

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network CGN April 2009

How Small Group Ministry Has Fulfilled My Life

By Jeanie Shatoff, UU Church of Delaware County, Media, PA

Thirteen years ago I fell in love -- with UU Church of Delaware County. It's a bit of a puzzle, this falling in love with a congregation. And the funny thing was, I almost didn't join.

After I had visited the church a couple of times, I heard from someone that members of UU churches were among the "intellectual elite" and I was afraid to join. This is not what I had in mind. Spiritual enlightenment, that's what I had in mind. So I decided that this church was not for me. I just wouldn't fit in. My heart dropped. I could not join this church. Yet, the church felt like an important missing piece of my life. After much internal debate, I decided to stay away.

A few years later, though, my son came to me and said he wanted to be part of a church. I brought him to UUCDC -- and I fell in love all over again. I decided I'd have to work through my issues about being with "intellectual elites." Then a few years later we started the Small Group Ministry program and I became involved. And through my small group I found out that this church was filled with people just like me! They were searching for the same things I was looking for. Maybe some were "intellectual elites," but the members of my small group became good friends. They understand me and know me in a way that others don't. I feel like I can call on them if I need them, and they connect me to the larger church. Now I'm a small group facilitator of not just one, but two groups!

Being a facilitator with the SGM, for me personally, was a way to give back to the church. I enjoy listening and sharing. It's meaningful to contemplate within a small group, those questions that don't often come up in day-to-day conversations. "How have your beliefs changed? How have they influenced your life choices?" Fun topics "What makes you laugh." SGM was the central missing piece of the puzzle for me -- that spot in my being that wants to see the big picture. The part that calls out completeness.

Not long ago I was diagnosed with a life-threatening disease. It was no big deal, the doctors told me. Just some surgery and radiation therapy. Maybe it was no big deal to them, but it sure felt that way to me. I didn't have the courage to get up on a Sunday morning and tell the whole congregation. But I did tell my small group. And they held me as I cried and called me and sent me cards and emails after my surgery. They have been there for me every step of the way, and I don't know what I'd do without them.

Jeanie is a small group facilitator at UU Church of Delaware County in Media, PA. Her story was part of Rev. Peter Friedrich's sermon on January 2009 to re-launch UUCDC's Small Group Ministry program. Forty new participants signed up, doubling the number of groups.