

SGM JOURNAL

Vol 9 No 2

Spring/Summer 2013

A publication of the UU Small Group Ministry Network

UU Small Group Ministry Institute 2013 at Murray Grove

Monday, July 22 - Friday, July 26, 2013

See flier and registration information inside!



- Tracks for programming and leadership
- Daily Small Group Ministry sessions
- Evening sessions on SGM Best Practices
- Meetings for professional and lay leaders

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Small Group Ministry at General Assembly June 19-23, 2013 Louisville, Kentucky



Booth # 419 – Exhibit Hall

(See Exhibit Hall hours in Summary of GA Schedule at <http://www.uua.org/documents/gaoffice/grid.pdf>)

- Purchase resources: facilitation, program management, sessions
- Share SGM/Covenant Group challenges and successes
- Speak with Network board members and SGM program leaders
- Get answers to all your SGM & Covenant Group questions

**Revitalize, Strengthen, and
Grow your Congregation**

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Our Mission:

“To help create healthy congregations and a vital Unitarian Universalist movement by promoting and supporting Small Group Ministry.”

Evolving Small Group Ministry: Beyond the Congregation

By Rev. Helen Zidowecki, Board President, UU Small Group Ministry Network

Who We Are:

The UU Small Group Ministry Network, a UUA Related Organization, is a non-profit, tax-exempt charitable organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. We provide support to small group ministry programs in UU congregations through training opportunities, networking, and the development of new resources.

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Archives are available on the SGM Network website.

Small Group Ministry started with groups of adults in congregations. Participants in those groups brought a new way of being together into the larger church community, changing the way that congregations function. We expanded the age groups involved, and worked with both generic and specific-focus groups, with ongoing and short-term groups as well as themed series: Where We Live for older congregants; UU Principles series; Parenting with Coming of Age participants, etc.

In casual conversations, I have heard people talk about the concept of Small Group Ministry occurring outside the church. One such group in Augusta, ME, was started by several congregation members who reside in a retirement community. Many of the group members were not connected with the church, nor were they likely to become involved. One of the original intents for Small Group Ministry was increased and sustainable growth in our congregations. If this is the case, how do we achieve the congregational connection of groups in alternate settings? Maybe the participants' commitment to the group is itself a connection that allows us to carry out our congregational mission of service beyond ourselves.

And how about other settings, such as long term care facilities, jails and prisons? What about youth settings, like Boys and Girls clubs? Other denominations offer Bible study. We have Small Group Ministry, providing the opportunity for intimacy and ultimacy! Such a service!

The Network would like to hear the experiences of UU congregations using the Small Group Ministry model in settings outside the church. A session at the 2013 SGM Institute, Murray Grove Retreat & Renewal Center, will be devoted to that discussion:

“SGM as Congregational Outreach/Service,” Thursday, July 25.

Social Time and Dinner at 5:30 pm, followed by the session from 7-9 pm.

We'll present examples and have conversations about what this means for UUs, what considerations are related to alternate settings, and what the impact is on the participants themselves. This is a way for us to continue changing the world, ten at a time.

If you have experiences to share and/or would like to be on the session panel, please contact Helen Zidowecki through office@smallgroupministry.net. And join us at the Institute. See the Network website for information.



UU Small Group Ministry Institute 2013

*Sponsored by the UU Small Group Ministry Network
and the Central East Regional Group, UUA*

Monday, July 22 – Friday, July 26

Murray Grove Retreat and Renewal Center, Lanoka Harbor, NJ 08734

murraygrove@murraygrove.org

A working conference designed for SGM enthusiasts from congregations of all sizes, the Institute is open to new and experienced program organizers, facilitators, ministers, religious educators, and other congregational leaders.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THIS INSTITUTE

- Hear presentations on Small Group Ministry from individuals and congregations
- Focus on the expanding influence of Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry
- Open evening sessions with congregations in the area
- Options available for Commuters

As participants, you will:

- **Learn** about and practice Small Group Ministry through hands-on workshops, presentations, daily group sessions, worship, and networking
- **Explore** the impact of Small Group Ministry/Covenant Groups in congregations
- **Build** your facilitator skills, including problem resolution
- **Create** and select effective sessions that use art, music, and movement
- **Develop** and build Small Group Ministry for specific audiences and group sizes
- **Refine** your Small Group Ministry/Covenant Groups to your setting

Cost: \$400 for lodging & program fee

Commuter rates: Monday and Friday, \$35 each day; Tuesday –Thursday, \$70 each day

Additional Open Evening Sessions (Tuesday-Thursday): \$30 Dinner & Program

\$25 discount for registration before May 1, 2013; \$25 discount for UU SGM Network members

Online Conference Registration at <https://www.formdesk.com/uiforms/SGMInstitute>



Document Your SGM History For the Future
From the UU Small Group Ministry Network Board of Directors
Covenant Group News, January/February 2013

Documenting a Small Group Ministry's history and model preserves it for the future and ensures the integrity and longevity of the program. Is your program adequately documented? What is the appropriate place for this documentation?

As we learned at the SGM Network's General Assembly booth, a recurring concern is the lack of program records to guide ministers and lay leaders. The unfortunate result is that a congregation's small group ministry history and model may be lost during leadership transitions. Incoming clergy and program coordinators may be at a loss to know how the program started, how it works, and what guiding resources are available.

Consider these common scenarios:

- The minister who started small group ministry in your church is leaving to serve another congregation.
- The lay leader overseeing SGM and training facilitators has just stepped down.
- Small Group Ministry is now in the portfolio of the newly hired Minister of Congregational Life.
- A newly formed SGM Steering Team will now assume leadership of the program.

Transitions such as these require passing on our SGM program history. Before that can happen, we must decide what information is crucial and where it should be kept. In short, how can we best keep our institutional SGM memory?

The Small Group Ministry program at First Unitarian Church of San Jose, CA has done an exemplary job of documentation on their website. We spoke with Julia Rodriguez, long-time chairperson of San Jose's SGM Council, about the elements to include. The following list provides a starting place for preserving your own congregation's SGM history.

Essential elements to document:

Small Group Ministry mission and goals
 The program's "creation" story
 The timeline from planning stage to program launch
 The people or roles involved
 The program model and policies, including participant guidelines
 Program publicity, recognition, and celebrations
 Session format and topic sources
 The facilitator training program
 The facilitators' guide or manual plus additional resources
 Promotional materials including brochure, fliers, Q & A, and sign-up form
 Program budget information
 Staff and ministerial liaisons
 Resources available, including the UU SGM Network website, Network member benefits, and renewal information

Small Groups, Deep Connections.

Safe-keeping locations:

Preserve the essential elements of your SGM history in the minister's files, the program coordinator's or steering team's notebook, and in the facilitator's guide. Include the program's history and policies on the Small Group Ministry page of the church website. For long term safe-keeping, add a complete documentation of the SGM program to your congregation's policy and procedures manual. Lastly, make note of who maintains the participant database and where it is stored. Consider annual updates to your history with the addition of program evaluations, changes, and improvements; enrichment training topics; and participant data.

For further information about what and how to document SGM history and policies, visit the webpages of The First Unitarian Church of San Jose: http://sanjoseuu.org/FUSJC_SGM/sgmhistory.htm and http://sanjoseuu.org/FUSJC_SGM/sgm_faq.htm.

Sticky Groups: Small Groups That Work

*By Paul Pinson, First Unitarian Society in
Wilmington, Delaware*

Can you think like the people you want to have participate in your small groups? At First Unitarian Society in Wilmington, DE, we've been trying to do just that. As a strategist by profession, I look at small groups in terms of the outcomes we are seeking – meeting congregational goals and maximum satisfied participation.

Why do people join small groups? How can we make them attractive and “sticky” so that people want to participate and stay involved? Not surprisingly, the answer differs from person to person, so the more ways we can answer those questions successfully, the more participation and satisfaction we will get. The more participation and satisfaction we have, the better small groups meet congregational goals for engagement and communication.

Small groups have always provided an opportunity to meet people, be part of something the congregation is doing, and discuss topics in an environment of mutual respect and support. Often discussions are structured, so people can explore their perspectives on topics that otherwise do not get discussed.

An obvious way to broaden appeal is to broaden the number of themes we address by adding areas of interest over time and focusing on those that gain a following. Of course, it is a balancing act between variety and resources. It's easier if there is an identifiable group with excitement for a topic and leaders willing to prepare their own material. Last semester at First Unitarian in Wilmington, a team took on leadership for a “Metaphysical” themed group. It was oversubscribed and turned into two groups this semester. We've also seen parents of younger children and parents of teens get together to form groups around their common interests. Our Senior Minister leads a group that addresses a theme of Social Justice and Social Action. These groups have broadened our participation beyond the monthly topical groups with which we started.

Another approach to broadening participation is to recognize and incorporate groups that already exist. Our Assistant Minister leads a monthly small group at a nearby senior living facility where many of our older members live. We also have book groups, writing groups, retiree brown bag groups, adult education classes and social groups. We're looking at

these groups to see if they might benefit from some small group characteristics so they can be included in our structure and facilitators' gatherings. The advantage would be group recognition within the congregation and the opportunity to stay viable over time.

It is also important to look into some factors that affect willingness to join and “stick” – openness, commitment, and energy. We have small groups that have been around for decades. Some are open, but many only add new members if someone else stops participating or dies.

Although long-term “closed” groups are an important part of congregational life, developing deep trust and sustaining connections, joining such a group may be difficult for some people – especially new people. We have made many of our groups short-term and open. We hope these groups are easier to join because new members can try out groups before signing up for years. Short- and long-term groups will benefit from a process that welcomes new members with introductions and background, because even “closed” groups must change over time to sustain themselves.

Facilitators have an impact on energy and engagement. Facilitation is a valuable skill that can really make a group work. Our facilitators participate in their own group, so they too can share and be connected. Facilitators receive training at the beginning of each semester and support throughout the year to maximize their effectiveness. A key skill we found important to develop is recognizing where the energy is in the group and focus on that, rather than being rigid about the topics and questions in an outline.

We plan to poll participants this year on topics and themes they'd like to discuss in the future. And while we're at it, we plan to ask the people we would like to have participate what would attract them.

Small groups can support a comprehensive membership program by helping visitors and new members become engaged in the congregation, providing obvious channels for communication processes, and longer-term connections for membership retention at critical points. For example when children graduate, parents are more likely to stay if they have additional connections to the congregation.

So, listen to your congregation. Ask them what they would want in a small group. Eliminate barriers. Make groups that fit your congregation.

Celebrating Our Tenth Year of Covenant Groups

By Arlene Miles, Unitarian Universalist Church of Buffalo, New York

The Unitarian Universalist Church of Buffalo (UUCB) began its tenth year of Covenant Groups by celebrating with a scrumptious potluck dinner on March 16, 2013. The evening began with socializing and partaking of the food and drink. For this part of the evening people sat where they pleased, the majority choosing their own covenant group, although there was some mingling of groups.

The second part of the evening was a traditional Covenant Group Session, entitled "Taking Stock." The topic choice was the joint effort of the task force who planned the event and our Interim Minister Rev. Margret O'Neill, who used as a resource a SGM Session Plan developed by the Unitarian Universalist Community Church of Augusta, Maine. Facilitators and Covenant Group members were randomly divided into five groups. Instead of the usual check-in, each person stated their name, attendance at UUCB, length of time in a covenant group, and gave an adjective, beginning with the first letter of their first name, that described them. This was an effective way to begin.

Facilitators introduced discussion questions:

- Thinking back, why did you join a covenant group? What were your hopes and what were your fears at the time?
- What gifts (intangible gifts from the experience) have come to you from your participation in a covenant group? How have those gifts affected your daily living?

The Deep Listening model was not originally used in our earliest groups, then called Small Group Ministry, so each person had been provided a copy of two reflections on Deep Listening to review the process. Groups were asked to use Deep Listening to respond to the first question and then decide how they wanted to handle the second one.

The groups came together as a whole to respond to the third question:

- What do you hope for, for yourself and for our covenant groups, in the coming season?

This event was extremely successful. There was overwhelming consensus that belonging to a Covenant Group was an enriching, meaningful experience. Many comments were made on how well the process worked in the "new" small groups formed for that evening's session. Some of our groups have been together for a long time. I think this evening demonstrated that it could be possible for groups to divide and assimilate new members.

In reflecting on this celebration, longtime facilitator Chuck Battaglia, wrote: "I am always humbled and amazed at how quickly deep connections can be made between people through the process of intentional sharing within a safe, non-judgmental, and welcoming environment. I left the evening inspired with the renewed sense of purpose and hope for the possibilities that these groups have for the future in the growth and spiritual development within the UUCB."

At our facilitators' meeting following the celebration, plans were made for a similar event in the fall. This time each covenant group member will invite a guest to share the tasty repast and experience a small group session. We feel this may be a good tool to spread the word about the benefits of belonging to a Covenant Group.

Inviting People into Small Groups

By Brooke B. Collison, Alban Institute

Ultimately, invitation is the key to creating small groups. When an invitational culture permeates a church, people are more likely to be connected—to belong. Think what it would be like if every person—whether longtime member or visitor—felt invited to be a part of church groups. And consider how that experience would differ from a place where it takes extra effort just to squeeze your way in. An invitation to join a small group is a good way to make people feel welcome.

Who offers this invitation? The answer is simple: "Anyone." How nice to hear, "We want you to join a small group" or "A new small group is forming and we would like you to join us to see if it will meet your needs."

Small groups thrive when they meet the needs of the members. People bring different needs to their participation in a small group, and the mix of needs results in every group being different; however, there are some pervasive human needs and characteristics every group can work to meet. So, what are the needs frequently associated with an effective small group?

- Belonging
- Having a sense of place
- Fun
- Learning
- Accomplishing tasks
- Providing support to others
- Getting support from others
- Personal growth
- Friendships

Once a group forms, it will continue to meet a changing mix of needs as the group matures.

Even when people would benefit from a support group, they are not likely to announce that they are looking for a small group of people with whom they can develop long-term interpersonal relationships. People joining a small group will more likely need to be found and asked than they will seek out and find a small group. Announcements, sign-up sheets, bulletin inserts, or any of the other forms churches use to distribute information are not likely to catch more than a few people willing to start or join a small group. That brings us back to the invitation.

I recently asked the 11 other people in the small group I attend why they came to the first meeting nearly 16 years ago. All of them talked about the invitation they had received from one of the two founding couples. When I asked how many of them

came to the first meeting reluctantly, about half raised a hand. None of them would have put their name on a sign-up sheet indicating they were interested or willing to join a small group. So why did the group get started? And more important, why has it continued for 16 years? The reasons:

- The invitation was personal and direct.
- The projected schedule asked for a six-week commitment.
- The option to leave after six weeks was genuine.
- The initial purpose was clear.
- The leaders were effective.
- The first six weeks of lessons and activities were interesting to group members.
- The participants discovered something of value for themselves.

As well as that initial invitation worked 16 years ago, I offer this cautionary note about invitational groups: the danger or problem with inviting people to join groups is that someone may not get invited! As the church initiates its small group program, intentional inclusiveness is essential. People should be able to say "No," but no one should be denied the opportunity to say "Yes."

Your planning group, therefore, has a difficult choice to make—either develop a small group program so extensive that every person can be invited to join or develop a smaller start-up plan while clearly communicating that, as the program gets established, other people will have the opportunity to become participants. Be careful to avoid creating a start-up small group program that becomes or even appears to be elite, exclusionary, or selective.

Based on what your planning group knows and understands about your congregation, it can best determine how the initial invitations to join a group are most effectively made. The planning group may decide to invite people by neighborhood groupings, their age, identification as new members, marital status, or some indication of interest determined by a survey or questionnaire. Creating the lists of potential members offers a church the opportunity to develop multigenerational and heterogeneous groups that reflect the community demographics.

Your planning group, using the knowledge it has about your church, can design an effective system of inviting people to become members of a small group. The invitations should be made in a variety of ways and the groups will be organized to meet the presumed needs of persons in the congregation. The planning group also knows that effective groups need

good leadership. Whether it comes from within the group or from outside, leadership is a key ingredient for the start-up of a small group program.

When people come together in a setting that allows them to know one another better, to deepen their sense of spirituality, and to engage in activities that support each other, the effect will be noticeable in a congregation. It will be more difficult for an individual to stand in the midst of a group of worshipers on Sunday morning and still feel isolated and alone. People will be able to connect. The experience of invitation and connection could even become epidemic.

“Inviting People into Small Groups,” by Brooke B. Collison is reprinted from *Alban Weekly* (No. 141, April 2, 2007), with permission from the Alban Institute. Excerpted from *Know and Be Known* by Brooke B. Collison. Copyright © 2007 by The Alban Institute, Inc., Herndon, VA. All rights reserved. *Alban Weekly* is a free electronic newsletter sent once a week with timely and concise information on emerging trends and Alban’s latest resources and upcoming events. Sign up at <http://www.alban.org/weekly/>

WEB NEWS

www.smallgroupministry.net

Connect with SGM via Social Media

Small Group Ministry Network Group - <http://www.facebook.com/groups/158837360893790/>

Networking Through the Network!

Two new members-only areas are being established on our website. The first is a **Members Section**, available for access in May. This section features Small Group Ministry activities in member congregations and the opportunity to communicate and add comments or questions for other congregations. Though networking with each other, members will gain an appreciation for the *process* of enhancing our programs, the *place* of Small Group Ministry in our congregations, and the *commitment* to deepening Unitarian Universalism through intimacy and ultimacy.

The second area under development is **Specific Focus Sections for Ministers, Small Group Ministry Lay Leaders, and Religious Educators**. We look forward to working with these groups to capture present Small Group Ministry involvement, identify specific challenges, and develop resources. The 2013 SGM Institute includes the workshop “Meetings for Ministers, Religious Educators and Lay SGM Leaders” on July 24 from 7-9 pm at Murray Grove Retreat & Renewal Center. Join us at the Institute or send your comments to Helen Zidowecki, office@smallgroupministry.net

Implementing SGM Now ONLINE!

Implementing Small Group Ministry For Starting, Restarting, and Enhancing Small Group Ministry and Covenant Groups is now online. Check out the link at the top right of the Home page. Small Group Ministry is a dynamic concept that varies from setting to setting. Input from congregations, program leaders, workshops, the SGM Institutes, plus Network publications and electronic media form the basis of this resource. *Implementing* addresses these broad areas:

[Overview of Small Group Ministry](#)

[Programming: Starting, Rejuvenating and Restarting Small Group Ministry](#)

[Oversight](#)

[Group Leadership and Facilitation](#)

[Groups](#)

[Sessions](#)

[Service](#)

[Visibility for Vitality](#)

Expanding Small Group Ministry

Each section has general information and guidelines plus options to consider. Comments and ideas are welcome through office@smallgroupministry.net.

SGM Introductory Sessions at MLUC

By Sue Drummond, SGM Steering Committee, Main Line Unitarian Church, Devon, Pennsylvania

Small Group Ministry is important to members of Main Line Unitarian Church in Devon, PA. It allows them to develop deeper personal connections to other members of the congregation and to explore different aspects of spirituality. While not all members have the time or the inclination to join a group, those who do usually find that it soon becomes a meaningful and rewarding part of their lives, and we encourage everyone to give it a try. We always have a SGM presentation as part of the new members orientation class, but it can be intimidating for some people, particularly new church members, to join an existing group. This spring, we are offering a series of four “try it out” Introductory Sessions made up entirely of SGM novices led by an experienced facilitator. The intention is to let people get a feel for the SGM format without having to make a long-term commitment right away.

To recruit participants, we put a notice in the church bulletin that goes out via email midweek and the one in the Sunday program. We also set up an attractive table in the atrium after each service for two consecutive Sundays with a poster, sign up slips for name/phone/email that allowed people to indicate their preference for day and time, and a couple of friendly, experienced SGMers to recruit. We offered a choice of weekday daytime and evening sessions. (Weekday evenings were most popular. Sunday evening was offered, but was rarely chosen.) We made sure to take the names of people who were interested but could not make the particular sessions offered, as we may be able to fit them into an existing group. The facilitators for these Introductory Sessions were chosen for their willingness, availability, and experience. They will call those who signed up and welcome them, provide details, and answer any questions prior to the first session.

The first session is likely to spend less time on a topic and more time on explaining how SGM works and on introductions - something that would normally not be necessary in an existing group. The facilitator will cover ground rules and procedures and introduce the covenant. The second session will run more like a “standard” SGM, though time for questions and getting to know each other will still be emphasized. By the third and fourth sessions, we hope the groups will be more comfortable and familiar with each other and will spend more time discussing the topic. Topics have not yet been chosen, but we will select some that were well-liked in previous groups.

We hope that participating in this short series of sessions will be a positive experience for everyone and will lead to either the continuation of the short-term groups themselves or to members feeling comfortable enough to join other groups as individuals in the fall. Check back with us in early June, and we’ll tell you how it turned out!

UU SGM Network Publications

Order forms available from <http://www.smallgroupministry.net>

Social Justice Work Through Small Group Ministry Features 34 covenant group sessions for preparation, action and reflection on topics of multiculturalism, radical hospitality, immigration, racism, marriage equality, and earth justice.

BOOK *Network Members: \$15 plus \$6 S&H Non-members: \$25 plus \$6 S&H*

CD *Network Members: \$15 plus \$2 S&H Non-members: \$20 plus \$2 S&H*

Small Group Ministry with All Ages Implementation strategies, leader training, session development, and session plans for children through elders.

BOOK *Network Members: \$20 plus \$6 S&H Non-members: \$30 plus \$6 S&H*

CD *Network Members: \$15 plus \$2 S&H Non-members: \$20 plus \$2 S&H*

Soul to Soul: Fourteen Gathering for Reflection and Sharing Topics such as addiction, aging and personal resilience offer new opportunities to explore life issues with others. *Skinner House Books, \$14.*

ALSO AVAILABLE See our website for details.

Facilitator Training and Development Manual. A guide for training and support plus a handbook on CD to customize for group leaders and facilitators.

Spiritual Journeys: 101 Session Plans for Small Group Ministry Programs

Sessions on Spiritual Journeying, Personal Beliefs and Values, Spiritual Challenges, Just for Fun, Being Human, Holidays, and Special Use subjects for life events.

Small Group Ministry for Youth. Twenty-five sessions for middle and high school youth.

It's true, membership has it's privileges!

As a member of the SGM Network you:

Get the current issue of the *Journal* before it's on the website, provide financial support for the SGM movement, receive discounts on publications and Network-sponsored events, and have a voice and a vote at our annual meeting at GA.

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I would like to receive the newsletter electronically;		YES NO
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We rely on donations from members and supporters like you! Your continued financial support allows us to better serve our members. Please consider making a tax-deductible gift to the Network.

Send completed form and check made out to **UU SGM Network** to 4303 Swarthmore Road, Durham, NC 27707.

Download the form or join online at www.smallgroupministry.net

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