

How Small Group Ministry Enriches My Congregation

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In the spring of 2002, the Main Line Unitarian Church was almost 50 years old and well-established. MLUC had grown into a large congregation with approximately 750 members. Although people were friendly, and long-time members knew each other from many years of working and worshipping together, it was difficult for some members to have a sense of connection or to feel the spirituality of a deep conversation. Newer members were sometimes finding it overwhelming, and some old members were leaving, saying they just didn't know anybody anymore. The timing was perfect for Small Group Ministry!

The goals of the Small Group Ministry included:

- (1) Providing members the opportunity to belong to a group of 6 – 10 people where they could develop a sense of connection.
- (2) Providing a place where spiritual and philosophical questions could be explored in a structured setting.
- (3) Enabling groups to perform service projects, both inside the church and in the larger community, fostering group cohesiveness.
- (4) Attracting new members and retaining old members.

The SGM program has been enormously successful, with more than 130 members in small groups. In January 2010, over 50 new members signed up for a trial mini-series of meetings. Although members are allowed to rotate to another group once a year, people generally love their groups and insist on staying where they are. The service projects are a lot of fun –even if done only annually. One group enjoyed raking flower beds and planting flowers last spring at a local medical clinic, and they bought, painted and assembled a picnic table for the summer volunteers. Of course, work was followed by lunch at a Thai restaurant, and since it was Kentucky Derby Day, mint juleps. This month the group will be preparing meals for homeless families who will live in the church for a week.

Some members report that SGM is the glue that seals them to the church, especially during difficult or transitional times. The service projects enhance the image of the church's work in the community and create goodwill for MLUC. Both new and old members sing the praises of their participation in this program. The search for intimacy and ultimacy, as well as the need to better serve our members and the community at large, motivated the beginning of the SGM program. The benefits of the program are ongoing and growing, and we continue to give it our strong support.

Cynthia Corboy served on the implementation team and helped launch MLUC's small group ministry program. She is currently a member of the SGM Steering Team.

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