

Toward a New Reality

Rev. Helen Zidowecki, June 2020, for Unitarian Universalist Community Church, Augusta, ME

Opening words:

It's not new, this ZOOM phenomena. Groups have been meeting electronically for years and it has been increasing. What is new is the rapid engaging of electronic media in the face of covid-19, with social distancing and isolation: the technology change coupled with the changes in our lives.

We may have thought that this would be a temporary change, then we could return to our in-person meetings, return to normal, or rather a "new normal." But what is temporary? What is normal? Maybe "new reality" is a better term, a reality that is changing and evolving. Maybe the changing times are preparing us to engage more deeply with needed change.

Come, let us name what we are doing well.

Come, let us name what could be.

Come, let us discover how we can enhance our intimacy (bonding) and the depth of our ultimacy (engaging deeply) with the things that matter in a new reality

Sharing/Check-in: How is it with you today?

Topic/Activity:

"Sharing Experiences", *Covenant Group News (CGN)*, May 2020

When I did the post to Facebook, we were all thinking of a short-term thing, that our groups would soon be meeting in person. That we don't know that anymore brings up two things for me. One, churches need to take a serious look at their small group ministry programs. If we can't meet in person for a long time, the groups may be essentially "lost" or hard to restart. We wouldn't want this to happen just because we went to sleep....took a long nap. Two, it seems to me that there is a huge opportunity to start new virtual/zoom covenant groups as outreach to people who need this connection now. Diana Dorroh, Baton Rouge

I don't want to minimize our individual and collective fear and anxiety, and yet, I also want to help build a bridge towards hope and our connections. Our focus for our chalice groups is on our faith journey and traditions and how this may inform and guide our time during the pandemic, and all the uncertainty. Julie Evonna, Aiken, OH

Consideration of the many facets of isolation has brought appreciation for various ways the disruption impacts us physically, emotionally and spiritually. This also has brought awareness of the many ways we can help and be present with each other. Linda Findlay, Augusta, ME

Let us start with naming and appreciating what we have been and are doing during this time: our strengths, passions and life-giving forces.

What does Small Group Ministry mean to us during a pandemic or other crisis?

How has our relationships with each other and our group changed or deepened?

What are we doing that we want to continue and enhance?

Let us envision the compelling possibilities of Small Group Ministry that emerge from our experience and history.

What opportunities do we have to increase and share the gifts of Small Group Ministry?

How does or can the depth of the connection (bonding) increase depth of engagement (ultimacy) as difficult concerns require our attention – individually and as a group?

What is your image of Small Group Ministry in the new reality?

Let us be conscious of what we have done and committed to what we can do individually and together. This is a continual cycle. From naming the positive, we envision what can be. The history and mutual experience leads to new discoveries of our strengths, beginning the process anew.

Likes and Wishes/Check-put: How was the session for you?

Closing Words:

We are the ones involved in Small Group Ministry/Covenant Groups in these changing times.
We are the ones who have experienced the intimacy and ultimacy, the personal impact.
We are the ones to move Small Group Ministry/Covenant Groups into the new reality.

“Online meetings can, in some ways, be more accessible and efficient than in-person gatherings, especially if group participants are able to limit outside distractions such as notifications popping up on their device or computer. Encourage a group covenant that takes this new format into account and helps the group come closer to re-creating the intimacy and connection of an in-person experience.” <https://www.uua.org/safe/pandemics/adapting-small-groups>