

## Minister's Page

### Looking Outward Together

*By Rev. Dr. Stephan Papa*

All leaders face the challenge of knowing when to insist on something and when to go with the will of those with whom you are working. The determination is best made considering the importance of the issue. Is it essential or secondary?

When we were setting up the Small Group Ministry Program at the Main Line Unitarian Church in Devon, PA in 2003, we were committed to a collaborative process; we didn't always take official votes, but we tried to reach consensus. We had information from Glen Turner, Calvin Dame, and Bob Hill. We were taking parts from each and putting this program together as we believed it should be. One question had us divided: Should each small group be required to do some kind of service?

Some considered this requirement extraneous to small group ministry; as the senior minister, I was even accused of pushing it in order to get volunteer jobs done for the church. After making it clear that the service could be performed within the church or in the community outside of it, I insisted that at least one service project a year be a requirement. Reaching for an outside religious authority, one I used frequently in marriage ceremonies, I quoted Saint-Exupery saying, "Love does not consist of gazing at each other, but in looking outward together in the same direction." The truth of poetry won out and the service requirement was included.

We created fifteen groups with eight to ten members in each. Every group had a facilitator and the same session plan. I met monthly with the facilitators for check-in, training, spiritual centering, and to continue developing the program. Several of the small groups did not take readily to the service requirement. When asked at our monthly meetings if they had done one yet, some of the facilitators repeatedly said no; there was resistance in their groups.

Then a few of the facilitators reported doing service projects, that it felt good to be of use, and that they bonded in the process. Eventually, all the groups did some service project; some of them really got into it, and did several. They all began to see service as an important part of the meaning and value of their small group experience.

The groups did not exist just to support one another. The fact they provide service to others is what makes them a small group ministry. Looking outward, providing service, social change, for others is essential to small group ministry and to a religious community in general. Don't you agree?

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