

From Our Members.....

**Small Group Ministry at the
Unitarian Universalist Church in Eugene**

by Dick Loescher

The Small Group Ministry (SGM) program at the UU Church in Eugene, Oregon, is open to members and friends of the church, and has occurred annually since 2003. This program has had a significant beneficial effect on the congregation in terms of increasing meaningful connections between people, facilitating spiritual and personal growth, and encouraging a culture of respectful listening and sharing. Our church is growing, and now has a membership of 336. In recent years we have had approximately 70 to 90 people participating each year, with 7 to 10 groups of up to 10 people in each group. Many people have been in more than one group.

The current structure and logistics of our SGM program seem to be working well. The SGM steering committee and the minister plan the program and curriculum. Resources that have been helpful to us include SGM workshops, the UU SGM Network web site (www.smallgroupministry.net), and various SGM related publications. Each year we have a different overall theme, and the individual topics relate to the theme. All of the groups use the same session plans.

In the fall of the year facilitators are recruited and trained, and registration (with a voluntary \$10 registration fee) is done. The SGM groups meet for two hours twice a month (mostly in homes, but sometimes at church) from January through May for a total of ten sessions, and then disband. Each group does a service project for the church or the larger community. In the final session each year the participants and facilitators fill out an evaluation form. The SGM facilitators, steering committee, and minister meet for 1½ hours each month from January through May for support, education, and problem solving. This year we added information about nonviolent (compassionate) communication (NVC) to the facilitator training session and the training manual, and incorporated NVC practice into the monthly facilitator support meetings.

Although in the early years of the program each group was asked to develop its own covenant, in recent years all of the SGM groups use an established "Small Group Ministry Covenant of Right Relationship" that was developed by the SGM steering committee and the minister. The guidelines and agreements are listed as strategies to meet our needs and support our values. We also list optional meeting strategies that may be helpful in facilitating group interaction and time management. Based on our experience and that of others, occasional updates have been made.

Information about our SGM program is viewable by going to our church website, www.uueugene.org, clicking on "Groups and Committees," and then clicking on "Small Group Ministry." The information available includes: a summary of the SGM program, the Facilitator Training Manual, the Covenant of Right Relationship, the Registration Form, the Evaluation Forms for Facilitators and Participants, and the Session Plans. We are happy to share our experience and documents, and to receive input from others.

Dick Loescher chairs the Small Group Ministry steering committee at the Unitarian Universalist Church in Eugene, Eugene, OR.

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