

## From the Board...

### SGM Model and Myths

*By the UU Small Group Ministry Network Board of Directors*

Staffing the Network Booth at General Assembly is like having a window onto the world of small group ministry. We learn a great deal about program beginnings, vibrancy, declines, and restarts. This year in Charlotte was no exception. We heard great success stories as well as challenges and misconceptions. It is the misconceptions or “myths” that we’ll introduce in this issue. This theme will be continued in *Covenant Group News* over the next several months. To follow and to contribute to the topic, subscribe to *CG News* on [www.smallgroupministry.net](http://www.smallgroupministry.net).

#### Small Group Ministry Model

1. Small Group Ministry (SGM) is intentional lay-led small groups (recommended maximum of 10 people) that focus on ministry.
2. These small groups build deep relationships (*intimacy*), foster spiritual exploration and search for meaning (*ultimacy*), and contribute to personal, congregational, and leadership growth.
3. Three agreements between the groups and the congregation provide the program’s foundation: to abide by a set of relational ground rules called a *covenant*, to *welcome* new members into groups, and to engage in *service* to the congregation and the larger world.
4. Group leaders/facilitators are chosen and trained by the minister or coordinator and meet with the minister, coordinator, and other leaders for support and connection.
5. Groups use a standard format that includes opening words; personal check-in; reflection, sharing, and dialogue on a chosen topic; an ending check-out; and closing words.

These are the elements that are essential to small group ministry. Variations in how the basic elements may be implemented are outlined in the publication, *Implementing UU Small Group Ministry*, available on the Network website. The variations include program name, meeting place and frequency, group duration and composition, and session topic selection. *Variations are choices that individual congregations make in implementing the model, but they do not define small group ministry.*

**Myth # 1: Groups must dissolve after one church year.** This misconception most likely grew out of a one year commitment that group members may be asked to make, the desire to form ever-expanding connections among congregation members, and the fear of clique formation. A clique is defined as a narrow exclusive circle or group of persons.

In actual practice, there are groups of varying duration across the denomination. Congregations have 4, 6, and 9 month groups that dissolve at term’s end and new groups are then formed. There are also groups that last indefinitely, but with changes in facilitator and group members. Some congregations have both: groups that meet for the nine month church year then dissolve, and groups that are on-going.

Many have argued that long-term groups have developed the intimacy and mutual pastoral care that sees them through the highs and lows of life. Others contend that the opportunity to belong to a different group each church year develops multiple deep relationships.

In either case, it is important to make clear at the program’s inception that leaving one group and joining another is acceptable and even encouraged, so that members will not feel that they are “deserting” their original group. Making connections with multiple groups of people must be perceived to be the acceptable norm for the program. Congregations often ask everyone to re-commit for the

coming year, with the expectation that some will remain in the same group, while others will move to a different group of wonderful people.

If members of a long-term group are active participants in the congregation, uphold their covenant, are engaged in service to the congregation and larger community, welcome new members, alternate facilitators, and take care of each other in times of need, what would be the motivation to break up the group?

If, on the other hand, a group has become isolated from the congregation; substituted group meetings for Sunday worship service; stopped using the meeting format, become “closed,” refusing new group members; or has no plans for service activities, it is not actually engaged in small group ministry. In this case, the group may elect to leave the SGM program, but stay together as an affinity or purely social group.

Comments on this and future topics may be directed to Diana Dorroh, Editor of *Covenant Group News* at [diana\\_dorroh@hotmail.com](mailto:diana_dorroh@hotmail.com).

### **Upcoming Myths**

- A. Only ministers can direct Small Group Ministry programs.
- B. Facilitators Meetings are covenant groups for the facilitators/Facilitators Meetings don't work.
- C. Groups grow larger than 10 members, then split.
- D. Groups meet once a month/Groups meet twice a month.
- E. Group meetings are cancelled when the facilitator is unable to attend.
- F. If you can't arrive on time, don't attend the SGM meeting
- G. If you don't have anything to say or share, you don't belong in SGM.
- H. No response to comments during topic sharing.
- I. Significant changes to the program cannot be made without a complete restart.
- J. Food is prohibited.
- K. A service project doesn't count if there is not 100% participation.

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