

A Role for Drop In Groups

*By Carolyn Holt, Community Church of Chapel Hill, NC
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Small Group Ministry began at Community Church of Chapel Hill, NC, as traditional two hour groups. We called them Covenant Groups, because members covenanted (agreed) to meet monthly during the Church Year. Members in the groups liked them, but a ten-month commitment to an unfamiliar process discouraged others from joining; integrating newcomers during the year was also challenging. As a result, our Covenant Program was static in size over a several year period, generally serving about thirty church members and friends in a church of 350 pledging units.

During the 2008-09 church year, our Religious Education Program began offering Small Group Ministry one Sunday evening a month: one-hour, drop-in groups, followed by a family potluck. Childcare was provided as adults met in small, deep listening groups. With its family emphasis, the primary audience for this program was parents of children in RE, but the program was open to all adults in the church. An evaluation in June of this well-attended (35 adults, plus their children), drop-in program reported feedback which was not only positive but essentially similar to evaluation results from our ongoing, two-hour groups. *(For more information on this program for families, contact Marion Hirsch: Hirsch.marion@gmail.com)*

As a result of these findings, we are adding more Drop-In groups to our Small Group Ministry Program for the 2009-2010 church year. These groups will meet once a month, for two hours, but church members and friends are free to attend as schedules permit; no ongoing commitment is required. The covenant involved in drop-in groups is to the process, which provides a safe container for individual spiritual exploration in a group setting. These new, two-hour drop-in groups will be staffed with two or more facilitators, so that if more than nine attend on a given night, two or more groups can meet concurrently. We are advertising these groups in the monthly church newsletter, and there will be a follow-up announcement on the Sunday just before our "Third Thursday Drop-In Covenant Groups." Every month our Minister, Maj-Britt Johnson, develops a topic for use by all the groups described in this article; she also preaches on the topic towards the end of the month. Our hope is that as new members and friends find Community Church at various points during the church year, they will attend a Drop-In Group.

We believe that the healing power of deep listening will not only deepen spiritual life, but serve as a bridge into active church membership. *(For more information on Drop-In Groups at Community Church, contact Carolyn Holt: carolynholt@mac.com)*

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