

A Terrapinian (Slow and Easy) Start Up

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There are various approaches to starting a small group ministry program. We took the slow approach, one a turtle might like, at Community Church UU, New Orleans, LA. We had experienced several failed attempts to launch small groups previously. The vexation of previous failures led to our taking things slowly as we began to launch our current program last spring.

The key to the revived attempt was linking to the theme-based Soul Matters program from the Unitarian Church of Rochester, NY and the Rev. Scott Tayler (now the Congregational Life Consultant at the UUA).

Our first step was introducing the congregation to theme-based worship. This was new for the members and friends of CCUU. Fortunately, one theme available in the Soul Matters packet was “Imagination.” Using this theme, and augmenting it with announcements about a small group program, led our members and friends to imagine a transition soon to occur at CCUU.

I then prepared several newsletter articles about the Soul Matters approach to thematic worship and small groups. The July article, “Soul Matters” included this quote from the Reverend Scott Tayler,

“Unitarian Universalism is about connection. We are a religion that sees people struggling, not against our own sinful souls, but against a shallow, frantic and materialistic world that all-too-often leaves us disconnected from our deepest selves, life’s gifts and needs greater than one’s own. And so our congregations work to heal that divide by helping each other listen to our deepest selves, open to life’s gifts, and serve needs greater than our own.”

This introduction led to an August article on “Listening,” a September article on “Opening,” and an October article on “Serving.” (Available at http://communitychurchuu.org/index.php?option=com_remository&Itemid=43&func=select&id=2&orderby=4.)

These three steps (theme-based worship, church announcements, and articles) led to the start up of our small group ministry program in October. The slow pace of presentation allowed us time to find and hold an orientation for facilitators. The first attempt at leading a group occurred during a worship service, and this worked out magnificently.

There are now four small groups that have begun to meet at our church. About half of our church membership is participating. Each group has co-facilitators. It is a great joy to see, hear, and feel the energy and vitality that has appeared along with the start up of our small group ministry program.