

Announcing the U.U. Small Group Ministry Network

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Small Group and Covenant Group Ministry holds the promise of **transforming individual lives, transforming our congregations, and transforming our liberal religious movement.**

These are audacious statements, perhaps, but look what is happening. From two or three programs, at the most, five years ago, hundreds of congregations now have some kind of covenant group program in place. In my congregation and in others I have watched as the satisfaction and excitement of the small group experience spreads out to strengthen and energize other aspects of congregational life. And I have watched, in my congregation and in others as participation in small groups has rounded and connected members with one another beyond the limits of the coffee hour, and provided **a forum for deeper spiritual inquiry and the exploration of vital questions of faith.**

I have a deeply held respect for the promise of Small Group Ministry. Small groups provide the tool with which evangelicals grow congregations of a hundred people into mega-churches of ten thousand or more. And it is the reason that members of those congregations report that the megachurches **provides the most intimate experience of their lives.**

People in our culture yearn for intimacy and ultimacy, they are hungry for a place where they can be known and accepted, and where they can engage with serious questions of depth and meaning. I believe that Small Group Ministry offers us the opportunity to meet those needs and to welcome more people into the circle of our liberal faith. **I believe that Small Group Ministry is a tool to help us become the churches that we dream of being, and help us to fulfill our mission within and beyond our congregational walls.**

And the beauty of this is that it is so simple. People meet in groups to share and to explore religious questions. They can do it at the church, or they can do it in their homes or they can meet some where else! It is so simple! But, in fact, a successful program requires a bit more. It

requires preparation, thoughtfulness, support, training, promotion, good will, nurture, resources and intention. **And most of all, it requires a continuing, shared vision of the promises and possibilities as well as the dynamics of making small groups work in a congregation.**

That's where the U.U. Small Group Ministry Network comes in! Those of us who have helped to spread the gospel of small groups and to share what we know about starting, promoting and sustaining a program have felt for a while that we need a congregational-based network. **Thus we forming the Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network (UUSGMN).** The purpose of the Network is to promote the vision of Small Group Ministry, to share information, to connect people who are doing this work for mutual support and encouragement, to develop training resources and opportunities, and to make our congregations stronger and more vital through this simple program.

So, we invite individuals and congregations to join in the U.U. Small Group Ministry Network. We are seeking to become a UUA Independent Affiliate Organization. This is the first issue of our *Quarterly Newsletter* that will offer information, explore issues and share resources. We will have a presence for conversations, questions, tips and resources. We will help to connect trainers with congregations in need of help; develop new training materials, as well. We will help convene workshops and conferences to encourage connections, develop models, deepen skills and expand our collective vision.

We invite your participation, we invite you to bring your experience with covenant groups or come and learn how to do it. We invite you to join, at the regular or at a sustaining level, and us to strengthen the life of local congregations by creating a network of mutual encouragement and support.

Welcome to the Small Group Ministry Network!