

## **Taste of Small Group Ministry**

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At First Parish Church of Groton, Massachusetts, our SGM Working Group offers a **Taste of Small Group Ministry** prior to each fall and spring series to introduce new participants to our program. In a Taste of Small Group (TSG), we explore a thought-provoking topic through guided sharing and listening in just 30 minutes. Childcare is provided.

We announce TSG and SGM series dates one to two months prior, and have the worship leader mention TSG and coffee hour signups that morning. Our SGM flyer is a separate insert in the order of service. We provide a nice sign-up table at coffee hour with food, flowers and sample SGM materials with "SGM Ambassadors" (prior participants with stickers on their name tags) on hand to share their experience. Sign-ups continue through the office, but we find we get most of our sign-ups TSG morning. Taste of Small Group has greatly increased participation—our program is thriving. The session below was presented this fall to a group of eight, all of whom joined a Small Group.

### **Holding Fast to Dreams**

#### **Chalice Lighting/Opening Words: 1 min**

If we want to support each other's inner lives, we must remember a simple truth: the human soul does not want to be fixed; it wants simply to be seen and heard.

If we want to see and hear a person's soul, there is another truth we must remember: the soul is like a wild animal -- tough, resilient, and yet shy.

When we go crashing through the woods shouting for it to come out so we can help it, the soul will stay in hiding.

But if we are willing to sit quietly and wait for a while, the soul may show itself.

*~Parker J. Palmer*

We light the chalice in honor of the opportunity to spend 30 minutes together and for the opportunities for connection to ourselves and to one another that the Small Group Ministry Program makes possible.

#### **Welcome/Introduction to Small Group Ministry: 5 min**

*Introduce yourself as the coach:* Our role as coaches is to guide the group and keep us on time and on topic as best we can. In Small Group Ministry there are usually two coaches for each group and we will be full participants as well as guides.

*The Purpose of Small Group Ministry* is connecting more deeply to whatever you experience as holy and connecting more deeply to the other people in the group. Small Group Ministry is a place where the soul may show itself. It is a place for honest conversation about topics and issues we may never get to talk about in the course of daily life, yet which matter deeply.

*The Format:* Each weekly session has the same format or agenda, though the topics change from week to week. We light the chalice, check in, there's an introduction to the topic, then several powerful questions to reflect on. There is a time for quiet reflection, writing or drawing, followed by a time of deep sharing and listening, a brief check out, and a closing blessing. Today we will experience some of those components, but not all of them, and not with the full time allotment they usually have—but hopefully you will be able to get a sense of what the groups are like as we experience it today.

*The Covenant:* Small Group Ministry groups are sometimes called Covenant Groups because the most important characteristic is that the group agrees to abide by a covenant or set of agreements. The purpose of the covenant is to make it possible for members to share deeply and from their hearts. The covenant includes such things as respectful listening without interrupting, confidentiality, speaking from our own experience, and committing to attend meetings.

*(Distribute)* These are the covenants we use in Small Group Ministry. Today we'll not go through each item or create a covenant together except that we do ask you to listen carefully without interrupting and to keep confidentiality. In this case, confidentiality means that you are free to tell others about your own experience in the group but do not reveal the content of what anyone else shares.

### **Mini Check-in: 7 min**

Now we'd invite you to check in by *introducing yourself briefly* and answering the question:

*How is it with your spirit today?*

Today each person will have just one minute to check in and we'll keep time for each other by subtly passing the watch to the person speaking when one minute is up. We'll go around the circle one by one, keeping a few seconds of silence before speaking in which we might hold the person who spoke in our thoughts or simply be in the stillness.

As coaches, we'll go first as an example. (Ask the person to your right to keep time for you, trying not to go over one minute.) We'll take a few seconds of silence before starting by sounding the gong. (Model this.)

**Topic: TOTAL TIME 18 min** Today's topic is Holding Fast to Dreams. We have these quotes to share:

It is never too late to be what you might have been. ~*George Elliot*

Hold fast to dreams for if dreams die , life is a broken-winged bird that cannot fly.

Hold fast to dreams for when dreams go. life is a barren field frozen with snow

~*Langston Hughes*

Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So

throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore.

Dream. Discover.

~*Mark Twain*

Often when we have a dream, we let reality, or what we perceive to be reality, interfere with the dream. We tell ourselves we don't have the time, money, skills or courage to follow our dreams. It is often easier to believe the person who tells us we *cannot* do something, than the person who tells us we can. When you were a child or young adult, what did you want to be or do when you grew up? Does your life reflect anything of those youthful dreams? What brings you the most joy, the most energy, the most sense of being at home in yourself and in the world?

**(Distribute Questions & Read Aloud)** These are the questions we'll reflect on in the silence ahead...

1. What are your dreams; what does your spirit long to do?

2. How could you find your passion if you're not sure yet what it is—where might you start looking?
3. Is there anything stopping you from turning your dreams into reality?
4. Are there steps you have taken to step over the threshold and into your dreams?

**Silence for Reflection/Writing/Drawing: 3 min**

We'll have 3 minutes of silence for you to reflect on these questions and jot down any thoughts you may have. Feel free to only complete the questions that speak to you.

**Sharing: 12 min**

We invite each of you to share your response as you feel moved, rather than clockwise. And to make sure each person has equal time to share, we'll again use the watch. (If time after each person shares, free flowing discussion of the theme is possible. Coaches may need to direct the conversation back to the questions.)

**Final Words & Check-out: 2 min**

(Thank everyone for coming.) If you haven't signed up for Fall SGM please sign up today. Coaches will contact you to confirm your place in the session.

Usually there's time for a check-out during which people are invited to share how their reflections or something they heard in the group has impacted them or moved them to do something in the week ahead. Today I wonder if there are any final thoughts anyone would like to share.

**Closing Blessing to Extinguish the Chalice: 1 min**

*May the efforts we have made here today to listen with caring and compassion sustain us in the days ahead.*

*May these efforts bring peace into our lives and into the lives of all those whom we touch.*

*And now, may love surround us, may joy gladden us, may peace lie deep within.*

*May our lives and the lives of all those we love go well.*