

## **The Role of the Minister in Small Group Ministry**

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In his presentation, *Strategies and Solutions for Small Group Ministry Challenges*, at the General Assembly in June 2008, Rev. Russ Savage identified the essential characteristics of successful small group ministry. One of these was the involvement of the minister.

Since the original planning and formation of SGM, what we call Chalice Circles at UUCB, the ministers have always been involved. The ministers conduct the training of facilitators in the late summer. They offer a sermon on deep listening and its role in SGM as registration begins in the fall. The sermon is accompanied by testimonials from congregants about their experience in Chalice Circles. The monthly meetings for facilitators, which focus in part on sharing our experiences in our Circles, are run by the ministers, who often facilitate their own Chalice Circles. Chalice Circle participants are informed that ministers are available if a serious pastoral concern arises in a Circle. In the last few years, we have adopted a monthly themebased approach. It is often the ministers who create session plans for the Chalice Circles related to these themes.

Rev. Savage argued that, “ministerial support provides visibility, legitimacy, and even prestige to the SGM program”. Based on our experience, we at the UU Church of Bloomington support that viewpoint fully and encourage congregations to involve the minister in SGM.

Unfortunately, as the results of the small group ministry survey indicate elsewhere in this issue, nearly half of the respondents reported that their minister was not involved at all with their SGM program. In many other congregations, the survey indicates, the role of the minister in SGM is limited.

“Implementing Small Group Ministry” describes the minister’s role as key in whether and how a Small Group Ministry program works. “Visible support and active involvement of the minister is a factor in success. The role of the minister varies during the implementation of SGM, at each stage of the program, and with the size of the congregation. The minister does not do this alone: *Small Group Ministry is a program of the congregation rather than a program of the minister. However, if the minister is not involved and not supportive, the program probably will not succeed.*”

[http://www.smallgroupministry.net/implementing/implementing\\_oversight.php](http://www.smallgroupministry.net/implementing/implementing_oversight.php)

### **For ministers with limited time, here are suggestions for supporting the congregation’s Small Group Ministry:**

- Give opening words at Facilitators’ Meetings
- Provide session topics to facilitators and program coordinators
- Recognize the coordinator/steering team and facilitators during a Sunday service
- Invite Sunday service testimonials from group participants to coincide with the sign-up period.
- Advocate SGM participation during the annual start-up season
- Publicize covenant groups’ service projects
- Form a liaison with Membership to place new members in covenant groups

-Taken from the Small Group Ministry Network Journal, Spring 2016