

# ***U.U. Small Group Ministry*** ***Quarterly***



Vol. 1, No. 4, Spring, 2005  
Published by the U.U. Small Group Ministry Network

## **Using the Action-Reflection Model for Service Projects** **By Elizabeth Barrett & David Blough**

First Unitarian Society, Madison, WI

We at First Unitarian Society of Madison encourage each Covenant Group (or Chalice Group as we call them) to do at least one service project per year, either for our church or the larger community. A few of our groups do more than that. In our Covenant Groups, we foster intentionality and growth through service by using the Action-Reflection model.

For many of us, our lives are a continuous cycle of action without reflection. We decide to take action on something, we do it, and then we move on to the next decision and action. The danger of this habit is "spiritual drift." Over time, our decisions and actions may become disconnected from what we truly value and hope to accomplish. We may find ourselves acting without thinking, or feeling like our actions are not having any effect.

Graphic courtesy of the Rev. Scott Gerard Prinster

Covenant Groups are a way for us to act more consciously, in tune with our values and with each other's support. In Covenant Groups, we reflect on what we have done, integrate it with our values and our understanding of the world, and make that the basis of future action.

This approach of action, reflection, and integration transforms service from yet another task in our too-busy lives into a means of spiritual fulfillment. Service becomes renewing, not draining.

Some of the feeling of renewal comes in working together with others for a common goal. The rejuvenation also comes from knowing that our actions are being directed towards something we really care about. Taking time to reflect on what we have accomplished gives us a chance to appreciate the difference we have made.

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## **Service: An Essential Element of Small Group Ministry Sessions** **By Rev. Calvin O. Dame**

Augusta, ME

In the relatively short time since Small Group Ministry/Covenant Groups began to emerge and spread through our Unitarian Universalist congregations, there has been a spirited and appropriate discussion as to what elements are essential to small group ministry, what can be considered as best practices, and what are local variations that are best left to local circumstances and taste.

Bob Hill outlined a number of essential elements in his Complete Guide To Small Group Ministry: that groups be 8 to 10 people; that groups meet with enough frequency for intimacy to develop and be maintained; that groups follow a regular format for sharing and discussion; that facilitators be chosen, trained, and meet regularly with the ministry of the church, either the minister or lay leaders entrusted with this role; that groups develop and maintain a covenant (Bob's been given to wryly observing lately on the number of covenant groups he encounters with no covenant).

Bob adds the expectation of an "empty chair" to symbolize the openness and welcome that we hope these groups will embrace, an element I tend to think of as a best practice rather than essential, and his list mentions but subsumes under covenants an element that I have long considered essential, and that element is Service.

In Augusta, we have included the expectation that each group engage in some form of service either within or beyond our congregation at least once a year from the very beginning.

There are a number of reasons why I think service is essential. First, it was a clear element in the material from evangelical churches that we researched in putting our program together. Quite frankly, as we were surveying a model that successfully builds congregations of tens of thousands of members, it seemed like a good idea to take the elements of that model seriously.

But more than that, including service made spiritual sense. We were intent on putting together groups that would deepen the spiritual resources of our congregation by fostering the spiritual growth of our members. We opted spiritual growth groups, and here is the bottom line on spiritual growth: service is always both a path and an outcome of spiritual growth. We didn't make this up, you can check it out in any religious tradition, teacher or path.

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**Using the Action-Reflection Model  
for Service Projects (cont. from page 1)  
By Elizabeth Barrett & David Blough**

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While it's true that participating in a service project brings its own satisfaction, people can become burned out if its meaning isn't reflected on. Focus on the connection between the work and its broader effects, either during the project or afterwards.

Here are a few questions for reflection on the experience of service: What did engaging in service feel like? What parts felt energizing and what parts, if any, felt like obligation? What did you learn about yourself and others by doing this service? What did you notice about the experience of working together toward a common goal? In what ways is service part of your Unitarian Universalist faith? What changes, if any, would you like to make in your own actions or habits as a result of doing the service?

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The UU Small Group Ministry Network  
The Benefits of Membership:**

1. Experiencing the joy of helping our grassroots Small Group Ministry movement flourish!
2. Getting the SGM Quarterly mailed to your home or congregation four times each year.
3. Accessing great new members-only resources through our website.
4. Receiving registration discounts when you attend UU SGM Network sponsored events.
5. Receiving assistance when you plan and offer a regional or cluster small group ministry event.
6. Participating as a voting member in the UUSGM Network Annual Meeting at General Assembly

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*"The world cannot always understand one's  
profession of faith, but it can understand service."*

*Ian Maclaren*

**Service: An Essential Element of Small Group  
Ministry Sessions**

**By Rev. Calvin O. Dame**

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And we had other reasons as well. One is the powerful intimacy that develops when groups are working well, it can create a centripetal force and a self-absorption that can isolate a group. A regular connection back to the larger community seems in order.

Then, too, groups that just talk all the time, well, they just talk all the time. They get boring and stale. Groups need to get up and do something together. A movie night is good, but so is a project where members roll up their sleeves, rub elbows, get to know each other in a different way, and gain the satisfaction of making a contribution together. Our experience Augusta has ratified our expectations and provided lessons we didn't foresee. Service has been an important part of the experience of our small groups. Over the years, it is the groups that engage in service projects most generously and most often that have been the strongest, have lasted longest and have been the most resilient. And the various service contributions have supported and extended the mission of the larger congregation.

What kind of projects? Well, all sorts, large and small: Show up together for a work day, take all the serving/greeting tasks on a Sunday morning, run a fund raiser, show up together on clean up day, staff the soup kitchen, buy Christmas presents for a family at the Family Violence Shelter, paint a room, paint the garage, fill the flower boxes out front, raise money for our project n Nicaragua, provide a worship service, organize the reception after a memorial service.

I appreciate a big project, but small projects are great, too! Especially because it is true that some groups resist the service component. We never insist that a group do a service project, but we do encourage the group to return every few months to the Service Session Topic in our Sessions Book, and consider service in the context of spiritual growth and the life of community. And, sooner or later most groups will take on a small project. And, not surprisingly, the experience is usually good and a small project leads on to other, more ambitious contributions.

As Small Group Ministry has spread thought our movement, one of my disappointments has been that too often planners choose or congregations opt not to include service in their model. I think those programs miss an important avenue for building strong groups, and that in doing so we sell ourselves short. I believe that we need to take our own spiritual lives seriously, and that we need to be forthright about the spiritual truths we know. A deepening spiritual life is a life of service, and service is a path into spiritual community.

## UU Small Group Ministry Network Board & Staff

Rev. Calvin Dame, President  
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Susan Hollister, Treasurer  
Rev. Marti Keller  
Sue Stuke, Secretary  
Rev. Helen Zidowecki

### Advisory Board

Rev. Bob Hill  
Rev. Glenn Turner

### Co-Coordinators:

Peter Bowden  
Mellen Kennedy

### Our UUSGM Network Mission:

*To help create healthy congregations by  
supporting Small Group Ministry.*

### New Board Member Profiles

**Susan Hollister** is a member of Main Line Unitarian Church in Devon, PA, near Philadelphia. She is a registered dietitian and mother of two grown. Susan first experienced a small group while attending the Unitarian Society of New Haven in CT. The concept was just in the talking stage when she and husband, Alan, moved to Pennsylvania and joined MLUC in 2002. Knowing SGM was an ideal way for newcomers to meet people and make connections, Susan joined the implementation committee and helped launch the program. She facilitates a Monday morning group, sits on the steering committee, and currently serves as co-chair of the SGM Program. Susan helped start a needlework group at MLUC and belongs to one of its book groups. An avid gardener, she heads to the woodland on most fine days to nurture native plants and create a wildlife haven.

**Rev. Marti Keller** joins our Board from the Atlanta area. She is, as she describes it, not quite a cradle, more like pre-school Unitarian, having grown up in congregations in Bethesda, Maryland and Palo Alto, California. She is a self-proclaimed small group aficionado, from her UU religious education roots, to her participation in the women's poetry collective movement, to her work as a lay and ordained minister in credo or covenant groups in the parish.

She is a member of an Atlanta congregation based spirituality group that is in its ninth year, as well as one for Jewish UU and other women that also meets monthly. Her own congregation has ongoing small groups. In her community ministry work with an interfaith homeless organization, she has been working with small spiritual growth groups since 1997, and as an adjunct instructor in the contextual education program of Candler School of Theology, Emory University, she has been teaching a small group seminar for the past five years.

## The UUSGM Quarterly Editor: Mellen Kennedy

The UUSGM Quarterly provides information, explores issues and shares resources on Small Group Ministry or Covenant Groups. **Do you have a SGM experience to share, or a testimonial, or an exciting aspect of the SGM program in your congregation?** Please send your requests for topics, your ideas and submissions to [mellen@smallgroupministry.net](mailto:mellen@smallgroupministry.net).

### è Feature Articles in Upcoming Issues:

Summer/GA 2005      Small Group Ministry  
By Congregation Size

Fall 2005              Cultivating Leadership

Winter 2005      Topic To Be Selected  
Based on Members' Requests

### We Welcome Your Gift to the Network

This UU Small Group Ministry Network Quarterly is funded in part by our members and also by the Fund for Unitarian Universalism. However, there is more work that can be done to support Small Group Ministry in our congregations. And we want to do it! In order to take on these research and resource development projects we are welcoming donations. Your donations to the UUSGM Network are tax deductible. We thank our members for their support and welcome all additional financial contributions. For more info on making tax deductible donations, please contact Peter Bowden (401 855-0037).

*"What we have done for ourselves alone dies with us.  
What we have done for others and the world  
remains and is immortal."*      Albert Pine

### Subscribe to the Covenant Group News

Keep up on news about small group ministry and covenant groups with the monthly e-news, "Covenant Group News." The newsletter was started by Bob Hill and is now published by the UU Small Group Ministry Network. If you're not already a subscriber, to sign up, visit our website [www.smallgroupministry.net](http://www.smallgroupministry.net)

*"To worship God is nothing other than to  
serve the people. It does not need rosaries,  
prayer carpets, or robes. All people are  
members of the same body, created from one  
essence. If fate brings suffering to one  
member the others cannot stay at rest."*

Saadi

## Our Members Write About Service Project Success Stories

*"I slept and dreamt that life was joy.  
I awoke and saw that life was service.  
I acted and behold service was joy."  
Rabindranath Tagore*

### From First Parish UU, Kennebunk, ME

Our Small Group Ministry Group, one of four at First Parish Unitarian Universalist church of Kennebunk, Maine, consists of 10 women, ages 40ish to 80+. We did our yearly duty signing up for a coffee hour or two, but sought a service project that reached beyond our group, beyond our church. At the time, fall of 2003, I was co-facilitating a bereavement group. In that work, I discovered the idea of Shawl Ministries. See the website of Janet Bristow and Victoria Galo, <http://www.shawlministry.com/> for background information. Our Small Group Ministry began a Shawl Ministry as our service project, a way to celebrate our coming together in love, and to share our compassion and love for others through the work of our hands. Members who did not knit or crochet made beautiful tags for shawls or helped with refreshments. As we evolved, we moved the ministry to the Caring Committee, and began blessing the completed shawls in Sunday service. To date we have completed 35 shawls, involving more than 15 people. Our shawls went to people dealing with illness, grief, and care giving. They marked birthdays, weddings, friendship, and births. They went to people within our church community, outside our community and have traveled as far as Africa.

Another idea grew from a SGM Facilitators meeting discussion about service projects. We asked Our Arts and Improvements Committee to create a "Job Box". The box contains cards describing odd jobs around the church. Our SGM tackled the first entry, cleaning and polishing our library (which contains hundreds of antique volumes), during one of our regular meetings. Amazing what eight people with two hours can accomplish.

I am hoping, as the SGM Coordinator at First Parish, that we can tackle a church-wide project sponsored by all of the groups. One candidate is an outdoor labyrinth we would like to create.

Best Regards,  
Sally Keene, Facilitator of "Together on Tuesdays", SGM Coordinator FPUU

### From River of Grass UU Congregation, Southwest Ranches, Florida

I asked our covenant group leaders to submit a description of their successful service projects and here are their responses.

We have organized 3 or 4 blood drives, assisted with the Holiday Angel Tree project and participated in new-home clean-up days. – P. Miller

Our covenant group sponsored a "night out" for our members with children. We hosted free child-care on a Saturday night at the church facility. This enabled members

to go out for the evening without the extra expense of child care, while knowing their children were being safely and lovingly cared for. – E. Garwood

Last June before our Saturday morning covenant group split, we hosted a successful End of the Church Year Brunch immediately after the last service before summer break. The group members had a really good time working as a team, and the congregation seemed to enjoy it. Members went out of their way to prepare special foods, not just bagels. We plan to do the same this year, as a combined group. – M. Gutfreind

Last summer, our now two separate Saturday morning covenant groups came together to conduct a lay lead service on what "covenant" means. We considered it to be a true service project because the Chair of the worship committee came up short on summer service topics/leaders and really needed us. – D. Lade

To assist with last year's May Madness Project (an emergency month of various fundraisers to eliminate a pending cash-flow crisis) our covenant group hosted back-to-back fundraising Bunko parties on a Friday and Saturday night. The event was so successful (\$600, I think) this year's Fun-Raising committee planned three additional Bunko parties. – L. Bresnahan

Submitted by Janet C. Schwartz

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## Service Projects at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Arlington, VA By Elizabeth Barrett

First Unitarian Society, Madison, WI

I interviewed the Reverend Michael McGee of the UU Church of Arlington concerning service projects in their congregation. Arlington has about 1000 members with 25 Covenant Groups. Rev. McGee started with ten covenant groups four years ago, and was a little reluctant about introducing the service project component of covenant group ministry to his congregation. He wasn't sure how the idea would be received.

Nonetheless, he "put it out there," introducing service as one of three purposes of covenant group ministry: to create community, foster spiritual growth and serve others. He encountered little resistance to his expectation that each group do one service project per year, either for the community or for the church. Even now, almost every covenant group follows through on this expectation. Whenever Rev. McGee encounters a "stalled" covenant group, he encourages them to work on a service project because of the renewed energy and sense of purpose service brings to a group. At his church, groups have helped the community in various ways, including volunteering at a food bank and cooking and serving meals to the homeless. In addition, covenant groups have taken over the implementation of many projects that directly benefit the Arlington Church, including the building of a playground, coordinating the end of the year potluck for all covenant group members, hosting new member potlucks and the annual breakfast for all religious education teachers.

## Regional Conferences On Small Group Ministry



The UU Small Group Ministry Network is offering assistance in planning regional conferences around the U.S. and Canada. Could your congregation, region or district benefit from a conference on small group ministry? A regional conference is an opportunity for area congregations just considering the idea, as well as congregations with already existing programs, to receive help and encouragement to be successful in their endeavors. Here are the conferences scheduled thus far:

### **Knoxville, Tennessee – September 17, 2005**

UU congregations in the Knoxville area have begun planning a regional conference for September. For more information contact Jake Morrill at revjakebmorrill@bellsouth.net or Mellen Kennedy at mellen@smallgroupministry.net.

### **Los Angeles, California -- Fall 2005**

We are pleased to announce that District Executive, Ken Brown and others in the L.A. area are planning a regional conference for the fall. For more information contact Ken at UURev@aol.com or Mellen Kennedy at mellen@smallgroupministry.net.

### **Madison, Wisconsin – November 5, 2005**

Presented by The Central MidWest District and the UU Small Group Ministry Network

A Regional Conference and  
Enrichment Program for Small Group Leaders  
At First Unitarian Society of Madison, WI  
Saturday, November 5, 2005  
9:00 AM - 4:00 PM

Save the date for this day long small group ministry enrichment program for lay and professional Unitarian Universalist leaders! We've designed this program to help UU congregations with small group ministry programs take the next step in deepening and expanding these ministries. Ministers, DRE's, lay coaches, facilitators, facilitators in training, and lay ministers of every label and classification - we welcome you. Calvin Dame and Mellen Kennedy of the UU Small Group Ministry Network will lead this day of exploration, problem solving, connection, inspiration and growth. Topics will be based on emerging patterns in small group ministries throughout our association and issues raised by participants.

### **Portland, Oregon – October 8, 2005**

We're excited to announce that a regional conference is being planned for congregations in the Portland area. If you're interested contact Mellen Kennedy at mellen@smallgroupministry.net or Kathy Foldes [kfoldes@easystreet.com](mailto:kfoldes@easystreet.com).

## Small Group Ministry At General Assembly 2005

This year's General Assembly (or GA)  
**In Fort Worth, TX, June 23-27**  
will feature a number of opportunities for Small Group Ministry or Covenant Groups.

**To register and for more info, visit [uua.org](http://uua.org).**

## UU Small Group Ministry Network Sponsored Programs at GA 2005

The UU Small Group Ministry Network will once again have a booth in the Exhibit Hall. In addition, as a new UUA Affiliate Organization, this year we'll offer the following two events..

### **“Creating An Effective Small Group Ministry Network” Annual Meeting of UU Small Group Ministry Network Sat. urday, June 25 from 3:45 PM to 5 PM**

Small Group Ministry is re-vitalizing our movement. This Annual Meeting of the UU Small Group Ministry Network (UUSGMN), is an opportunity: to connect with other SGM fans; to learn how we can help each other create vital SGM programs; and to learn about and get involved in the UUSGM Network.

### **“Small Group Ministry: Beyond the Basics Workshop” Saturday, June 25 from 2 PM to 3:15 PM Repeat Programming of “Beyond the Basics” Workshop Sunday, June 26 from 3 PM to 4:15 PM**

The UU Small Group Ministry Network provides energizing information and ideas to move your small group ministry program to a deeper level of health and vitality. We'll discuss integrating small group ministry into the life of your congregation, deepening facilitator training, understanding various models of small group ministry, and more!

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## Register Now for GA Covenant Groups By Rev. Connie Grant

Covenant Groups at General Assembly 2004 in Long Beach earned rave reviews from participants, proving to be a highlight of the GA experience for many. This year's Covenant Group program at GA in Fort Worth promises to be a little bit bigger and a little bit better.

In these groups, six to eight people will meet four times in hour-and-a-quarter sessions led by a facilitator trained in helping participants experience the intimacy and community that are the heart and soul of Covenant Groups. Whether you are an experienced GA attendee or a first-timer, whether you are a member of a Covenant Group in your home congregation or Covenant Groups are new to you, this is an opportunity to enhance your GA experience.

Slots are filling, but space is still available for group members and facilitators. To register, contact the Rev. Connie Grant, GA Covenant Group registrar, at [GAcovenantgroups@aol.com](mailto:GAcovenantgroups@aol.com)

## **Facilitators' Corner: The Wellspring of Intimacy By Mellen Kennedy Burlington, VT**

Our small group is wrestling with the topic of "Protection Versus Openness to Others," a topic which group members themselves had proposed and decided to address. Dan has just been telling us he's an introvert. In an unassuming smile, in an understated way he addresses the group. The topic has brought his attention back to a prayer he had written years ago as the culmination of a year-long group experience. He reads the prayer aloud to the group. As he speaks, a hush falls over the group. The beauty, humor and sincerity, the truthfulness of Dan's own prayer stirs us deeply. It is a moment of awe and intimacy.

That great Unitarian theologian, James Luther Adams, has said that what draws people to our churches is a need for "Intimacy and Ultimacy." And the needs which small group ministry is addressing in our congregations is just these needs for Intimacy (community, connection, or friendship) and Ultimacy (what really matters, the depths, the Divine). For a group to be healthy and true to the promise which Small Group Ministry offers, it needs to be a place where our need for intimacy is met.

And what is intimacy? We tend to think that it's knowing all the details of a person's life. However, I think true intimacy can be quite the opposite. A friend said to me recently "I hate the word 'sharing'. It means someone is going to dump their stuff on you and then walk away." I laughed because I knew what he meant. This is what I've heard jokingly referred to as "Oversharing!" That kind of "sharing" is an outpouring of details, not intimacy. "Details" comes from the French meaning, "to cut apart." The details are the broken up pieces.

The word "intimacy" comes from the Latin root, "intus" meaning "within." It's the superlative version of "intus", so it means "the most within." What is intimate is not the details of our lives, the surface stuff. The intimate is the wholeness, the truth that is most within -- that is our soul or our spirit. The surface details of our lives are not as intimate as the spiritual wholeness, who we really are inside.

With Dan's permission, I tell about Dan's sharing because he brought to us something from within the most intimate place. It's the place from which the prayer of his soul had been written and from which this prayer was being lived. We felt honored and humbled by the sharing. It was a powerful moment of intimacy shared by the group.

As facilitators how do we encourage intimacy? As with all aspects of facilitation, we create an environment of intimacy by becoming comfortable with it and living it ourselves. I think that going to the place most within and finding the words to articulate the truth that you have found there, is engaging in intimacy with oneself. And then at select and appropriate times being willing to come out and communicate with others what is most within, that's intimacy in a group. I find it helpful to ask myself, "Is my sharing enlivening the group and drawing us closer?" If so this is true intimacy. "Or are eyes glazing over and do I feel

folks distancing?" If so, perhaps I've veered into "sharing" in the pejorative sense of dumping as my friend calls it.

In our Unitarian Universalist sources (listed right after our seven principles in our hymn book), we state that "The living tradition we share draws from many sources" including "direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces that create and uphold life." Intimacy is at times daring to share with others our own direct experience of transcending wonder. Touching these deeper truths of who we are is indeed a renewal of the spirit. This true intimacy is the wellspring of small group ministry. Wishing you the best in your valuable work as a facilitator in tapping this wellspring in your self and in your group.

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## **New On Our Website www.smallgroupministry.net By Peter Bowden, Newport, RI**

Thanks to great feedback from our members and web visitors we've added new features to our site. We hope you will enjoy them!

### **The Quarterly Is Now On-Line**

Many of you have asked for a way to share the SGM Quarterly with more members of your small group ministry. To facilitate your sharing the SGM-Q with group leaders and participants we have started to post online the entire Quarterly as well as separate feature articles.

You may download the SGM Quarterly as a PDF file and make copies as needed. Individual members -- if you would like to distribute the Quarterly to others we invite you to upgrade to a congregational membership.

In addition, we have taken the primary articles from the Quarterly and set them up as individual documents. We hope this will make it easier to use these articles in your facilitator groups and training sessions.

### **Article Archive**

You can now access all past SGM Quarterly articles via the web. If you have just joined our Network don't forget to read these past articles.

### **New Session Page**

We have added a new SESSION EXCHANGE page to our site. Since this page was added the rate of session submissions has increased dramatically. This page may be accessed through the main menu at the top of any page of the site. If you would like to share sessions with our growing SGM community you may send to Peter Bowden at [peter@smallgroupministry.net](mailto:peter@smallgroupministry.net) documents in word document or plain text. Please note that we ask you to take the time to review copyright laws and submit sessions that do not violate them.

### **Member List**

We will soon be launching an email list which for communicating important news to you. Messages will be limited to Network new business. General news will still be distributed through Covenant Group News. This list will have the following address:

[members@smallgroupministry.net](mailto:members@smallgroupministry.net)

**To Join the UU Small Group Ministry Network  
Or to Subscribe to this Quarterly  
visit our website [www.smallgroupministry.net](http://www.smallgroupministry.net)  
Or Contact the Network at:  
UU Small Group Ministry Network  
155 Evarts Street, Newport, RI 02840**

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**UU Small Group Ministry Network  
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Newport, RI 02840**

**Going to General Assembly?  
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**Want to learn more about  
Small Group Ministry?  
Come to Ferry Beach,  
Saco, Maine, August 13-19, 2005  
See page 7**

**Need Help with Service Projects?  
This Issue Features Four Articles on  
Service Projects**

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**Remember September?**

Now is a great time to think about September. Think back to what the start of this past year was like. Many people report that September was too crazy of a time to plan anything. The best time to plan your small group ministry startup activities is before the end of the previous year. So, before you have that end of the year celebratory event, take some time with your leadership to plan the Fall Kick-Off.