

Spotlight On: The Role of Group Members in Small Group Ministry

By Beth Tiewater, Editor of the SGM Quarterly Journal

Small group dynamics are influenced by many factors. The facilitator, the topic, and a comfortable meeting place all contribute to the experience. But far and away the most important factor is the members. For some participants, the covenant group session is a social occasion. They come for the pre- and post-meeting chatter and check-in. Others see the gathering as a rigid spiritual session, the UU equivalent of a bible study. For these members, an engaging topic is paramount. Commitment levels vary greatly among members in all groups. Attendance is a serious commitment for some. Others may forget a meeting, schedule another activity for the same time slot, or decide not to attend at the last minute simply because they're tired.

It seems that certain people are naturally "good" group members. They arrive in a positive frame of mind. They speak and listen well and contribute responsibly to the discussion. I am not one of those people. Often when I get to our meetings, I'm worrying about my son's homework and hoping my husband gets him to bed on time. In discussions I am opinionated, I have been known to interrupt people, and I make too many jokes. However, I am aware of my shortcomings and I do make an effort to keep them in check. Others in my group make adjustments, too. And that's what's important. It's almost impossible to get that perfect mix of people, so coming to the meetings with an awareness of who we are and an openness toward others goes a long way in creating a healthy group atmosphere.

A few things to remember:

The facilitator is not responsible for your group's success

You are not going to love every topic/session

You are not going to love every group member

Also remember:

We are often enriched and enlightened by the most unlikely people

It sometimes takes months of deep listening to really "hear" someone

Almost all of us are annoying at one time or another

So, next time you're heading to your small group meeting, remember that your role as a group member is important and you have everything to do with the success of the meeting.

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