

**DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING
A "SMALL GROUP MINISTRY" FOCUS
FOR YOUR CONGREGATION
(Revised - October 2003)**

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PREFACE

Over the past several years, the concept of a church ministry based on relationally-oriented small groups has captured the imaginations of Unitarian Universalists across North America. We are more aware of the hunger, not just with Unitarian Universalists, but with people across the continent, for intimacy and spiritual growth. We live in a time when real participation and involvement in groups and civic organizations is markedly shrinking. Too often, what passes for "individualism" is a withdrawal from the institutions which have long helped to carry and sustain our communal values.

Unitarian Universalism has been no less affected by the changed culture. Our growth has stagnated relative to the general population. It takes all the running we can do to stay in the same place. And, the kind of running we do, in trying to channel people onto committees to keep the church floating, too often leads to burnout and disillusion. It does not suffice to produce a new fund-raising technique or handbook on how to run a board meeting when we need first to address the basic spiritual and intimacy needs of our members! Hence the rising interest in "small group ministry," or "covenant groups."

The Small Group Ministry program was fashioned after models in mainstream and evangelical branches of Protestantism, models from UU congregations, like those in Brewster, Massachusetts and Tulsa, Oklahoma, some of the more relationally oriented programs like "Building Your Own Theology" and "Cakes for the Queen of Heaven," and "Evensong" (which gave our members a taste of small group sharing in some depth with each other), and models like AA and other 12 step groups which have helped so many people in coping with their day to day struggles. And we can now look at congregations in Augusta, Maine, Houston, Texas, Monterey, California, Arlington, Virginia, and London, Ontario among an estimated 500 UU churches which have a significant number of ongoing small groups revitalizing their congregations.

There have been workshops offered at UUA General Assemblies, at the UUA Extension Dept. Mid-Size Church Conferences, at UUMA Chapter meetings and retreats, at District gatherings, and at individual churches. As the Small Group Ministry (or "Covenant Group") model has grown, we have been able to fine-tune our workshops to deal with various aspects of theory and practice. This paper addresses the questions which arise after people get excited about the idea: "How do we get started?" What are the steps needed to design and implement the concept of Small Group Ministry?

My own enthusiasm for Small Group Ministry lies in the fact that it can be shaped and developed by any one of our congregations. There is no patent on the process even though papers, like this one, will give suggestions in response to questions. In fact, I think that the success of Small Group Ministry will be in direct proportion to how much each church takes ownership of the process. It will be enormously helpful to share our stories of how this has worked for us ("us" meaning the individual churches) because that will give everyone more options and ideas on what does and doesn't work.

Though Small Group Ministry may be developed in various ways, there are some essentials that make it what it is. Developing one or two small groups and letting it go at that is not Small Group Ministry. What's intended is making SGM a focus for the entire congregation with an outreach program and a vision to help extend the ministry of the congregation. Other essentials include:

- at least meetings twice a month (otherwise it's affect is diluted)
- opportunities for check-in and a spiritual growth focus
- an open group concept - welcoming in new members and birthing new groups
- facilitator/apprentice approach - nurturing new leaders for new groups
- collaboration - facilitators meeting monthly with minister/coach for ongoing training/support
- concept of service to the church or community - some attention paid to "bridging" in addition to "bonding"

PROCESS

After learning something about Small Group Ministry, any church can probably launch a few groups in a very short time. Although churches or Districts could train facilitators and turn them loose, I believe the ground needs more preparation. In most churches, the minister is the focal point for providing ministry in the congregation. Lay folk serve on committees and are responsible for some programs. Ministry is not something the laity does (with the exception of caring committees which are often limited in their scope to the sick and the shut-ins). Programs are intermittent. They do not usually provide ongoing opportunities for intimacy and spiritual growth. What we are attempting to do is to change this "minister-centered" culture. But, it won't happen without some real engagement in learning about and having an opportunity to experience Small Group Ministry.

Why do people buy into an idea?

- because it addresses their needs
- because it is clearly articulated
- because it is repeated and reinforced
- because they have an opportunity to shape and reshape it
- because it offers an opportunity for collaboration!

COLLABORATION

It takes widespread participation to change a church's culture, therefore, how and to whom you introduce the concept of Small Group Ministry is important. There are all kinds of models and approaches to consider. Nothing is set in stone. It is not how this is done in Augusta, or Brewster, or Baton Rouge, or what any of its proponents suggest, it is what a congregation decides after considering the options. It is important to consider the options.

There are key people in any given congregation who need to be involved and engaged in shaping "Small Group Ministry":

- the ministry
- the staff
- the board or governing body
- an Implementation Team on "Small Group Ministry"
- coaches to provide support to facilitators
- facilitators chosen to lead small groups
- the congregation

Let's look at some of these, briefly:

- Ministry and Staff - Key to the success of "Small Group Ministry" is the support of the minister and the staff. If the minister is not enthusiastic, it's probably not a good idea to do it.
- Board - The governing body of the congregation needs not only to be informed but to endorse SGM.
- Congregation - From the beginning, through sermons, newsletter explanations and updates, and casual conversation, the congregation needs to learn about SGM. As soon as the facilitators are trained, a worship service on SGM, followed by a mid-week experiential/explanatory meeting about SGM for the congregation should follow. Then members and friends can sign-up to participate in a group.

You'll need to engage the following people to design and implement the SGM program:

- Implementation Team - First the IT serves to learn about and shape SGM; second, it devises a way to select and train facilitators.
- Facilitators - They need to be selected and trained by the Minister or members of the IT.
- Coaches - These are lay leaders or assistant/associate ministers who work with the facilitators when the number of groups exceeds 10.

At each stage, it is important that continued input and collaboration take place as you fine-tune how you are going to do Small Group Ministry. After the first year of SGM, hold a meeting open to all participants in small groups to hear their reflections on the strengths and weaknesses of the programs and how they think SGM could be improved. If this process is truly open to the members of the congregation, there will be a significant "buy-in" to the concept and the chances of it becoming deeply rooted enormously enhanced.

So, how do we do this expeditiously and thoroughly? Who needs to know what and when? What's a reasonable timetable? What are the issues? Who decides them? I've added, at the end of this paper, a partial list of the basic resources we have. As I mention the various groups or people who will have a hand in shaping SGM in your congregation, I'll indicate which of them might be helpful to review.

WHERE TO BEGIN

Interest in Small Group Ministry may have been sparked by a minister or layperson from your congregation having attended workshops at a GA, District Meeting, UUMA Chapter Meeting, or word of mouth. If the interest begins with the minister, she/he needs strong lay support to augment their enthusiasm. You could either begin with the Board, acquainting them with the reasons for Small Group Ministry, or establishing an

Implementation Team on SGM whose work should be endorsed by the Board. Check page 16 for a time-line for how this process unfolds. All of the people (Minister, Board, Implementation Team, Coaches, Facilitators) that I will be mentioning would benefit by subscribing to the Covenant Group News cited in the Basic Resource section at the end of this paper. But, the basic text for Unitarian Universalists is now **"The Complete Guide to Small Group Ministry: Saving the World Ten at Time,"** written by **the Rev. Robert L. Hill**. It can be ordered from the UUA Bookstore (see "Resources" section at the end).

THE MINISTER... needs to begin looking at the resources listed at the end of this paper. The minister also needs to think about what people would be energized by this concept, people who:

- are respected
- are interested in ideas and relationships
- have some understanding of group process

From this pool of people, an Implementation Team on SGM will be picked. Some on the Implementation Team may eventually become Coaches and some Facilitators (these positions will be explained later). But, their first order of business will be to design the process for:

- introducing SGM to the congregation
- developing guidelines for SGM
- selecting coaches and facilitators

If I were the minister, I would begin by asking the board president, and other key leaders in the church, to attend some presentation re SGM (if one were being offered). Or, I would invite him/her/them to lunch to talk about what I'd learned, giving them a copy of one of the papers (written by either Thandeka, Dame, or Turner - listed in the resource section). Now that Hill's book is available, you might rather start with his "Introduction" and first two chapters in The Complete Guide to Small Group Ministry. Then, I'd solicit their suggestions, in addition to my own, for people to serve on an Implementation Team for SGM. This is the beginning of collaboration.

THE BOARD

The minister should put a brief discussion of SGM on the Board Meeting agenda, after collaborating with the President. For that meeting, you can send out one of our papers, or excerpts from them as background information. However, I especially recommend that the Board read Hill's chapters on "Why Small Group Ministry?" and "What to Do Before You Start." At the meeting, make a brief presentation of the idea, see if any of them are personally interested in being part of an Implementation Team, and, again, solicit suggestions of people for the Implementation Team. Have the Board set a time to experience an actual session - roughly a two hour meeting.

The following is the format I would use for a two-hour board session.

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Transformational Leadership

SMALL GROUP MINISTRY

Group Session Plan for Board

Opening Words:

We come together in an attitude of openness - not knowing quite what will happen, yet daring to receive a new idea, a new experience, sustenance for our minds and our hearts.

We come with an attitude of praise, expressing our thankfulness for the good that has come into our lives.

We come with an attitude of humility, knowing how much we need one another, how alone we can be in the world, how vulnerable if we face life solely by ourselves.

We come in the spirit of love, seeking human warmth and fellowship in the hands and faces of those around us.

We come in the spirit of joy, seeking reconfirmation and renewal of life, of love, and of hope.

-- adapted from Peter Lee Scott

Check in/Sharing (30 minutes)

Whoever facilitates should give a brief explanation of confidentiality, to the degree that confidentiality is to be expected.

Give each person about 3 or 4 minutes to share, more if time permits.

What they might choose to share may come from:

current state of our physical or spiritual health

joys or concerns about loved ones

concerns/excitement about what is happening in our lives

Discussion (60 minutes + or -)

"...leadership theorist James MacGregor Burns suggested that socially useful goals not only have to meet the needs of followers, they also should elevate followers to a higher moral level. Calling this *transformational leadership*, he posits that people begin with the need for survival and security, and once those needs are met, concern themselves with 'higher' needs like affection, belonging, the common good, or serving others." Ronald Heifetz

Survival and security issues, in churches, often boils down to finding people to serve on committees, finding RE teachers, taking care of the building and grounds, and conducting the every member canvass. This alone often leads to burn out.

Questions: (write questions on newsprint)

- Why did you join the church?
- What is your vision of what we could be?
- How could Small Group Ministry enhance that vision?

Closing Words

May beauty infuse our lives;

May a vision lead and guide our ways;

May others, sharing, make us wise;

And love ennoble all our days.

-- Gordon Gibson

THE IMPLEMENTATION TEAM ON SMALL GROUP MINISTRY

After the Board has given additional suggestions for creation of an Implementation Team, these people should be gathered for a certain number of meetings. In this suggested model, they might meet twice monthly for three months, 6 or 7 meetings in all. How many people should be on the Implementation Team? A small congregation may need only 2-4 people, congregations between 150 and 500 may need 4-6 people, between 500 and 1,500 between 6 and 10 people. If more want to be on the Implementation Team that's great! The Augusta, Maine congregation had about 10 volunteers. The more there are, the greater the support for SGM!

The Implementation Team members should be people who are excited about finding ways to expand the ministry of the congregation. They should be reliable and have time to devote to understanding SGM. They should be team players (collaborative), should have vision and enthusiasm, and have an eagerness to learn. Hopefully, they will also have experience with groups - either leading or belonging.

Some of the members of the Implementation Team may later decide to become Facilitators, and some Coaches. Anyone who has the potential for being a Coach **should** be on the Implementation Team. (I will explain the role of the Coach in the SGM model on page 10-11, between this section on the Implementation Team and the training of Facilitators.)

Meetings of the Implementation Team could be preceded by pizza. But, the time period should be 2 hours for the working meeting. The format would follow the SGM formula as was done with the Board. **This format can be used for all 6 or 7 meetings.**

(This is the generic format suggested for the six or seven Implementation Team Meetings - the focus for the **Discussion** follows as I outline each session in turn.)

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SMALL GROUP MINISTRY

Group Session Plan for Implementation Team

Opening Words:

(you choose)

Check in/Sharing (30 + minutes)

Whoever facilitates should explain briefly confidentiality, decide on sharing format (feedback vs. no feedback, and give each person about 3 or 4 minutes to share.

What they might choose to share may come from:

current state of our physical or spiritual health

joys or concerns about loved ones

concerns/excitement about what is happening in our lives

Discussion (60 minutes + or -) See following suggestions.

Housekeeping (10 minutes or less)

Assignments, date reminders, questions, etc.

Closing Words

(you choose)

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FOCUS FOR FIRST MEETING OF IMPLEMENTATION TEAM

For the first meeting, ask them to have read: the "Introduction" of Hill's book "The Complete Guide to Small Group Ministry," and Transforming Our Churches With Small Group Ministry - the Rev. Glenn H. Turner, revised 11/00. But, save discussion on that until the 2nd meeting. At the first meeting let them experience an actual Small Group Ministry session with the following focus for discussion:

Discussion

- share an experience where a small group has touched your life
- how could small groups fit into your widest vision of what this church could become?

FOCUS FOR SECOND MEETING OF IMPLEMENTATION TEAM

Ask them to have read: a The Complete Guide to Small Group Ministry (pages 13-25 "Why Small Group Ministry" and "What to Do Before You Start") by the Rev. Robert Hill and A Small Group Ministry Resource Book.

Discussion

Devote the time to a general discussion of the need for Small Group Ministry and the theories about how to do it. This is the Implementation Team's opportunity to begin to think about the possibilities of how SGM could work in their congregation.

FOCUS FOR THIRD MEETING OF IMPLEMENTATION TEAM

For this meeting, have the Implementation Team members report, during the **Discussion**, on: The Coming Church Revolution - by Carl George. One person could report on Chapter 1 & 2, another on 3 & 4 and another on 5 & 6. Have them give a brief overview, as well as their reflections on the chapters, with the rest of the Implementation Team. Carl George is a Protestant evangelist with a wealth of wisdom about small groups.

FOCUS FOR FOURTH MEETING OF IMPLEMENTATION TEAM

The Implementation Team should have read: "Choosing, Appointing and Training Facilitators" in Hill's book.

Discussion

- Play the 1st 20 minutes of the first of the VISION series videos by Carl George.
- General discussion and building an agenda for the final two or three meetings of the Implementation Team.

POSSIBLE FOCUS ISSUES FOR FIFTH, SIXTH, AND SEVENTH MEETINGS OF THE IMPLEMENTATION TEAM

For the fifth meeting, assign and read "Three Kinds of Covenants" in Hill's book, "The Complete Guide to Small Group Ministry."

For the sixth meeting, assign and read "The Varieties of Small Group Experience" in Hill's book: "The Complete Guide to Small Group Ministry."

For the seventh meeting, assign and read in Hill's book: "Current Issues, Future Directions" in Hill's "The Complete Guide to Small Group Ministry."

Below are the various topics you are going to be addressing and resolving as a group. All the readings help to make an informed decision about what direction your congregation is going to take in laying the groundwork for a successful small group ministry.

- Outlining the Vision and Mission for the SGM focus in the church
- Promoting and Publicizing SGM in the church
- Planning the recruitment and training of Facilitators
- Establishing job descriptions
- Considering and suggesting any budget requests for SGM, if necessary
- Establishing a way to promote ongoing evaluation of SGM
- Establishing a tentative set of Guidelines for the Small Groups

What are some of the Guideline issues?

- Interest-group model versus other forms of Small Group Ministry
- Recommended cap on size of groups (I'd suggest 8-9)
- Policy on birthing new groups
- How and when to add members to groups
- Question of whether minister, or facilitator, or Implementation Team assigns people to groups after the initial sign-up
- Question of how groups can bridge vs. bond –
- Shall the groups be encouraged to do some service in the church/community?
- Check-in: general policy of simply witnessing without comment or allowing cross-conversation during check-in - try different models and let the group decide what works best for them.
- Techniques for talking/time-keeping
- How to deal with existing groups that may want to adapt toward the new model
- Question of whether baby-sitting/child-care space could be provided for groups meeting in the church rather than in homes
- How focus/discussion topics will be generated
- Minimum # of times a group should meet each month (I'd recommend no less than twice)
- Process of choosing, adding, dropping facilitators
- Role/importance of apprentices - renewal/training of new leaders for expanding ministry & growth

What are some of the issues related to the selection and recruitment of facilitators?

Qualifications for facilitators:

- Members of the congregation or with strong commitment to Unitarian Universalism
- Good sense of self and presence
- Relationally oriented rather than strongly individualistic
- Preference for facilitative style rather than a teaching style
- Positive outlook
- Emotionally healthy (not dealing with stress situations like death, divorce, or active alcoholism, depression, etc.)
- Enjoy working with people
- Team players
- Hopefully, some experience with groups

Role of the facilitator:

- Understanding general concept of Small Group Ministry
- Being responsible for managing group process issues
- Helping group establish their covenant (what they agree to as a group)
- Clarifying group expectations
- Encouraging participation
- Dealing with the logistics/time of meetings
- Attending monthly meeting with Minister or Coach
- Modeling openness and caring
- Facilitating group decision-making

The Minister and Implementation Team could ask for people to volunteer to become facilitators and then choose from that list and any other people whom they would like to have serve as facilitators. Just as in other church selections, however, it might be better to draw up a list of the people whom you think would make the best facilitators and have someone from the Implementation Team talk with them about what SGM is and how they could contribute to the ministry of the church by becoming a facilitator. You would probably need only one or two people to make those contacts. The Implementation Team also needs to be thinking about who might be facilitators down the road and put them on a list of possible apprentices. You'll have to make an educated guess as to how many people might want to join in a group so that you can estimate how many facilitators you're looking for. Limited experience tells us that in a congregation of 150+ you might need 4 to 5 facilitators initially. A church of 300 might start off with 10 groups. Better to overestimate the number of facilitators needed and then bring them in as the number of groups expands. The number of groups might double in a year or two.

COACHES

The Small Group Ministry approach breaks its units of care into roughly ten. There are no more than 8-10 in any Small Group. If you have 8-10 facilitators, then one person will be meeting with them for ongoing training/reflection each month. If there are only 8-10 groups, then that person will probably be the minister. When the congregation has more than 10 facilitators, just as a regular small group would birth a new group with a new facilitator, someone will now have 6-10 facilitators to work with in the same role as the minister. We call that person a coach. He/she needs to have the same basic understanding about SGM as the minister and should acquaint him/herself with the same resource material. Anyone who looks like they would be a good coach should probably have been picked to be on the Implementation Team. Coaches and Minister will get together once monthly as well to compare notes on the issues that arise in their respective groups as well as for mutual support. But, again, when you get beyond 10 coaches, you need another coach of coaches as well as the minister. By now, you are probably a large enough congregation to use multiple staff in these positions.

You may conceive of this structure as a pyramid with the minister overseeing the work of SGM from the summit. The administration/supervision/support flows downward through the coaches to the facilitators. It's all ministry, but the facilitators are at the ground level. Everyone above them functions to give them support. Carl George had a neat image for this: facilitators fish, everyone else cuts bait. However, the energy flow in our model is circular: ideas, information, and support are as much bottom up as top down. Strength is gained through interdependence.

The basic concept is that you operate in groups of 10 or less. So, whoever is at the top supervises no more than 10, and that's the way it is all the way down. That's not unlike the story about the woman who said that the earth was being held up by a turtle. When asked what was holding up the turtle, she said it was another turtle. When pressed, she commented: "It's turtles all the way down!"

Eventually, our strongest and most skilled facilitators will make good coaches.

FACILITATOR TRAINING

The training of facilitators might be done by the Minister or someone on the Implementation Team identified as a coach - someone skilled in-group process work. In training facilitators, as with the Board and the Implementation Team, we use the model of SGM to teach the model. We want facilitators to have some understanding of the general concept of Small Group Ministry and what it might do for the congregation and for the people outside the congregation who would benefit from this ministry. We want them to be acquainted with the proposed Guidelines and to have some say in their final adoption. We want them to begin working as a team - which will continue after they each have their own groups. We want them to feel comfortable about what they are doing and understand on whom they can rely for support. We want them to know what resources are available for further reference and reflection.

Here are some suggested Session outlines. I've outlined the first session plan in its entirety, the rest would be the same format with a different focus or discussion.

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SMALL GROUP MINISTRY
Group Session Plan for Facilitators - No. 1

Opening Words & Chalice Lighting:

The central task of the religious community is to unveil the bonds that bind each to all. There is a connectedness, a relationship discovered amid the particulars of our own lives and the lives of others..."

- Mark Morrison-Reed, UU minister

Check in/Sharing (30 minutes +)

Whoever facilitates should explain briefly confidentiality, decide whether or not to allow cross-conversations, and allow each person about 3 or 4 minutes to share.

Have each person briefly introduce him or herself.

What they might then choose to share may come from their:

current state of physical or spiritual health

joys or concerns about loved ones

concerns/excitement about what is happening in their lives

Focus: A Spiritual Experience (45-60 minutes)

The facilitator begins the conversation, and helps keep it focused yet moving, with questions such as: (and, it might be good to write these questions on newsprint to save repeating them)

- what has been a most powerful spiritual experience for you?

- how did that affected your life?

- why do you suppose we don't have more of those experiences?

Checkout: likes and wishes (10 minutes)

Ask participants what they liked or what felt difficult about this session.

Make sure dates are clear for future meetings.

Handouts: (for discussion at Session 2)

- "Transforming Our Churches With Small Group Ministry" by the Rev. Glenn H. Turner

- "Introduction" from "The Complete Guide to Small Group Ministry" by the Rev. Robert L. Hill -

"Guidelines" - as recommended by your Implementation Team

Closing Words

"Loving ourselves,

Strong in our love for each other,

Let us go forth

To build the world we dream of living in." - Rev. Calvin O. Dame

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SMALL GROUP MINISTRY
Group Session Plan for Facilitators - No. 2

Opening Words & Chalice Lighting: (you choose)

Check in/Sharing (30 minutes +)

Explain briefly confidentiality, repeat guidelines agreed upon. A person may request more time for sharing.

Focus - 1: My Experience with Groups (40 minutes)

The facilitator begins the conversation, and helps keep it focused yet moving, with questions such as:

- share an experience where a small group has touched your life
- how could small groups fit into your widest vision of what this church could become?

Focus-2: Reactions to Guidelines (30 minutes)

Checkout: likes and wishes (10 minutes)

Ask participants what they liked or what felt difficult about this session.

Hand out for discussion next time "Three Kinds of Covenants" from

Hill's book The Complete Guide to Small Group Ministry .

Make sure dates are clear for future meetings.

Closing Words (you choose)

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SMALL GROUP MINISTRY
Group Session Plan for Facilitators - No. 3

(Same format as above)

Discussion/Focus:

Review and discuss Small Group Ministry theory. Emphasize the importance of the "ministry" aspect of the small groups, the importance of keeping them open ("empty chair" concept), the need for outreach and the continued growth of the groups and the congregation so that the ministry is extended, and the importance of their being some component of service to either/both the church and the community.

Begin discussion on how you/they see their role as facilitator, the importance of meetings with the minister/coach, the importance of their input and insights in providing this ministry.

Copy and pass out copies of pages 37-46 and 93-100 of Hill's book "A Complete Guide to Small Group Ministry Program" as background for session 4 and session 5.

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SMALL GROUP MINISTRY
Group Session Plan for Facilitators - No. 4

Discussion/Focus:

How do we deal with each other when we are having difficulties:
(Examples: ill health, depression, alcoholism, divorce, tendency to monopolize conversations)
What can and can't the group handle?
What are the options for the facilitator?
What can you say in the group? What needs to be said/to happen outside the group?
What has the group covenanted to say about what can be conveyed to the minister within the agreements on confidentiality?
Remembering that we are here to support one another and do ministry, what are the limits for the group's health?
Remembering that it is not the function of SGM to provide therapy, how do we channel those needs and make referrals in a sensitive and caring way?
How do we draw/enforce limits? What do we do when our role as a facilitator is challenged?

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SMALL GROUP MINISTRY
Group Session Plan for Facilitators - No. 5

Discussion/Focus:

(This meeting of the facilitators precedes the formal organizing of the groups and the first meeting of the facilitators with their groups. During this meeting, you'll want to deal with any questions/anxieties that the facilitators have, and learn from them what dates they can do facilitation, Monday morning or afternoon, Sunday evening, etc. Remember that each of the meetings needs to be no more than 2 hours in length. You also need to be thinking about who might become an apprentice in each group, though this may not be apparent until the people in the congregation have signed up for the time slot that is convenient to their schedule.)

You should also set the date for the first monthly meeting of the facilitators so that it does not conflict with the small group meeting dates they have selected.

Also, the minister or person leading this training should help facilitators plan a session (either the first or second session) in which the group decides on what it will covenant in regard to:

- Listening, respecting, and caring for one another
- Keeping the group open for new members, and birthing a new group when the group size exceeds the maximum agreed-upon number
- engaging in some social service to the church and the larger world

And, I would refer you to page 12 of the Covenant Group Source Book and Hill's chapter on "Three Kinds of Covenants" in "A Complete Guide to Small Group Ministry" (beginning on page 38) for specific group process agreements that may need to be agreed upon, or at least, discussed.

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NEXT STEP AFTER FACILITATOR TRAINING

I've suggested earlier that immediately upon the conclusion of the initial facilitator trainings, there should be a Sunday Service introducing "Small Group Ministry" followed by a congregational meeting, mid-week, to experience SGM, ask questions, and sign up for one of the time slots available.

Use the same Group Session Format. You may decide to repeat the focus/discussion on their experience in belonging to groups, choose another topic entirely, or - here's another suggestion:

What is it that would give my life a sense of wholeness, purpose, passion, and zest? How can we help each other find that in this community?

A FEW THOUGHTS ON THE CHECK-IN

It is natural to want to express support for people during check-in as they express sorrow, joy, or confusion. We need to look at that. The group needs to decide how it wants to respond. Some people prefer to be heard without comment; others feel more supported with feedback. That is something for the group to explore and experiment with.

In a group that I facilitated, we put, besides a candle, a baseball-sized rock in the middle of the floor. When someone wanted to check in, they picked up the rock. When they were done, they put the rock back on the floor. That gave some emotional space between sharings, and it signified that the one who held the rock did the talking. We'll revisit that as get to know each other better. Some groups give feedback after the initial round of sharing is completed. For others, there is a flow of sharing and response.

TIME-LINE

If you implemented SGM according to these suggestions, how long would the process take? Hypothetically, let's start in September. You (the minister) are back from GA or wherever, where you and a few lay people, attended a workshop on SGM and you want to bring the concept into your congregation. It looks to me like a 6-month process. The following are dates for meetings.

September (1st week): lunch with President to discuss SGM

September (2nd week): Introduce SGM to Board (15 minutes), set date for SGM session with Board - mail them relevant material

October (1st week): Board SGM session. Ask for Implementation Team member suggestions

October (3rd week): Line up Implementation Team

October (4th week): 1st meeting of Implementation Team

November: meetings 2 & 3 of Implementation Team

December: meetings 4 & 5 of Implementation Team

January: meetings 6 & 7 of Implementation Team

January: meetings 1 & 2 of Facilitator Training

February: meetings 3 & 4 of Facilitator Training

March: Meeting 5 of Facilitator Training

March: (2nd Sunday) Sermon on SGM

March: (Wednesday following) SGM Session for Congregation & enrollment

March: (last week) First small groups begin

That timetable can be sped up by meeting weekly.

COMMUNICATION AND PUBLICITY

Throughout this process, newsletter articles, letters, and a brochure should be used to keep the congregation informed. This is an ongoing necessity. The care and promotion of Small Group Ministry is a top priority of the congregation.

OVERSIGHT

I mentioned earlier the idea of having a "convention" of small group participants gather once a year to give their feedback about how "Small Group Ministry" is working for them. In addition, it might be a good idea to have a Small Group Ministry Steering Committee focusing on the progress of SGM in the congregation. Composed of some of the experienced participants and leaders in the program, they could brainstorm ideas on how to keep the groups from getting stale and stay abreast also on some of the current literature on SGM.

SUMMARY

I realize that when a new concept begins to gain acceptance and receive positive publicity, the first impulse will be to "do it." The process I've laid out here takes about 6 months. That is not "instant gratification." However, I think it will build a solid base of understanding for making a sea change in how your congregation develops its ministry. At the least, you are provided here with some of the issues involving the training of facilitators. If you skip the stage of an Implementation Team, you either have the minister setting the Guidelines, or the minister and the facilitators. I believe the work should be more evenly spread so that the collaborative process and the buy-in will be more successful and burnout avoided.

I will be interested in your feedback and comments on how SGM works for you, however you do it. Good luck. It's a great way to do ministry!

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(My own background is as a parish minister from 1963-81 in Yakima, WA, Tacoma, WA, Natick/Sherborn, MA, and Baton Rouge, LA. I also served during 1981-00 as District Minister and UUA Field Staff person in the Northeast District of the UUA. I have been studying Small Group Ministry since 1997, and have given numerous trainings in the Northeast District, as well as workshops and sermons in churches outside the District (including Shelter Rock, NY, Barre, VT, Binghamton, NY, New Haven, CT, Kansas City, MO, Devon PA, and Seattle, WA), as well as District Gatherings in the Ballou Channing and Clara Barton District, at a Mid-Size Congregation Extension Gathering, at the Mass Bay and Iroquois UUMA Chapter Meetings, and at UUA GAs. -- Glenn

RESOURCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

BASIC UU TEXT

The Complete Guide to Small Group Ministry Program: Changing the World Ten at a Time - Robert L. Hill \$18 - Skinner House Books - available through the UUA Bookstore (Call 800 215-9076 or order online at www.uua.org/bookstore). All profits from the sale of this book go to the UUA or the Southwest District.

BASIC RESOURCES (non-UU)

Prepare Your Church for the Future - Carl George \$16.49 (Cnd.), \$12.95 (U.S.)

The Coming Church Revolution - Carl George \$16.49 (Cnd.), \$12.95 (U.S.)

How to Break Growth Barriers - Carl George \$16.49 (Cnd.), \$12.95 (U.S.)

Nine Keys to Effective Small Group Leadership - Carl George \$17.95 (Cnd.), \$13.50 (U.S.)

"Share the Vision" (five 60 minute videos) - Carl George and Jim Dethmer \$289.00 (Cnd.), \$215.95 (U.S.)

These books, videos and tapes can be order from: 800-804-0777

OTHER UU RESOURCE MATERIALS

"Covenant Group News," a free e-mailed newsletter edited and published by Hill is available at www.swuuc.org. Look for the "Newsletters" section. You'll find four years of archived back issues there, too. This is an excellent ongoing resource.

Peter Bowden maintains an interesting and ever-changing web site at:

<http://www.smallgroupministry.net>

"Covenant Group Source Book" - Can be found at this address: <http://www.the-ccv.org/sourcebook.pdf>. The Center for Community Values has other material on Covenant Groups on their website: <http://www.the-ccv.org>. They can be reached at The Center for Community Values, 1507 East 53rd Street, Suite 862, Chicago, IL 60615-5337. Email: ccv@the-ccv.org

"Transforming Our Churches With Small Group Ministry" - the Rev. Glenn H. Turner, revised 11/00 - available from the Augusta UU Community Church on the Internet: <http://home.gwi.net/~uuccaug/>

"A Small Group Ministry Resource Book" - the Rev. Calvin Dame - available from the Augusta UU Community Church on the Internet: <http://home.gwi.net/~uuccaug/>

"Designing and Implementing a Small Group Ministry Focus for Your Congregation" - revised 10/03 - the Rev. Glenn H. Turner - currently available from Glenn Turner: gturner2@maine.rr.com. Also available on the Augusta UU Community Church website: <http://home.gwi.net/~uuccaug/>

"The Augusta, Maine Small Group Ministry Session Book" - Prepared by the UUCC of Augusta, Maine, the Rev. Calvin Dame, Minister. \$25 plus \$3 shipping and handling. Unitarian Universalist Community Church, 69 Winthrop St., Augusta, ME 04330

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