

## **The Significance of SGM: A Reminder**

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One of the wonderful things about attending the annual General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association is the opportunity to volunteer for something really cool and meaningful, and that you care about deeply. In Portland, Oregon, in June 2015, I had the opportunity to help staff the UU Small Group Ministry Network (SGMN) booth for several hours, along with Rev. Helen Zidowecki, who was really fun to work with, and tremendously knowledgeable.

I already knew quite a bit about Small Group Ministry (SGM), having been a covenant group leader during three separate stretches of time, and SGM is a subject I'm quite passionate about. In small spiritual practice groups such as a Covenant Group or Chalice Circle, we have the chance to get to know each other at a deeper level, practice deep listening, ask questions of real gravity about our lives, and build strong bonds of community and love together.

That said, I didn't realize how much I would learn, and what a great time I would have at the SGMN booth! Helen taught me more about the SGM Network, its considerable resources to support small group ministry work in our congregations, and the great volunteers who are behind all of this.

People who walked up to the booth shared enthusiastic stories with me about the many SGM programs going on at UU congregations around the country, some of which we weren't even aware of! Interested folks who have never been in a Covenant Group asked me questions, gave it some thought, signed up for more information, and generally moved me with their desire to connect in a meaningful way with their fellow Unitarian Universalists.

All in all, volunteering at the SGM Network booth was a reminder to me of something I've long believed. Our shared ministry as UU's is indeed about salvation, but not from damnation -- it's about saving people from loneliness, despair, isolation, meaninglessness, and hopelessness. As Rev. John Murray famously said long ago, "Give them not Hell, but hope and courage." Small group ministry is very much the work of finding hope, courage, and connection – together.

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