

Shared Ministry Through Covenant Groups

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I'd been in a Covenant Group for over a year when my partner Sam became very ill, spending five days in the hospital. After his release, I was anxious and afraid – how would I take care of him? He was bed-ridden for a week. Thankfully, the members of my small group rallied to bring meals to us – all different kinds of soup, one delivered every other day or so along with salads, bread and the occasional decadent dessert. **Sam and I felt so cared for and supported – that is the power of shared ministry.**

Months later, I helped another group member pack her belongings and move to a new apartment. She said, “I owe you one for this. I owe you.” I thought, No, that's not true. Jean doesn't owe me a thing. **She has supported me in more ways than she knows**, always ready with a kind word or a hug, always committed to our group.

The care we provide each other in our Small Group Ministry programs becomes a natural part of being in a group together. **We bond and form a small community, each acting as a lay minister to the rest of the group.**

This doesn't just happen, however. A good facilitator models shared ministry from the first contact with group members by being warm, caring and responsive. Someone in the group took a trip or had a job interview? A telephone call to ask how it went may be in order. A homemade get-well card would be perfect in certain situations. Whenever someone misses a meeting (for whatever reason) the facilitator or someone else in the group can make contact. Soon, an environment of shared ministry permeates the whole group. It's not forced **and each group finds its own level of comfort with deeper connections that evolve naturally over time.**

At my congregation, our three ministers recently wrote a covenant with “support the laity in shared ministry” as one of their promises to each other. They stated that they “will work to create ongoing opportunities for members of the community to care for one another in maintaining the culture of a healthy congregation.” **Our ordained ministers recognize that they alone cannot meet the needs of everyone in our community.** Of course, we've known this for many years, but it's great to have it finally acknowledged in writing!