

The “Ministry” in Small Group Ministry
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On an Autumn evening recently about 275 people packed into Bragg Auditorium at All Souls UU Church in Kansas City to view the new documentary “Wal-Mart –The High Cost of Low Price.” The showing was part of the UU Documentary Film Series organized by lay leader, Mike McKelley. **The Series is a “movie ministry” for Mike which he began organizing about three years ago.** Now it’s an important part of the church’s presence in Kansas City, attracting viewers from throughout the community including college and High School students.

How did Mike come to his movie ministry, to that Church and to UUism in general? Through Small Group Ministry! Mike took a “Build Your Own Theology” (BYOT) class 4 1/2 years ago in a Small Group Ministry format. It was part of the Adult Religious Education Program at the church. The class used the basic SGM format including a chalice lighting, an opening, a brief check-in, the body of the meeting (some part of the BYOT curriculum), a check-out and closing. They made their own relational ground rules to guide their time together. They met for ten sessions over the course of about five months.

Through the group, Mike made friends and began to feel connected to the congregation and to UUism. In his words, “Had I not tried that group, I probably never would have found UUism. I saw the listing in a community newspaper. Having grown up in a dogmatic faith left me really uncomfortable with organized religion. I thought I’d never go back to a church. Being in the group got me over the bitterness. It was a chance to explore and fit together my own creed that was positive and legitimate.”

As is typically the case with Adult Religious Education programs that use an SMG format, the members of the group became close.

“We bonded and shared deep things with each other. **There was a magic to that group. It worked!**” says Mike.

When the formal Religious Education course was done, **the group members decided to keep meeting because they so enjoyed each other’s company.** As Mike relates, “Some of us have continued meeting every other week ever since. I led the last group session on mindfulness. Some new folks have come and gone, but there’s a core group that’s been together the whole time.

Part of the “Ministry” of SGM is outreach in the community. **Through this Adult Education Small Group Ministry, Mike has found a church home. And in finding a church home, Mike has also found his own ministry.** That’s the other part of “Ministry” of Small Group Ministry. For Mike, “This Series is something that I’ve always had a passion for and finally found a way to do. I’ve gotten so much positive response, so many “thanks you’s”, emails, and pats on the back. People feel that I’m bringing something to the community that is really wanted and that no one else is providing. That makes me feel good. It lights me up.”

If Mike had not joined the group, the Documentary Series would not exist. Through SGM we create a place at the table and help people feel welcome. In that open group setting, folks can discover their own calling. Where does it lead? It unfolds in unknown ways and with wonderful surprises such as this movie ministry, through which Mike is helping heal and change this broken world one viewing at a time.