

Creating Small Group Ministry Session Plans

Rev. Helen Zidowecki, Ferry Beach Conference, August 2006, revised, with excerpts from "Creating Small Group Ministry Sessions" by Rev. Calvin O. Dame, UU Small Group Ministry Network Quarterly, Winter 2005

Session Plans may be created in various ways. Ministers may write plans or assist a writing group. Session plans can also come from groups themselves.

Session Plans topics can come from various sources: participants' interest, using or adapting existing session plans, sermon topics, current reading and events, and other material.

Sessions plans are facilitator friendly. This includes minimal preparation on the part of the facilitator. Occasionally the group needs to be alerted to specific plans, like bringing poetry.

Keep it simple. Groups meet for two hours, at most, and a good part of that time goes, appropriately, to checking in and connecting. Therefore, topics need to be focused.

It's important how we frame the questions. "Questions need to open out into discussion rather than direct attention towards a particular conclusion or telescope a right answer. When you look at a question, you should be able to imagine discussion going in a couple of directions." Calvin Dame

Work from the premise that people in the group and the congregation hold differing views on almost any topic. Ask questions that honor the individual, the group as a whole, and diversity.

Keep the number of questions in a session to a minimum--three questions at most and two may be plenty. No group can work through five or more questions in any depth in any one meeting. Focus the session for one meeting time, though groups may use a topic for several meetings.

As groups need variety, so topics need diversity. This diversity is in the breadth and the seriousness of topics. Sessions are by their very nature "uneven." The questions, the intensity, activities around the topics will vary. Sessions will also be received differently from group to group.

Process for Developing Plans for Sessions. Session plans can be developed starting with:

◆The openings or closings, and drawing the questions from these, or

◆The questions and matching the openings and closings to set the focus, or

◆The *informal* approach described in *Small Group Ministry for Youth*:

--Participants select *openings* and *closings* from *Singing Our Living Tradition* and other sources, or write their own. The words or the location of readings are noted onto pieces of paper and into envelopes, one for openings, one for closings.

--Participants write questions that would help on them on their spiritual journeys onto slips of paper. These are put into an envelope.

--For the session, one person does the opening, a second person, such as the facilitator, is responsible for the topic, and someone does the closing. These participants may use their own material or draw from the respective envelopes.

Standard questions for atopic might be:

*What do I have to share about this topic with the group?

*How does this topic relate to me spiritually and why?

*How does my perspective of the topic influence my living and my actions?

"Finally, keep a sense of perspective. Small group ministry is about connecting people, deepening our spiritual lives; creating community, strengthening our congregations and creating opportunities to serve. We are not creating graduate theological courses, nor should we mimic new age fads. Small group ministry sessions should aim to provide real questions to engage real people in discussions that matter in the living our real lives." Calvin Dame