining in
The wholeness, the moreness, the "I don't have to do it-
allness".
Each group a circle, more like a sphere.
Living the life cycle above and apart from us.*

*May we always remember the dinghy and the yacht
The animal, cloud, the frog and the stone.
May we dance in them and sing and ride the waves
The lives of groups are part of our own.*

**UU Small Group Ministry Network
155 Evarts Street
Newport, RI 02840**