

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network CGN May 5, 2002

Covenant Group Ministry at Work

Rev. Mark Christian, Oklahoma City, OK

Editor's Note: Rev. Robert Hill

The Rev. Mark Christian, minister of 1st Unitarian Church of Oklahoma City, wrote the column below for his newsletter a few days ago. I am sending it along to you virtually without editing (except for changing the name of the main character in order to protect that church member's privacy). This is, I believe, a story of a vision fulfilled, of a Covenant Group serving as we all want Covenant Groups to serve. This is far from being the first such story I've encountered, but it is fresh and inspiring. -- Bob

"Mark's Musings," a Church Newsletter Column By the Rev. Mark Christian

This week I'd like to share something I've been watching behind the scenes with you. This activity has been one of the most uplifting things I have observed in any church. I want to tell you about this to give the participants some support. More importantly, I want to hold this up as why our church is so important and as an example of what a community can accomplish.

Many of you know Fred Jones [name changed for privacy reasons]. For those who may not be able to put the name with a face, Fred is an older man who serves as our Head Usher. He is a widower who puts in countless volunteer hours in the church office. He is a gem.

Fred recently underwent surgery at the V.A. Hospital. There is nothing unusual about this so far. We have lots of members who support the church with volunteer time. In addition, at least once a month (often more frequently) someone in our community undergoes major surgery. Like many of us, Fred's family doesn't live here in Oklahoma City. Cultural mobility means that many of us (of all ages) don't have family near by.

Where this story takes a new direction begins with the fact that Fred has been active in one of our Covenant Groups. Members of his Covenant Group have stepped forward to offer enormous support to Fred. Before his surgery, they saw to it that he had rides to Doctor's appointments. Covenant Group members have spent countless hours, often just sitting quietly in his room, since Fred's surgery.

Last week, Fred's recovery stalled because of complications and members of his Covenant Group have literally been at Fred's side all day long to offer support that the staff at the hospital is not equipped to provide. Members of the Covenant Group have been coordinating with Fred's family, the church office, our Befrienders group and me.

Is this happening because Fred is a good man? Perhaps. Fred possesses a positive attitude toward life. I believe, though, that most of our Covenant Groups would rally around any of their members if they fell on similar straits.

I really can't say enough about what a great addition to our community these groups have been. They offer the chance to get to know other church members well. They offer the two things that I think people really want from church-intimacy and ultimacy.

I am thankful that we have a functioning set of Covenant Groups here at First Church. If you aren't a member of one already, I hope you'll investigate joining one soon.

In the Faith, Mark Christian