

THE 1-PAGE COVENANT GROUP MANUAL

Rev. Robert Hill

LONG TIME, no send. Full-time District Executive work has kept me so busy that I haven't had time to send out a Covenant Group News since the last issue in July. My apologies. On the plus side is the fact that talking about Covenant Groups and leading workshops on facilitator training are a big part of what's been keeping me so busy. Our congregations - not just in the Southwest or in the Northeast where Glenn Turner and Calvin Dame have been promoting this way of organizing churches, but all across the continent -- are seeing Covenant Groups as a way to deepen service to members and to reach out to those who need us but don't yet know we want them. We're flying!

And if you doubt that many potential Unitarian Universalists are out there, please read the new book by Paul H. Ray and his wife, Sherry Ruth Anderson: "The Cultural Creatives." Subtitled "How 50 Million People Are Changing the World," it was published this month by Harmony Books (Random House), New York.

This encouraging book is 370 pages long. One page, I now firmly believe, can hold all one really needs to know to get started with Covenant Groups in one of our congregations. "The 1-Page Covenant Group Manual" follows. Much of this will be familiar to most of you, but there are a couple of additions to similar versions published earlier. If you'd like a formatted copy suitable for framing (or carving into stone), please a request to my e-mail address.

The complexities and the finer points of Covenant Groups may provide material for doctoral theses in coming years, but this one-page manual, fully understood, is enough for creating and launching Covenant Groups. As Brent Smith has said about being in a Covenant Group, "It's a conversion experience. Until you've been in one, you won't fully appreciate its power."

Don't let concern about in depth training for facilitators stand in the way of the conversion experiences people need. Choose facilitators carefully for their people skills, be sure they understand this "1-Page CG Manual," and turn them loose. Most training will happen in the monthly facilitator's Covenant Group guided by the congregation's minister or appointed lay facilitator. Go for it. - Bob

THE 1-PAGE COVENANT GROUP MANUAL

Six Necessary, Defining Elements

1. **SIZE** - About 10 people. At least four or five, no more than 12.
2. **FREQUENCY of meeting** - Once (at least) or twice a month, in someone's home or at church if there is a quiet, private, living-room-like setting available regularly.
3. **FORMAT** - Must combine worshipful and/or centering readings and personal check-in periods at the start and at the end. (See the recommended format below.)
4. **FACILITATORS** - A woman or man chosen and trained by the minister, or, in societies with no minister, a small Covenant Group Committee. The trainer then facilitates a Covenant Group for Facilitators so the training is on-going and shared.

5. **EMPTY CHAIR** - Always at least one, to symbolize those not yet reached who need us and the expectation of seeding a new group as membership gets to 10 or so.
 6. **COVENANTS** - During the first meeting, agree on how to be with each other. Later, agree on one service to perform for the church each year. Twice a year: find a way of doing something beneficial in the larger community as a group.
-

The Every-Meeting Format

OPENING READING from a Unitarian Universalist source (the hymn book contains enough material to sustain a Covenant Group for many, many months).

OPENING CHECK-IN: Each person is asked to briefly state her/his answer to a question such as: What's on your mind today? What do you need to leave behind for a couple of hours in order to be fully present here?

THE FOCUS/PURPOSE OF THE MEETING: With the exception of political or divisive issues within the church: whatever topic or activity the group prefers, so long as it is consistent with our Purposes and Principles and the mission of the sponsoring congregation. The focus should be more on sharing than on debating.

CLOSING CHECK-OUT: The facilitator asks each person for a word or phrase that says something about how she or he is feeling as the meeting draws to an end.

CLOSING READING: Again, from a standard Unitarian Universalist source.
