

Supporting the Vision Caster

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In Peter Bowden's thoughtful article, "Holding the Vision of Small Group Ministry" in the [Fall, 2006 Small Group Ministry Quarterly](#) (PDF), he explains that ministers are often very involved in the SGM program's startup, but can't sustain that level of involvement as the program continues. I was particularly challenged by Peter's last sentence: *"It takes a strong lay leader or other staff person to uphold the vision for this ministry when the primary vision caster(s) has stopped broadcasting the message."*

An alternative to the approach Peter suggests, is for a lay leader or staff person to steer the professional minister toward what needs to be done to uphold the vision, with specifics about what needs to be said and when and how. This is how the SGM program works at the Unitarian Church of Baton Rouge. It is a large mid-sized church (350 members) with a large Small Group Ministry program (200 participants) but only one minister, Rev. Steve Crump. I am a fulltime volunteer staff person and spend about eight hours a week coordinating the SGM program.

Six years ago, Steve and I worked with the initial set of leaders to launch the program. Since then, he and I have worked together to lead the program. We have been blessed with about 28 committed leaders who share the vision and implement our model. The leaders meet together about eight times a year, breaking into small groups for problem solving. As the only minister, Steve's attention and focus is widely spread among many competing priorities, so the steering role is the one I need to play here. He often has a better idea than me, but it's up to me to take the initiative to suggest actions. These include congregational recognition of the leaders, leaders meetings, and problem-solving session with leaders who have difficult challenges.

It's practically an obsession of mine that the leaders need to hear our minister's vision of SGM and that they need to hear it often, because it is ministry and it is important. The leaders need support and inspiration from the congregation's spiritual leader. This means scheduling the leaders meetings when he can attend and rescheduling when necessary. Steve always does a wonderful job, but he doesn't have to plan the leaders meetings or attend meetings to plan the leaders meetings, He just has to read the agenda in my emails or discuss the agenda briefly with me before the leaders meeting and then to be there.

Obviously, this partnership requires trust between the minister and coordinator and a shared vision of a thriving small group ministry program. But if this trust can be established, it allows the professional minister of the congregation to play the vision casting role.
