

UUF Winston-Salem LOVES SGM
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In the March 2017 *Covenant Group News*, we wrote of our plans to “restart” Small Group Ministry at the UU Fellowship in Winston- Salem, NC, and we promised a follow-up article. So here we are again.

With the collaboration of a wonderful steering team, we decided to begin in the spring with an “Introduction to Small Group Ministry” - five sessions over ten weeks. We didn’t want to wait until the fall to begin, and felt there would be sketchy attendance in the summer.

We had six groups – five with one leader and one with co-leaders. We opened registration, hoping that we would get some response. Were we surprised! We had 43 people sign up! This meant that we had 50 people engaged in Small Group Ministry, with no coaxing at all!!

The groups met five times, as planned, and included a service project in their being together. Though we offered a “curriculum,” there was varied use of that resource. All of the groups seemed to flourish and the feedback (obtained by electronic survey at the end) spoke of the positives as “the comfort we created, getting to know each other and share,” “balanced and respectful” interactions, and “learning the life stories and attitudes of very interesting but quite different people.”

Asked, “How do you see the Small Group Ministry program benefiting/enhancing the ministry of UUF-WS,” responses were thoughtful and encouraging: “It is such an effective way of connecting with others. I view these programs as being the ministry of UUFWS.” “It is a great way to have a warm-hearted experience with people at UU. I feel more connected. I now feel a bit more ‘at home’ for the sharing with these people.” “It can help us be more accepting of our differences, especially as we try to make the UU genuinely more inclusive.” “The groups are a particular way to enable introverts like me to find intimacy, and that’s a large reason for my participation.”

Virtually every participant said they would continue when the new groups form in the fall. One group (the one with two leaders) decided they want to stay together – they were the largest group with twelve members, including the leaders.

In preparation for our “fall launch,” the steering team planned two events. The first, an introduction for anyone in the Fellowship who wanted to know more about SGM, drew 18 people – not very many, but a good start. The second was a “refresher” for people who have been trained to be leaders, but may or may not have led groups. And now we’re ready for our next step – opening our new groups (eight, but one, as you learned above, is at capacity) to the Fellowship. This we will do the next Sundays and groups will begin after Labor Day.

We two continue to offer on-going support to the leaders, along with our amazing staff liaison, Caron Armstrong. We will hold groups for “brags and snags” three times during the next ten months.

It’s such an honor for our steering team and us to bring this lovely and loving program to our Fellowship! We will always feel appreciative to the Small Group Ministry Network for their encouragement, and for sharing their wealth of experience and materials with us!

-Taken from the Small Group Ministry Network Journal, Fall 2017