

Growth Through Division: A Covenant Group Successfully Splits!

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Unitarian Universalism is a faith with few “miracle stories” but many miracles. As the ministerial liaison to the Covenant Group program at Cedar Lane Unitarian Universalist Church in Bethesda, Maryland (850 adult members, 300 children,) **I can attest to the transformative experiences fostered by our covenant groups - intellectual, spiritual, emotional and relational experiences that are nothing short of miraculous!**

Our program experienced a “miraculous” event in the Fall of 2007 when one of our long-time groups took the brave step of splitting into two...and both groups emerged from the split as healthy, growing covenant groups.

Bob Harrison, one of the early founders of Cedar Lane’s covenant group program, tells the story this way: “The group was organized to follow the ‘Living by Heart’ (LBH) curriculum developed by the Reverends Laurel Hallman and the late Harry Scholefield. The group, had met year-round and had grown to a dozen participants.

“After three years together, when a thirteenth person asked to join, several participants talked about starting a new group, feeling that the larger size of the group – while inspiring a rich intellectual conversation each week – was beginning to diminish the potential for intimacy and deeper community. One member of the group asked Heather what she thought. She encouraged

us to split into two different groups.

“Some members readily assented, others weren't so sure. All agreed that they valued mightily the confidentially and community they had developed...”

In the end the group decided to split.

As some members of the original group hadn’t gone through the entire LBH curriculum before, the “new” group decided to follow more closely the poetry-rich course manual. **Since its formation in October 2007, the new group has grown from five to eight and the original Living By Heart group continues to thrive.**

Together, we at Cedar Lane learned that while splitting a group can be emotionally treacherous, it can be successful and may yield new opportunities for covenant group members, new ones and long-timers alike. As well, splitting a group is in harmony with the core goals of the covenant group ministry. To close a group (that is getting too large) contradicts one of the missions of covenant groups – to always have space for new people to join this special ministry. In addition, allowing a group to get too large detracts from the gifts of Small Group Ministry.

For those covenant group leaders who are considering splitting a group, we encourage you to take this leap of faith, despite the challenges and difficult feelings that may arise. Good things – and even miracles – are sometimes the fruit of risk