

## **Evolving Small Group Ministry: Beyond the Congregation**

*By Rev. Helen Zidowecki, Board President, UU Small Group Ministry Network*

Small Group Ministry started with groups of adults in congregations. Participants in those groups brought a new way of being together into the larger church community, changing the way that congregations function. We expanded the age groups involved, and worked with both generic and specific-focus groups, with ongoing and short-term groups as well as themed series: Where We Live for older congregants; UU Principles series; Parenting with Coming of Age participants, etc.

In casual conversations, I have heard people talk about the concept of Small Group Ministry occurring outside the church. One such group in Augusta, ME, was started by several congregation members who reside in a retirement community. Many of the group members were not connected with the church, nor were they likely to become involved. One of the original intents for Small Group Ministry was increased and sustainable growth in our congregations. If this is the case, how do we achieve the congregational connection of groups in alternate settings? Maybe the participants' commitment to the group is itself a connection that allows us to carry out our congregational mission of service beyond ourselves.

And how about other settings, such as long term care facilities, jails and prisons? What about youth settings, like Boys and Girls clubs? Other denominations offer Bible study. We have Small Group Ministry, providing the opportunity for intimacy and ultimacy! Such a service!

The Network would like to hear the experiences of UU congregations using the Small Group Ministry model in settings outside the church. A session at the 2013 SGM Institute, Murray Grove Retreat & Renewal Center, will be devoted to that discussion:

“SGM as Congregational Outreach/Service,” Thursday, July 25.

Social Time and Dinner at 5:30 pm, followed by the session from 7-9 pm.

We'll present examples and have conversations about what this means for UUs, what considerations are related to alternate settings, and what the impact is on the participants themselves. This is a way for us to continue changing the world, ten at a time.

*If you have experiences to share and/or would like to be on the session panel, please contact Helen Zidowecki through [office@smallgroupministry.net](mailto:office@smallgroupministry.net). And join us at the Institute. See the Network website for information.*

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