

**An Island of Calm in the Midst of Frenzy:
Covenant Groups at General Assembly
Elizabeth Barrett,
First Unitarian Society of Madison, WI**

I had the awesome experience of facilitating a Covenant Group at the Unitarian Universalist 2004 General Assembly (G.A.) in Long Beach, California. This was the first time Covenant Groups were offered at GA. A special thank you to the CCV, the Center for Community Values, who sponsored this experiment which was a great success!. Being an extravert who enjoys crowds and workshops (and especially crowded workshops), loves to dance and attend worship services, I always have a fabulous time at General Assembly, but not much opportunity for reflection and listening to the “still, small voice” within. **Being with a Covenant Group each day provided that spiritual time for me and many other GA participants;** I find that time seems to stand still during a covenant group meeting, because there is no “work” that must be accomplished.

My eight-member Covenant Group gelled amazingly fast. We chose our meeting times and agreed on the provided covenant with ease. We shared our answers to such thought-provoking questions as “How do your actions reflect your values?” **We shared laughter and tears as we found common ground as Unitarian Universalists.** One member of my group was especially in need of a small group during GA, because she was grieving the very recent death of her closest friend. We provided her with support as we listened deeply, creating a circle of caring. Through being present for her expression of grief, I began to confront some of the unresolved grief in my own life.

Imagine walking through a large conference center hotel, seeing groups of about 10 people meeting in hallways, lobbies and even on a large staircase landing or in the hotel bar. You see people sitting in circles, tucked into various nooks and crannies, each group huddled around a chalice, each group having an aura of closeness and caring. Having Covenant Groups convene during GA gave the week a dimension of congregational life that we usually don’t get there; – **that of calm and peacefulness, time to breathe and listen deeply to our fellow religious seekers as well as to our own souls.**