

## ONE-TIME SESSIONS

**“OPEN” SMALL GROUP MINISTRY SESSIONS**, Unitarian Universalist Community Church, Augusta, Maine  
*from Helen Zidowecki and Kathryn Kellison*

In January of this year (2008) the Unitarian Universalist Community Church in Augusta offered a “drop-in” SGM session during the first of two Sunday services. The session provided an opportunity for people to experience a session and connect with others at a deeper level in the hopes of them becoming part of a group.

Notes from our experience are:

- We evolved from “drop-in group” to “open group”, implying that people were intentionally attending.
- We watched for people who came consistently in the hopes of having a regular, on-going group on Sunday mornings in addition to the “open group.”
- So far, people attending the Sunday sessions have not joined other groups. Program brochures and info on the process for joining a group are on hand.
- The sessions lasted for an hour: check-in was not as extensive and more of the time was focused on the topic. This still provided a meaningful experience.

Several things in our congregation made this Sunday morning open session possible. First, we have two services so the SGM session is not in opposition to worship. (We did not have sessions during the summer when there is only one service.) Second, religious education is offered in both services: traditional RE in the first service and *Spirit Play* during the second service. (Children of participants looked forward to participating in both programs.) Third, there is a core group of facilitators that rotate on the Sundays.

We found it important, as we experiment with different implementation patterns, to maintain the basic elements of SGM: small group, focus on ministry and dialogue, and connection with the larger church community.

**MINI-COVENANT GROUPS** First Unitarian Church of Albuquerque  
*from Alicia Hawkins*

Mini-covenant groups are offered four times a year at First Unitarian Church of Albuquerque. They are designed for those new to the idea of SGM to learn more about the experience of connecting with others beyond the “coffee hour” level. They allow participants to have a taste of what the covenant experience is all about without committing to a regular group.

The mini-covenant groups are perfect for someone who has heard about the groups, but isn’t sure SGM is a good fit for them. Many groups go beyond the initial commitment and become a regular group. Each mini-covenant group meets for three sessions and is led by an experienced facilitator. The three sessions are: Sharing Our Histories, Being in Community, and Finding our Place. Each session includes homework for participants, a session plan for the meeting, and a Leader’s Guide.

People new to our churches are hungry for the kind of community Covenant Groups offer. A mini-covenant group is an easy way for people to get a taste of the richness that covenant groups can bring into their lives.