

**An Interview with Rev. Bob Hill**  
**By Rev. Calvin O. Dame, President of UU Small Group Ministry Network**  
*UU Small Group Ministry Quarterly, Summer 2005*

**Rev. Bob Hill, one of the earliest proponents of Covenant Groups in our movement and author of *The Complete Guide to Small Group Ministry*, is leaving his position as District Executive for the Southwest District after seven years.** He's moving to Brisbane, Australia where his wife, Dr. Kristi Heesch, is taking a three year research oriented position at the University of Queensland in the field of health promotion and public health.

**Calvin:** What got you interested in Covenant Groups?

**Bob:** The simple answer: **Glenn Turner.** In 1997 I attended a meeting in Boston with Glenn, a fellow District Executive and long-time friend of mine, and he was all excited about the possibilities of Carl George and something called "**metachurch.**" The more complex answer is that I was primed and ready for what Glenn told me because of my growing belief that **one of the failures of our movement was our inability to be hospitable.** We had not been very open or friendly, ministers and lay people alike, in my opinion, and we'd been too contentious, more interested in debate than in community. Glenn's description of the meta-church techniques led me to a lot of reading and, very soon, an "Ah Ha!" by showing me a **way for us to begin to share stories and listen to each other and to our guests.**

**Calvin:** What changes have you seen in our churches as a result of Covenant Group work?

**Bob:** I think there's been some change in the attention we give to those who have not yet found us and those who are just coming through our doors. **We have perhaps become better at listening instead of talking.** And I see a deepening of commitment by our members to their churches. **Small Group Ministry/Covenants Groups have helped to strengthen and grow our congregations.** We're seeing some of the results here in the Southwest District. **Our adult membership passed 10,000 this year for the first time and SGM has been a part of the growth of many of our congregations.**

**Calvin:** What are you happy with?

**Bob:** I am pleased that most of our **ministers coming out of seminary have a good grounding in Covenant Groups.** They expect to make these groups a part of their ministries.

**Calvin:** What are you discouraged with?

**Bob:** One of my early fears has come true. I worried that I would be going around to churches and hearing folks say "Oh yeah, small groups, we did that. Didn't work for us." I'm hearing some of that now and when I ask how their groups were conducted, **I find, just as I suspected, they didn't really try Covenant Groups. They omitted or changed key elements.** There are even covenant-free Covenant Groups, I'm told, but my view is that without a covenant agreed to by the participants and regularly reviewed, you don't have a Covenant Group. There are elements that are essential to the "magic," to the success of Small Group Ministry. I've also been disappointed by the absence of support or lukewarm support from some ministers. **And I think lukewarm support may be worse than no support at all.** Ministers need to catch the vision. **When Small Group Ministries fail or drag along, it's usually for one of those two reasons: omission of key elements or insufficient ministerial support.**

**Calvin:** What is left to do?

**Bob:** Continue to spread the gospel and stay on message: **"Small Group Ministry can save our churches and help to save the world. The Small Group Ministry Network work is vital! You're saving souls."** One other point: Small Group Ministry needs **to be institutionalized as an integral part of our General Assemblies,** as an ongoing, continuing demonstration of the power and potential of small groups of this particular kind. **We had great cooperation from the President and the Moderator and the Planning Committee last year, we're getting that again this year,** and now I'd like to see us move to the next level of having Covenant Groups for delegates made an integral part of staff and Planning Committee work. Delegates need Small Group Ministry and our churches need their delegates exposed to the

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power of Covenant Groups. **This needs to be woven into the very fabric of G.A.**

**Calvin:** Bob, thanks so much for your work, and best wishes in the future. If they've got email there, be sure to stay in touch.

**Bob:** I checked for high-speed internet service first thing. I'll be watching your progress from afar and cheering you on,