

Reaching Out Into Our Congregational History
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There are lots of ways to attract members to Covenant Groups (or Small Group Ministry Groups). For some people, just hearing that the groups are available is enough. Others find out about them through the church newsletters or a Sunday speaker. **The UU church in Concord, NH has tried a couple of other approaches that have been successful in attracting people who might not have gotten involved otherwise.**

We began our groups in 2001. This was something brand new to the church and the planning committee wanted to maximize participation. **They felt that it was an opportunity that would appeal not only to currently active members but also might be of interest to those folks who were no longer regularly attending.** The committee members sought out copies of the old church directories and went over them. **They were looking to find out who was still around and who might be looking for a low-impact way of getting re-involved.** Once the group had identified those people, they sent out letters describing the upcoming program with an application enclosed. While there are no official numbers, some did indeed respond. These folks have been in a group since, and in addition have become more active in the church as a whole.

My own group did something similar when we were looking to add members. **We took the church directory and saw who was still listed as a member but no longer came to church. We called them up and invited them to try out our group. Everyone was honored to be asked and two of the three people we called ended up joining.** In addition, facilitators are finding that sometimes just going up to someone at church and asking if they'd be interested in joining a group works. **One couple told me that they'd been thinking about it since the fall but it took being asked to get them to commit.**

Another successful technique the church used was to have a Covenant Group Breakfast one Sunday morning that was open to anyone. Covenant group members spoke enthusiastically about their group experiences. **From this, a brand new group formed with two church regulars and five people who had not been part of the church community for years but had come to that morning to see what covenant groups were all about.**

What we have learned through this is that we sometimes need to think outside the box as to how to attract new members. **We are always looking for innovative ways and we continue to be surprised by what works.**