

News From Our Members: Fall Round Up
UU Small Group Ministry Network Quarterly, Fall 2006

In the autumn, many of our congregations host a Kick-Off or other event to launch new Small Group Ministry Programs, and to celebrate and recruit members for existing programs. Here is some news from various congregations on their Fall Start-Ups

From Rev. Sarah Clark, First Parish in Plymouth, MA

After attending The Small Group Ministry Network Conference at Ferry Beach this summer, I returned to our congregation with much information and inspiration. **We launched the Small Group Ministry Program on September 17 with Small Group Sunday.** The worship service included three speakers each sharing their reflections on Small Group Ministry, and my homily entitled "That I Might Know Your Mind". In the service we honored our facilitators using, with some adaptation, the Installation Ceremony from Rev. Stefan Papa. The children's story was also related to Small Group Ministry.

After the service, we had a table at the coffee hour staffed by facilitators ready to answer questions. Before the service, we had a preliminary sign up of about 12 people, and an additional 12 people signed up that day. During the week, we called people to recruit more participants. So we started our small groups in October with a total of 32 people (including the facilitators) in four groups. Of these, two meet in the morning and two in the evening.

In addition to these four groups, we also have **a group for ongoing support and training of the facilitators** which I am leading. All of the groups are starting with the same session "Friendship" and then will do a session on "Covenant" in which groups set their ground rules. The first facilitator's group will cover the importance of ground rules as well as check ins and a short session on a theme. **We feel we're off to a good start this year with much promise of stronger friendships and deeper spiritual reflection for our Small Group Ministry participants.**

From Ann Davis, Coordinator, Chalice Circles Unitarian Universalist Society of Mill Creek, Newark, DE

I left Ferry Beach on August 16th having spent five days with the excellent trainers from the Small Group Ministry Network. Those days were jam packed with information and spiritual experiences that were shared by instructors and students alike. I left feeling educated, inspired, and energized. As the new Chalice Circle Coordinator for my church, I felt very much enabled to increase the number and the quality of the covenant group program at my church.

Exactly a month after I left Ferry Beach, members of the Chalice Circle Steering Committee and I held a three-hour **training for new facilitators.** Three new facilitators were initiated in the ways of assisting small groups to interact in a manner that develops each person's spiritual understanding and interpersonal intimacy. Eight days later, on September 24th, with the leadership of our minister, the Reverend Nancy Dean, our congregation celebrated Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and **Chalice Circle Sunday.** I dedicated the chalice lighting to the goal of companionship for spiritual growth through small group ministry. Three people spoke about their small group ministry experience with words of encouragement to their fellow congregants to join a group. **Reverend Dean led an installation ceremony in which our roles as part of the spiritual leadership and ministry of the church were illuminated and we accepted our commission to take on this position of responsibility.** Following the service, a light lunch was offered to the adults who wished to experience a small group ministry session. Child-care was provided with sandwiches to free the parents to attend the "sampler" session. Then, two Chalice Circles were formed with four and five initiates in each. Veteran Chalice Circle participants filled in the groups along with the facilitators to make one circle of 9 and one of 10

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people. The topic of the hour-long abbreviated session was “Mentors”. **The participants seemed to open up to speak about significant people who have been a guide through life.** Most participants adhered to the “Ground Rules” and interacted with their fellow circle companions in attentive and compassionate ways.

We had fifteen new Chalice Circle members register to join a group. **By early November, I estimate that there will be four or five small group ministry groups join the two that exist in my church.** I am hopeful that we may have our first theme group or groups follow the covenant group format filled with participants from the Earth-Based Spirituality Group.

Two of our facilitators are seriously considering **starting a group at a nearby retirement community** where there is a group of twenty Unitarian Universalist residents. **Our Director of Religious Education will be trained soon, and shortly after that I will be training four or five youth to use SGM format during their youth group discussions.** I am very excited about the potential for strengthening of spiritual growth and emotional bonds of members of our congregation.

From Revs. Mary Ann Macklin and Bill Breeden, UU Church of Bloomington, IN

Our congregation started Small Group Ministry by sending two lay leaders and one of our ministers to Ferry Beach in August 2005 for a weeklong training. We came back believing that the program was worthwhile and began a yearlong process of preparing to launch our Chalice Circle programs in fall, 2006.

It has proven more than “worthwhile.” We expected to enlist perhaps 10-15% of our membership, or about 40-50 in the initial program. **We were pleasantly shocked when more than 130 persons signed up representing more than 25% of our membership!** Obviously, even in one of the most vibrant of congregations, there are many that feel the need for more intimate times of sharing life experiences and deepening their spirituality. We are thankful some of our lay persons were persistent in expressing such a need, and we encourage our colleagues and other lay leaders to give Small Group Ministry serious consideration as a channel for renewal in our liberal religious tradition.

We believe our success thus far is the result of good planning, including training such as the Ferry Beach conference. In addition, we invited Dr. M’ellen Kennedy to a weekend consultation with our implementation team in order to overcome obstacles that threatened to derail us. In other words, we refused to give up, believing that this program was worth the effort and cost to do it right. We are very excited about our Chalice Circle program. There will be challenges ahead, but with the commitment of our facilitators, our lay leaders, and the guidance of those in the Small Group Network, we believe the future looks bright for this ministry