

From the New President Of the Small Group Ministry Network

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The Annual Meeting of the UU Small Group Ministry Network occurred in June at the Unitarian Universalist General Assembly in Portland, Oregon. At the meeting, I was elected to serve as President of the UU Small Group Ministry Network. I am honored and excited to serve in this capacity. You are all doing very important work for your own congregations and for the growth and health of our liberal religious movement. The Network exists to support and enhance this work. The Network was founded three years ago by Rev. Calvin Dame, Rev. M'ellen Kennedy and Peter Bowden. Calvin has served as president since the Network started and his inspiration and hard work helped lay a solid foundation. He provided consistent leadership over these years, established the connection that made our week-long workshops at Ferry Beach possible, wrote many of our excellent resource materials and so much more. It is very humbling to follow him as president. **We extend our gratitude to Calvin as he completes his time on the Board.** The other founding members, M'ellen and Peter, remain in staff roles. At the Annual Meeting we also **elected three wonderful new Board members: Mary Ann Terry, Anne Haynes, and Steve Becker,** Susan Hollister, Walter LeFlore, and Rev. Helen Zidowecki continue to serve. **We wish to thank Rev. Marti Keller for two years of service, as she steps off the board this fall.**

Also at General Assembly this year, I had the fun of spending some time in **the Network's booth in the Exhibit Hall.** It was very exciting to talk to so many people about their small group ministry programs. I estimate that I talked to about seventy ministers and lay leaders. Nobody was saying to me "This doesn't work. We tried it and it failed" or even "We want to start some groups and don't know where to begin." Instead, **we were hearing about healthy, vibrant programs** and were being asked specific questions about how to make them better. Questions like:

"How should we train our facilitators?"

"What should the role of the minister be?"

"Where can I get some session materials?" and

"What do we do with especially needy members?"

It was invigorating being in the booth and engaging in these conversations. Our two workshops were also well attended. Susan Hollister, Treasurer, and I had to sit on the floor for the workshop entitled "Emerging Models of Small Group Ministry."

In July 2007, The Unitarian Universalist Association notified the Network that we are no longer an affiliate of the UUA. We are not alone. Only four reapplications out of about seventy were approved. We have been working with the UUA Board and Staff to design a new working relationship. We'll keep you posted on the results, but it looks very promising.

In September, the Board held our annual two day retreat in Devon, Pennsylvania hosted by Mainline Unitarian Church and Susan Hollister. Thanks to the leaders of Mainline Unitarian Church for their gracious welcoming of our group. All of our Board members and one staff member, M'ellen Kennedy, attended. It was an intense and productive experience, as we addressed the organizational issues of a three-year old organization. **We elected officers: Steve Becker, Vice-President, Helen Zidowecki, Secretary, and Susan Hollister, Treasurer.**

We set goals and made plans to execute them.

Many of our goals are institutional:

- * Creating a workable relationship with the UUA;

- * Completing the work to get our 501c3 status;

- * Establishing a workable process for interrelatedness of our membership, web site, CG News and the Quarterly;

- * Improving professional working relationships with staff;

- * Developing a comprehensive data base of our constituency; and
- * Fully funding our goals.

We also planned to:

- * Continue the “District Initiative,” which consists of working within the targeted districts to promote SGM;
- * Ensure that quality workshops and conferences are offered;
- * Offer a national comprehensive small group ministry conference.

In summary, the challenge for the UU Small Group Ministry Network Board is to strengthen and improve the Network organization, and its relationship with the UUA, while continuing to offer conferences, training sessions and a presence at General Assembly. It’s a tall order and may take more than one year.

The rest of the Board, the staff and I continue to need your help and support to build on the foundation we’ve established in our first three years. The most concrete form of assistance you can give is to become a member or supporter. If you’re not yet a member, considering joining the Network.

In addition, there are volunteer opportunities on several committees including the Education and Conference Committee, the Membership Committee and the Fundraising Committee. I’m looking forward to working with and serving you in continuing to build a strong small group ministry movement.