

## **Resurrecting Small Group Ministry: A Story Unfolding**

*By Rev. Dr. Jan Carlsson-Bull, Unitarian Universalist Church in Meriden, Connecticut*

Consider this the first chapter of a story old and new. Roughly five years ago, Small Group Ministry was launched at the Unitarian Universalist Church in Meriden, CT as “Sharing Circles.” The minister oversaw the process, worked with a few congregational leaders to recruit and prepare facilitators, and launched a number of small groups. One remains in the chance form of a men’s group—chance, because it was open to women. For various reasons, women opted out. The men stayed and became known at the Philly Hug in the tradition of the team hug of the Philadelphia Eagles. The balance of Sharing Circles faded during an upheaval in church leadership. Small Group Ministry works in wondrous ways!

The time is ripe for a resurrection. As the settled minister enjoying my second year in this high-energy congregation, I celebrate the community embodied in the many ministries here. From experience in other congregations and from my vantage point as a Board Member of our UU Small Group Ministry (SGM) Network, I know how this form of ministry enhances community beyond the capacity of committees and task forces. My offering for you is the unfolding story of how this is happening.

In conversation with our Director of Religious Education (DRE), Molly Nolan, we agreed that SGM would serve this congregation well across generations and in adult clusters and would be a natural entry point for newcomers. A Coordinating Team was formed consisting of our DRE; our community minister; a relatively new member with clear promise for thoughtful group process and leadership; and me, the minister. We met initially as a Team in early September, with all having read materials that I provided from access to our UU SGM Network and from my experience of launching Small Group Ministry several years ago at First Parish UU in Cohasset, Massachusetts, in consultation with Peter Bowden.

Tapping the seasoned expertise of our Network and documents from other SGM programs, we began a discerning process. Our common goal? To plan and launch what we are calling simply “Small Group Ministry” and to form at least three groups, one of them intergenerational to accommodate senior youth who do not form a critical mass for a Youth Group this year. We brainstormed members who might serve as caring and competent co-facilitators, around a model of two co-facilitators per group. Currently we are inviting these individuals to serve. Our hope is that by December 15 we will have recruited and trained facilitators, clarified group meeting times and sites, and scheduled monthly facilitator meetings. December 15 will be Small Group Ministry Sunday, with worship centering on “Small Group Ministry: Intimacy and Ultimacy” and a post-service opportunity to experience this ministry in abbreviated form and sign up for specific groups. Worship will be led by our Coordinating Team; the follow-up, by our Coordinating Team and our new facilitators.

In recruiting prospective facilitators, we have crafted an overview of this old/new form of ministry so that each will know what exactly their commitment will be. And we have adapted this overview for the November newsletter, to put members and friends on anticipatory alert. Our understanding of Small Group Ministry is the intentional gathering of groups of 8-10 individuals led by trained facilitators with the purpose of fostering friendship and caring, enhancing spiritual growth, strengthening the fabric of faith community, and providing avenues for service. Could I say more? Of course, but if this whets your appetite for how SGM might be resurrected in your congregation, stay tuned. If you would like to know more before the next chapter is written, please contact me at [revjcarlssonbull@uumeriden.org](mailto:revjcarlssonbull@uumeriden.org).

In faith that resurrection can happen in our midst!

*Rev. Dr. Jan Carlsson-Bull  
Unitarian Universalist Church in Meriden, CT*