

## Extra Grace Required

Adapted from Covenant Group News, April 28, 2008

Every Covenant Group will, at one time or another, experience difficult or problem behaviors that impact the group. The group covenant is our major relational code and generally prevents disruptive behaviors. But what if a member becomes angry, sullen, or aggressive during a SGM meeting? We use the term "extra grace required" to refer to people who are sometimes difficult to get along with. Facilitators must be prepared to 'defuse' the person's behavior and diminish its negative effects on the group. Following are real examples of situations and the approaches that were used to manage them.

**From Ontario, Canada:** When one individual is demanding too much attention, the facilitator may try giving visual cues such as no eye contact after the person has had too much "air time." Self-involved persons, however, tend not to pick up on such signals. Instead, the facilitator might approach the member outside the group, asking "Do you think we're meeting your needs in the group?" and letting the conversation flow from there. "Chances are it will at least open the door to a discussion of the situation and perhaps a suggestion that maybe the person's needs would best be met by therapy." Confronting delicate situations is never easy, "but how respectful, kind, and loving are we when we don't speak up?"

**From Thomas Jefferson District:** When a new couple joined an established group, one of the members expressed his opinions strongly and repeatedly, apparently to encourage the new, rather reticent couple to speak up. Unfortunately, other members of the group followed his example, expressing their opinions as well. The facilitator was unable to curtail this behavior during the meeting, and related the events to the program coordinator. The coordinator approached the long-time member for a private conversation. The member "acknowledged that he felt important in the group and wanted to have his opinion appreciated." He didn't think he was being disrespectful; he was trying to encourage the new couple to share in the group by first sharing his beliefs. At the next meeting, the facilitator reviewed the group's covenant, something they hadn't done for a long time. Some time later the group learned that their long-time member had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. They now extend him extra grace and pay special attention to him outside the group so that he feels valued.