

SGM JOURNAL

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Archives available on www.smallgroupministry.net



The UU Small Group Ministry Network Logo

The SGM Network logo, designed by graphic artist Erin Malick Thompson, symbolizes the essence of Small Group Ministry. The sequence of talk bubbles forming a circle suggest the aspect of covenant groups in which each person speaks one at a time while the others listen.

The overlapping bubbles create a "figure-ground" effect in which the center space sometimes recedes and sometimes comes to the foreground, symbolizing the secure space created by members of the group.

NETWORK NEWS

VISIT THE SGM NETWORK BOOTH AT GA!

General Assembly June 24-28 Portland, Oregon

BOOTH # 214 – Exhibit Hall

Open Wednesday through Sunday

Booth Volunteers Welcome

Revitalize, Strengthen, or Grow your Small Group Ministry

- ★ 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

Welcome New Network Members!

Since November 2014, the following congregations have become supporting members:

UU Congregation at Shelter Rock, Manhasset, NY
First Unitarian Church of Cincinnati, OH
Paint Brush UU Church of Alephi, MD
High Plains Church UU of Colorado Springs, CO
Follen UU Church of Lexington, MA
First Parish in Concord, MA
First UU Church of Winnipeg, MB, Canada
UU Fellowship of Durango, CO
First Parish Church of Stow and Acton, MA
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UU Church at Washington Crossing, Titusville, NJ

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Purchase books and CDs from the Network using PayPal, credit card, debit card, or check. Visit: <http://www.smallgroupministry.net/sgmstore>

Network Member Congregations

Learn who else in your district and region is a Network member and valued supporter. <http://www.smallgroupministry.net/membership.html>.

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.

Year-End Evaluations

By Alan Backler, Chalice Circles Executive Committee, UU Church of Bloomington, IN

In the spring, as our Chalice Circles (Small Group Ministry) at the UU Church of Bloomington are about to end for the year, we ask participants to complete an evaluation form (see below). The facilitator of each Circle identifies a participant to hand out, collect, and turn in the evaluations. The facilitator leaves the room when the evaluation forms are being completed.

The main purpose of the evaluations is to provide the Chalice Circles Executive Committee with information to improve the Circles for the coming year. Also, as question #5 indicates, the evaluations help us identify people who are willing to give oral and written testimonials during the enrollment period in the fall.

Evaluations of Chalice Circles – 2014-2015

Facilitator's Name _____

Your Name _____

1. What has the experience of being part of a Chalice Circle meant to you?
2. What would you change about the Chalice Circle program and why?
3. How has your Chalice Circle participation changed your relationship to the larger church community?
4. What service projects did your group participate in? Briefly tell us about your experience in each service project.
5. Would you be willing to give a brief written or spoken testimonial about Chalice Circles to help promote next year's program? If yes, please specify whether you would prefer to give a written or spoken testimonial.
6. Please comment on your facilitator(s) in terms of organization, flexibility, ability to handle touchy or difficult situations, and responsiveness to group needs.
7. What other question(s) do you wish we were asking on this evaluation? Please include the question(s) and answer(s). Use the other side if needed.

Bringing Small Group Ministry Out Into the World

Rev. Dr. M'ellen Kennedy submitted an application for a workshop at GA 2015 that provides a proactive direction for Small Group Ministry. We would like to thank those involved with the proposal, which is the basis for this article: Rev. Dr. M'ellen Kennedy, Denise Davidoff, Douglas Jones, along with Rev. Jan Carlsson-Bull, Susan Stukey, and Rev. Helen Zidowcki.

In our contemporary American society, many folks are profoundly hungry for an opportunity for community and deep spiritual conversations, yet they are not able to or are not interested in attending Sunday morning worship and are unlikely to step through the doors of our congregations. We can bring the opportunity for community and spiritual growth through covenant groups or small group ministry out into the community!

One of the most important activities that transpires in covenant groups is that participants tell their stories. American poet and political activist Muriel Rukeyser says, "The world is made of stories, not atoms." The telling and shaping of stories is how we make meaning. Covenant groups create, with intentionality and care, the sacred vessel for the telling of and hearing of these stories. By engaging in the process of speaking and listening deeply, we become different people—more connected, more whole, more empowered, more of who we really are.

By offering these powerful small groups in varied settings, we are reaching very diverse demographic groups, including seniors in retirement homes, students on college campuses, folks labeled with mental illness, people in prisons or jails, and those attending trainings for cross-cultural understanding. The foundational components of small group ministry are focused on creating a respectful, non-coercive, welcoming environment for all participants. These foundational aspects of covenant groups include clear purpose, format, and ground rules or relational agreements.

Partnership is the essence of this endeavor. Imagine congregations partnering with new applications for covenant groups in the community. Rev. Dr. M'ellen Kennedy conducts small group ministry facilitator trainings all across the country and has made an interesting observation. Many of our congregations have had small group ministry for a decade or more and thus have cadres of seasoned, savvy facilitators. They love small group ministry and are eager for some new challenge, but they don't know what that might be. They respond with enthusiasm to the idea of building a relationship with an organization or institution outside of the congregation and beginning to offer a covenant group there. Many of the leaders in our congregations are ready for this.

The goals of covenant groups are Intimacy and Ultimacy or Friendship and Spiritual Growth. The fact that spirituality is at the heart of covenant groups is what makes them so powerful and compelling. People in institutions such as mental health facilities or prisons are often isolated, forgotten, and underserved. They have profound needs for friendship and spiritual exploration that are not being met. When we bring covenant groups to these diverse settings, we are making significant steps toward bringing a message of hope, love, and inclusion. We are affirming their inherent worth and dignity. From the Christian roots of our movement these words resonate from Matthew 25:35-36: "For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you took me in; I was naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you visited me; I was in prison and you came to me."

The UU Small Group Ministry Network is eager to move this concept forward. Please visit us at the UUSGM Network Booth #214 at General Assembly. Join us for discussions and interviews, share information about your experiences, and raise questions and possibilities.

You are also welcome to send information to office@smallgroupministry.net. Describe for us:

- Your covenant group setting beyond the congregation
- The transforming power of Small Group Ministry in this setting
- The challenges and rewards of SGM in this setting
- The congregational connection. Is this outreach a service component or an ongoing group of the congregation?

We look forward to your joining this venture!

Going Deeper with Theme-Based Ministry

By Andrea James, Lifespan Director of Religious Exploration, First Unitarian Universalist Church of Winnipeg

First Unitarian Universalist Church of Winnipeg, in Manitoba, Canada, has been practicing small group ministry (SGM) since 2002, and part of the SGM Network since 2010. We began with Chalice Circles, groups of six to twelve people who gathered monthly to discuss their thoughts on a topic of the group's choosing. In our culture these have been ongoing groups, with a depth of trust and intimacy that comes from years together. While our current Chalice Circles share common elements (deep check-ins, conversation around a topic, service to the church and wider community) and have been supported by the minister and/or a volunteer, they are disconnected from each other and do not follow a particular program.

Early in 2013, in post-worship discussions and other conversations, we began to hear congregants express a desire to "go deeper" into concepts and questions raised in sermons. Our minister, Rev. Millie Rochester, also longed to be able to explore topics more fully and with more depth than one service a year could afford. So by the 2013-14 church year we embarked on thematic worship.

Themes were assigned to each month from September through June (Unity, Gratitude, Vocation, Stillness, Letting Go, Renewal, Abundance, Hope, Truth, and Joy) and most worship services focused on some element of the theme. Even during the minister's sabbatical, guest speakers were informed of the monthly theme and encouraged to participate.

Then in May 2014 the minister and I (the religious educator) attended a day-long workshop on Theme-Based Ministry, led by Rev. Scott Tayler, a co-developer of the *Soul Matters Sharing Circle* approach to small group ministry. Rev. Tayler also joined the Unitarian Universalist Ministers of Canada during their annual gathering and the result was that many Canadian churches adopted this model, including First Winnipeg.

The *Soul Matters Sharing Circle* comprises a group of religious professionals from over 70 congregations across the continent. Many share resources in real time: offering readings, lesson plans, sermons and music ideas, stories and more, co-creating a small-group packet to be shared in their congregations the following month. Although we joined the Soul Matters group, we decided to dip our toes into this new model by using *archived* packets. We adapt previously published packets adding a letter from our minister, Canadian content (and spelling), newer resources, a Pinterest board related to each theme,

and a section aimed at families. Because we aren't using the same themes as the "real time" Soul Matters churches, and because our packets are adapted, we chose a new name for our program: Kaleidoscope. Each month we consider how we are inspired to embody a particular value as Unitarian Universalists. We asked ourselves, *What does it mean to live a life of...?* Hospitality, Deep Listening, Memory, Compassion, Possibility, Curiosity, Devotion, Creativity, Courage, and Play.

We see Theme-Based Ministry as a comprehensive program that includes worship, curated resources, deepening exercises, small group ministry, and worship circles for children and youth. Congregants may engage through different access points and to varying degrees. Some may choose to attend services, peruse the packet and do the deepening exercises. Others might delve further into some of the resources, watching YouTube videos or movies, reading books, or listening to podcasts recommended in the packet. And others still will do some or all of this, and then meet in a Kaleidoscope Group to discuss their experiences.

Group members are asked to read the packet, do one of two deepening exercises, and explore one of our "Questions to Live With." They receive their packet about a week prior to a new month and have three to four weeks of personal exploration and reflection, as well as sermons on the theme, before meeting with their group. We begin our groups with a brief check-in, sharing something that has lifted up or is pulling on our spirits. Each member shares their *experience* of "living a life of [the monthly theme]." While we practice listening without interrupting, the group also has an opportunity to discuss similarities and/or learn from each others experiences.

The key differences between our Chalice Circle model of small group ministry, and the Theme-Based Ministry model are

- ✘ Kaleidoscope Groups are part of a larger program, whereas Chalice Circles stand alone
- ✘ Kaleidoscope Groups discuss their experience of living with, or embodying the theme, whereas Chalice Circles tend to discuss members' thoughts about a topic.
- ✘ Kaleidoscope Groups are provided with a curated packet of resources, while Chalice Circles may or may not provide anything prior to a gathering.
- ✘ Members of Kaleidoscope Groups are all doing the same theme each month. This allows them to have discussions beyond their group, because everyone in the church has access to the packet.

Feedback from our first year has been very positive. We had one existing Chalice Circle embrace the new model

and two brand new Kaleidoscope Groups. By the end of the year, some Chalice Circles were enjoying using the packets as well, although they retained their individual formats.

Although we face some unknown factors as our minister retires in July, we look forward to the possibility of diving into theme-based ministry again in the future.

For more information on the Soul Matters Sharing Circle, see soulmatterssharingcircle.com. To learn more about the Kaleidoscope Program at First Unitarian Universalist Church of Winnipeg, visit uuwinnipeg.mb.ca. Andrea James has served First Winnipeg as their religious educator since 2008.

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.

UU SGM Network Publications

Covenant Group News A free, quarterly e-newsletter bringing you SGM news, resources, and event announcements from congregations, districts, and regions. Current issues are posted online. Subscribe now to receive every issue via email. <http://www.smallgroupministry.net/dada/mail.cgi/list/cgnews>

Connect with SGM on Facebook Join our more than 150 Facebook members. Share ideas and enrich the small group ministry community.

<http://www.facebook.com/groups/158837360893790/>

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Social Justice Work Through Small Group Ministry

Thirty-four sessions for preparation, action, and reflection on topics of multiculturalism, radical hospitality, immigration, racism, marriage equality, and earth justice.

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

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.

THE BENEFITS OF ATTENDING GA FOR YOUR SGM PROGRAM

UU Small Group Ministry Network Booth # 214

Meet, Greet, and Share

The GA Booth is a great place for conversation and for meeting others interested in and involved with Small Group Ministry/Covenant Groups. You are key to providing opportunities and enhancing SGM/CG in congregations and throughout Unitarian Universalism! In addition to general conversation, we would like to engage you in the topics below.

Bringing Small Group Ministry Out Into The World

See the title article in this issue describing the movement towards using Small Group Ministry with Young Adults, in retirement communities, and other group living arrangements. Join us at the GA Booth to share information about your SGM experiences in the community and the transforming power, challenges, and rewards of SGM in that setting.

Survey of members

How has the UU Small Group Ministry Network been of use to you? What are your needs related to Small Group Ministry? What would you like to see from the Network?

How many UU congregations have Small Group Ministry/Covenant Groups?

We are frequently asked this question by the UUA and congregants. The Network interacts with several hundred congregations at workshops and events, through submitted articles and session plans, on Facebook, and at General Assemblies. We want to include your congregation! How many congregations will we know about by the end of GA?

Creating and accessing holiday session plans

Share your holiday sessions for this special collection. What holidays and celebrations would you like to have included? What format is most useful? A specific website section or a collection in book form?

Session plans in Spanish and other languages

Share your resources and volunteer to help with finding, writing, and translating sessions.

Resources from the Network will be on display and can be ordered at the Booth.

SEE YOU IN PORTLAND!

Join the GA 2015 BOOTH TEAM!

Talk about Small Group Ministry/Covenant Groups, answer questions, cite SGM resources, and share your experiences with Booth visitors.

GA Booth Assistants work in blocks of 2-4 hours, *with modest reimbursement*, are knowledgeable about the UU SGM Network, and enthusiastic about sharing the Small Group Ministry model

GA Booth Volunteers assist at the Booth in blocks of 1-2 hours, are Covenant Group members, dedicated to the SGM model, and knowledgeable about the UU SGM Network

Booth Assistants and Volunteers will work with the **Booth Coordinator**, a member of the UU SGM Network Board. There will be a one hour orientation via conference call before GA.

To apply, respond to office@smallgroupministry.net by June 12, 2015.

Download Invitation at http://www.smallgroupministry.net/events/GA2015_Booth_invitation.pdf

OR

[Download Invitation Here](#)

Small Group Ministry: A Living Covenant

By Rev. Dr. Jan Carlsson-Bull, Unitarian Universalist Church in Meriden, CT

Just as we refer to our faith as a living tradition, so might we refer to our ministry of small groups as a living covenant. From congregation to congregation, from group to group, we form behavioral covenants, most likely from a suggested template, that ground the integrity of our relationships in small groups. Sometimes it would be easier to be creedal —“This is the law! Just do it!” Yet I would not trade for anything a faith community that is grounded in covenant for one bound by creeds. Relationships are contextual. Covenants are relational. In forging and practicing covenants, we cultivate a reverence for community. In Small Group Ministry, we cultivate a reverence for community in the form of a small group. Reverence is not adoration, but respect, mindfulness, thoughtfulness, and caring. Ergo, it’s “perfection minus more than one.”

As Small Group Ministry continues to unfold at the UU Church in Meriden, CT, we have sought to shape it as fluid and to respond to the input of participants and facilitators, not just at the season’s end potluck/assessment, but throughout the months of sessions happening. This includes our facilitator-specific sessions. My earlier articles published in this journal focused on “Resurrecting SGM” in this congregation. The first honed in on “A Story Unfolding,” the second, on “The Story Continues.” Here I offer thoughts about the fluidity of a congregation-specific ministry of small groups.

Last year we strived to have three groups. Numbers loomed too large as we planned for more groups than there were participants wholly committed to being there. Remember that 80% (and probably more) of success is showing up. This year we were more modest. Better to have two groups, even if 12 or more people register for each group, than to count on everyone who registers honoring all-out commitment to being there. This has worked well. On a couple of occasions one of the groups greeted 16 participants. Whoo! But the co-facilitators reported a lively dynamic and healthy participation. Kind of like lunchtime at a New York deli I thought, but I’ll take their word for it.

Our basic structure is a Coordinating Team that includes our DRE, two lay leaders, and me as minister. Each of these persons except me is also a co-facilitator. One additional person serves as a co-facilitator. Rather than abide by what I understood as the requisite frequency of facilitators meeting once a month, they pushed back and it’s been closer to every six weeks. I plan and lead the sessions with their input. We have also been mindful of appending each meeting with a mini-SGM session just for the facilitators. They need and cherish their time to be simply participants.

Responsiveness on the part of facilitators and participants has allowed a year of SGM that has flowed well, though we started the process later than we had hoped. This reality was further complicated by Mama Nature, who had just a few wintry temper tantrums here in the Northeast.

As a collary to each group’s Behavioral Covenant, a prime innovation this year was the crafting of a Facilitators’ Covenant. As in our groups, it provides needed grounding when dynamics go awry. The covenant is presented here to use as your own Small Group Ministry evolves.

Facilitators Behavioral Covenant

for Small Group Ministry at the Unitarian Universalist Church in Meriden, CT

Preparation & Closure

- We agree to participate in the facilitators training led by the core team.
- We agree to read the materials that we receive from this training.
- We agree to participate with our group members in the end-of-year potluck/reflection.

Commitment to participate

- We agree to participate in the facilitators' meetings held approximately every six weeks.
- We agree to negotiate with our co-facilitator if we must be away from our small group.

Respect for one another's time

- We agree to arrive at our small group meetings and the facilitators' meetings on time.
- We agree to start our small group meetings at the announced starting time.
- We agree to conclude our small group meetings by the announced ending time.

Mutual Support

- We agree to be supportive of our co-facilitators, especially when group conflicts arise.
- We agree to support one another as facilitators overall.
- We agree that if we are upset by a situation in our groups, we will share it in the facilitators' meeting or before then, with a member of the coordinating team.

General Respect

- We agree to encourage participation in a way that everyone will be heard.
- We agree to model for our groups active listening.
- We agree to honor within our groups and with one another one person speaking at a time.
- We agree to call anyone in our groups who doesn't show up without letting us know beforehand.
- We agree to encourage our group members to speak from their own experiences rather than from what they've read or theorize.
- We agree to discourage advice giving in our groups.

Challenging Situations

- We agree that our groups are not therapy groups and that we will refrain from addressing anyone's psychological issues.
- We agree to share with the minister a situation calling for pastoral care and/or intervention.

Service to others

- We will ensure that our group will undertake one service venture that serves the congregation and one service venture that serves the larger community.

Ah yes, we also agreed to begin Small Group Ministry earlier in the fall, with SGM Sunday in mid-September and the first sessions in early October. All facilitators are returning, and we're now recruiting additional ones, counting on the need for at least three groups come the autumn—maybe four!

When you listen generously to people, they can hear
the truth in themselves, often for the first time.

~Rachel Naomi Remen

Learning Deep Listening Skills: Beginning Strategies

By Rev. Aija Simpson and Anne Gero, PhD

Unitarian Universalist Church of the Cumberland Valley, Boiling Springs, PA

This article is co-written by Rev. Simpson and Dr. Gero and grew out of their many stimulating conversations. At the beginning of each change of voice, they indicate who wrote the thoughts that follow.

Anne

This article is about Deep Listening and what we know about helping Small Group Ministry members develop these skills. The key for getting the most from our Small Group Ministry is deep listening. Since most members do not come to our groups with the skill to listen deeply, how do we engage them in learning these techniques?

I began our inquiry by examining the SGM Network website and was delighted to discover a series of three articles on “Deep Sharing and Deep Listening” by Alicia Hawkins and Susan Hollister that reported the results of a survey conducted in 2012.

Article I describes structural and functional elements that serve to enable deep sharing: Clear Program Guidelines, A Safe Space, Facilitators Setting the Tone, Covenant Criteria, An Atmosphere of Trust and Openness, and Compelling Topics.

Article II identifies ways to increase deep sharing and listening. Learning to listen with our hearts instead of our minds and learning to deepen the silence are both described as centrally important. Along with that, obstacles such as judgment and side talking can get in the way of deep listening. The article closes by naming a wide variety of factors that shape group dynamics.

Article III focuses on meeting structure, showcasing key elements for new members, and ways to support facilitators with initial training and on-going meetings.

A major finding from this study overall is that structural and environmental conditions that make the climate/culture more conducive to using deep listening are very important to supporting the success of small group ministry.

It is my recommendation that all SGM Programs include these three articles from the website and add them to your training manuals. These data provide invaluable information from 34 Covenant Group/SGM programs nationwide. The patterns reported offer basic tenants that collectively can serve to nurture deep listening.

Aija

I, like most 21st century Americans, am a multi-tasking machine. It begins when I roll out of bed and start checking email on my phone while brushing my teeth and goes straight through to bedtime: when I am checking my e-mail and while I brush my teeth. Despite every study that suggests that we aren't actually as good at multi-tasking as we think we are (really, we aren't) the temptation is difficult to resist. Tell the truth: when was the last time you *didn't* work through lunch?

In our busy lives we have to deploy the four listening types at the top of the chart in Table 1 (below). We simply don't have time to focus all of our attention on what someone is saying, let alone the deeper meaning that might be underneath what they are saying. The world moves entirely too quickly and we have entirely too many distractions and I hate to tell you this: it is only going to get worse. This isn't really good or bad - it just is. Cell phones at the table aren't going anywhere and conversations that are interrupted by a text message every 5 minutes are going to continue to be the norm.

All of this is to say that in this loud, busy distracted world that we live in – deep listening is often not the norm. In SGM we come together and for one hour we do just one thing. We listen. We listen with all of our hearts and all of our souls. We don't check our e-mail and we don't focus on our to-do list. We don't even think about how we might respond – that too is a distraction.

We simply listen as deeply and as empathically as we can. In our modern world that is a revolutionary act.

To give all of your attention to one task is a skill and it is not one that many of us practice much anymore. It takes practice and training to learn how to focus deeply on one person's words. In the next section, Anne will present some strategies that help people to appreciate the importance of and begin to implement deep listening. Once someone learns

how to listen empathically in a small group, this is a skill they take into the world. This skill is not just listening deeply but learning to focus and to let yourself be the object of focus. It is a heady and rare thing to have all of someone's attention. It can take as much practice to learn to be deeply listened to as it does to deeply listen. We must practice allowing ourselves to be vulnerable enough to truly share. Yet it is only in this **true sharing that we can see the truth of our lives.**

To listen deeply and to share deeply are not activities that are prized in our busy, surface focused world. And so the church and our small group ministry programs do what churches have always done. We hold dominant culture in the light and we say "look, there is another way". Deep listening is one of those ways.

Anne

I am so excited about Aija's remarks about deep listening. It is one of the most comprehensive "essays" about the complexity of the subject – done in such a coherent way. I will now build upon this to move into how this foundation requires a variety of learning activities.

One of my passions is to identify ways that help learners grasp something that has been seen as foreign or, in their minds, impossible. My career has been in teaching graduate social work students, then later undergraduate social work students. Throughout my formal career, I also enjoyed developing training for a wide variety of people.

I tell you this, because I have retired – but I have not lost that passion. Now I focus on challenges in Small Group Ministry. In this section I offer a way to engage members in understanding what gets in their way of moving towards deep listening.

Strategy one: A volunteer has agreed to talk about a very difficult current situation for 10 -15 minutes. This experience is designed to help members get a sense of their baseline listening patterns. After listening, we would first discuss how this was for each of them as listeners. Encourage them to say what seemed easy to understand and what seemed difficult. What obstacles were in their way of understanding the speaker? What did they think the speaker wanted them to identify about what was really going on?

Strategy two: Introduce the Listening Continuum developed by Stephen Covey, author of many books about leadership. Using his model, I suggest that group members use the concepts in the next listening experience to better understand what their patterns of listening are now. The difference is that there is a framework of "kinds of listening" that we can use to determine where members are starting from. This will serve as a way for them to set some goals for further growth and development.

Table 1: Covey's Listening Continuum

Empathic _____
Attentive _____
Selective _____
Pretending _____
Ignoring _____

Strategy Three: Have another presentation or play a recording and ask members to listen and pay attention to what kinds of listening they were doing according to the Listening Continuum. Process listening by Listener Categories. For example, which of the categories of listening did you use most often? Which did you not use at all? Were you listening with your heart rather than your head?

Move to Table 2 and examine what your patterns of understanding were in this activity. Remember, this is a learning process. All of us will probably find that we have much to learn.

Table 2: Covey Listener Categories Elaborated by Understanding and Explanations

Listener	Understanding?	Explanation
Ignoring	Not much	No content or Process
Pretending	Very Little	None
Selective	Moderate	Listens for criteria only
Attentive	Good recall but only from what is said	Does not pay attention to attention to nonverbal
Empathic	Overall competency	Hears the spoken & recognizes nonverbal cues

In closing, we ask that you see this exercise as a beginning for understanding and learning new ways of listening and be able to expand and enhance your listening skills. Our ultimate goal is to be able to better hear others, hear ourselves, and to be listened to.

As Aija said so clearly:

“Once someone learns how to listen empathically in a small group, this is a skill they take into the world. This skill is not just listening deeply but learning to focus and to let yourself be the object of focus. It is a heady and rare thing to have all of someone’s attention. It can take as much practice to learn to be deeply listened to as it does to deeply listen. We must practice allowing ourselves to be vulnerable enough to share truly. Yet it is only in this true sharing that we can see the truth of our lives.”

These wise words help us see what we can achieve if we work together in small group ministry. While it is a noble destination, it is important to not get overwhelmed by the journey. We can do this if we make a commitment to help each other in the process.

We are hoping that many of you who read this article will respond to us and let us know what some of your ways are of helping others to listen. What approaches do you use in your training? Perhaps we can continue to share strategies that will help us all have more resources for our SGM/Covenant Group processes. May it be so.

References:

[wwwsmallgroupministry.net](http://www.smallgroupministry.net)

Steven R. Covey, *The 8th Habit: From Effectiveness to Greatness*, Free Press, New York, NY (2005) Paperback

Rev. Aija Simpsom, Unitarian Universalist Church of the Cumberland Valley, Boiling Springs, PA

<aijascarlett@gmail.com>

Anne Gero, PhD, Former Coordinator for UUCV Small Group Ministry for ten years with others.

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