

An Overview of Small Group Ministry (SGM)

*“I pin my hopes to small circles and quiet processes where vital and transforming events take place.”
Rufus Jones*

The Power & Purposes of Small Group Ministry:
Intimacy (Community Building or Friendship)
Ultimacy (Spiritual Exploration or Meaning)

Summary Description of a Small Group Ministry Group

Group Covenants: Make these three agreements explicit and clear from the outset:

To engage in service to the congregation and larger world
To abide by a set of relationship groundrules
To welcome new members (either in that group or in the program overall)

Size: 6-10 members

Meeting Frequency: At least once a month. Group meetings typically last about two hours.

Leadership: Facilitators (or preferably co-facilitators) who are chosen and trained to facilitate the group and are connected to the ministry of the congregation. Facilitators participate in monthly meetings for ongoing support, skill building, and problem solving. These meetings are lead by the minister(s) and/or lay leadership team.

Method for Welcoming New Members: Through continually starting new groups, and/or taking new members into existing groups, and/or dividing of large groups to form new groups.

Group Duration: Groups may be either short-term (a set number of weeks or months) or may be long-term and ongoing (sometimes for many years).

Composition & Focus: The focus of the group may be general spiritual exploration groups with a mixed membership. Or groups may have a specific focus (i.e. feminist spirituality). Or groups may have a specific affinity (i.e. men, parents, young adults, etc...).

Meeting Format:

Statement of Purpose: Brief greeting and clarifying of why the group is gathered. (This is important when a group is new and anytime there is a new member).

Welcome & Opening: A short reading, poem, or song that helps set a tone for the meeting.

Review Covenants & Groundrules: Restating the commitments which the group members have agreed to abide by. (This is necessary in the first few months when a group is new and any time there is a new member)

Brief Check-In: Short sharing by each person on a question such as “What are you leaving behind to be here?” It helps everyone become present and gives everyone a chance to speak once before the main body of the meeting starts.

Content/Body: The main activity of the meeting. It may be a discussion, an experience or an activity. It may use a pre-planned “session” on a particular topic such as fear, hope, guilt, anger, spiritual experiences, etc.... It usually has a few succinct provocative questions to help the discussion get rolling in a focused way.

Check-Out: Brief sharing from each person to bring the meeting to a close. It may take the form of “Likes and Wishes”, what did you like and what would you wish for?

Closing: A reading or song that helps bring the meeting to a close.