

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network CGN April 9, 2003

ONE TO THREE SESSION COVENANT GROUPS

Rev. Robert Hill

"Small Group Ministry is one of the great grassroots movements in Unitarian Universalism today. It is also one of the healthiest. It is helping us shape a faith that affirms real, lived human experience in all its complexity. It is helping us live out our individualism in ways that not only support but enhance our sense of community." -- Rev. William Sinkford, President, Unitarian Universalist Association

One-to-Three Session Covenant Groups Can Help with Wartime Concerns

The quotation above from our very busy, always-traveling UUA President, Bill Sinkford, encourages me and I hope it will encourage all of you who are working to fulfill the promise of Small Group Ministry.

I am also encouraged to learn of an innovative adaptation of Covenant Group techniques that has rich promise for helping our congregations deal with the fears, concerns, and inevitable disagreements raised by the current world situation. Whether you are for the war in Iraq, against it, or profoundly ambivalent about what is happening there, you may well be in need of an opportunity to consider what it all means to your life and the lives of others. If you don't feel such a need, you may be sure others in your congregation do.

Having learned that the Rev. Lee Bluemel, minister, and DRE Gail Forsyth-Vail of our North Andover, MA, church have used Covenant Group structures and techniques for one-time-only groups to deal with particular issues, I have been recommending a similar approach for helping Unitarian Universalists deal with the complexities of war, terrorism, and the erosion of civil liberties.

The idea is to provide a facilitator or facilitators for two-hour meetings using the normal Covenant Group format and operating under the guidance of a simple behavioral covenant (suggested up-front to save time, but amendable, of course). Groups should be limited, as always, to ten participants.

One-time-only Covenant Groups focused on these concerns may be enough for some people, while others may prefer a two or three-session series, perhaps meeting weekly. In any case, keeping these stress-focused Small Group Ministries to a limited number of sessions rather than having them continue indefinitely (or for all of a church year) will allow them to function well, I believe, as vehicles for deep sharing about disturbing concerns and divergent viewpoints.

The UUA web site, www.uua.org, has worship and study materials that can be useful in session planning, as does Peter Bowden's web site. E-mail: peter@peterbowden.com.