

Ministerial Involvement and Small Group Ministry Success

*By Linda Thompson, Community Church of Chapel Hill, Unitarian Universalist
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Covenant Groups at the Community Church of Chapel Hill, UU in North Carolina have become increasingly popular over the last two years. Our success, in large part, is due to the involvement of our minister.

At our monthly facilitators meetings, our minister, Rev. Maj-Britt Johnson, leads us through an abbreviated covenant group session that she has prepared. We then discuss what is going on in our groups and ask for suggestions. Our minister participates in the entire meeting, and it is extremely beneficial to have her feedback and perspective. She is aware of what we do, and she makes it clear that she supports this vital ministry.

Rev. Johnson asks for participation on another level by asking congregants who like to write to get involved in SGM. Each month, a theme emerges from small group ministry. The theme of the month is publicized in the church newsletter, and congregants of any age can choose to submit a meditation, chalice lighting, or poem to be used in small group sessions or church meetings during the month. Maj-Britt then uses this theme as the topic of one of her sermons.

Various kinds of small group ministry are encouraged by our minister. She leads a Friday Noon Minister's Sacred Reading Group. This is a "drop-in" group that meets for an hour each Friday. She reads a text from one of the world's religions or from poetry, and then the participants listen to each other's wisdom.

Another very successful addition to our church's SGM program is Sunday Family Group. Each month our Lifespan Religious Educator and other trained facilitators invite congregants to participate in a session of small group ministry. Child care is provided while parents participate in the hour-long session based on the theme of the month. Then everybody comes together for a simple meal. This has proved to be a very popular way to offer small group ministry. At times, there have been up to sixty people participating in Sunday Family Group!

The support and involvement of our minister and staff has resulted in a growing SGM program that attracts more and more people as we experience the benefits of deep listening and sharing from the heart together.

Linda Thompson is a facilitator of a covenant group at the Community Church of Chapel Hill, Unitarian Universalist.

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