

ARE YOU GUILTY OF BEING A UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST?

Peter Bowden, Newport, RI, CGN August 2004

In his book, [Growing a Beloved Community](#) (Skinner House, 2004), the Rev. Tom Owen-Towle offers the following question: *"If you were on trial for being a Unitarian Universalist, would there be enough evidence to convict you?"*

The above question came to mind recently while I was on the phone with one of our ministers. She shared the following common problems with her congregation's small group ministry.

1. Groups tend to become closed.
2. Groups do not want to do service projects.
3. Group leaders say they do not have time to meet with minister.
4. There are not enough leaders to form groups for newcomers.

Many of these problems have roots in Rev. Owen-Towle's question. Your groups are greatly impacted by the vision you uphold, leaders you select, and the content/quality of your ongoing facilitator sessions. It takes a clear vision, committed UU's and consistent effort to engage in the ministry of sharing our faith. If your small group ministry is facing some of the problems mentioned above you may want to stop and reflect. How committed are you and your fellow group leaders to your vision? Do you have one? Are the groups being created to meet the needs of existing members of your community or is there a larger goal? In the book, *The Purpose Driven Church*, Rick Warren suggests your congregation's mission and vision need to be communicated in some way at least every 28 days.

VISION: Make sure you know the purpose of your small group ministry. Then be sure to communicate it regularly to the full ministry team, staff, lay leadership, members and friends.

LEADERSHIP: In order to fulfill the mission of your ministry your group leaders need to be willing and interested in participating. Reluctant UU's tend to have groups that are reluctant to welcome newcomers, encourage participants to go to church on Sunday, and to engage in service projects. Choose your leaders carefully. If you are looking to grow your small group

ministry try identifying leaders willing to follow the following recipe for being convicted of being a UU:

1. Lead a small ministry group that intentionally welcomes newcomers on a regular schedule.
2. Regularly go to church, inviting group members to attend with you.
3. Engage in service projects as a group both within the congregation and the larger community.
4. Participate in a monthly small group for leaders led by the minister for ongoing training, support and spiritual renewal.
5. Actively mentor new UU small group ministry leaders from within your group.