

A Decade of Small Group Ministry In Northern New England

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Small Group Ministry began here 10 years ago when the Rev. Glenn Turner, then District Executive, engaged the ministers in Maine in a year of study of the work of evangelist Carl George. This led to workshops and implementation of programs in several congregations. In New Hampshire and Vermont, Small Group Ministry started with the work of M'ellen Kennedy, who, along with Calvin Dame from Augusta and Peter Bowden from Rhode Island, started the Small Group Ministry Network in 2004.

Fast forward to the formation of the Northern New England District in 2008. Small Group Ministry that had been budding over the years is blooming! The district groups that had been working in the respective Northeast District (Maine) and New Hampshire/Vermont District brought their energy to Small Group Ministry in the new district. The core Small Group Ministry Committee has representatives from each state and additional people working geographically.

This first full year of the Small Group Ministry Committee was spent organizing, making connections, offering workshops and assessing needs within the district. There have been:

- Articles in the district newsletter, materials in packets that go to congregations
- exhibits at district events,
- a new SGM page on the new district website, and
- posting of session plans on the website, including those requested by District Staff on economics, and links to session plans on Welcoming Congregation
- ongoing workshops on development of Small Group Ministry and Facilitation by M'ellen Kennedy, and a workshop for smaller congregations by Helen Zidowecki.

We have had direct contact with 37 of the 72 congregations related to small group ministry. We have learned that there are fourteen strong, ongoing programs; eleven with programs that are just starting or are rejuvenating, and two churches that would like to start a SGM program. Rejuvenation is occurring more in the Maine churches, where Small Group Ministry started earlier, which is leading to insight about how to maintain Small Group Ministry over the years as congregations and clergy support changes.

Small Group Ministry has been important to our congregations and has also impacted the way we interact as a district. Small Group Ministry sessions are part of ministers' meetings and have been incorporated into District gatherings for several years. For example, at the District meeting May 1-2, small group sessions provided a method for reflecting on the Keynote by Rev. Dr. Rebecca Parker. Conference evaluations indicated that this was a highlight of the conference.

Is Small Group Ministry an active part of your district? Share your stories by contacting the UU Small Group Ministry Network at office@smallgroupministry.net.

-Taken from the Small Group Ministry Network Quarterly, Summer 2009