

SURVEY by Rev. Robert Hill

Tell Us About Your Congregation

Every time I go somewhere and talk about the power we now have to serve the needs of our members and millions of others, I discover that this grassroots movement has spread to congregations I hadn't counted among those using Covenant Groups.

My belief is that we have scores of churches and fellowships using small-group ministry techniques, maybe hundreds, but I have no idea just how many there are or how far along they are in building small-group ministry. No one knows.

So, I have a request. I need some indication of the degree to which you and your congregations are using Covenant Groups. Would you please give me some information about your congregation and what it is doing?

I ask that you take these steps (or, if you're not using Outlook, the comparable steps required by your email program):

1. Click on "Reply" above.
2. Change the "To:" line to: bhill@uua.org.
3. Change the "Subject" line to: SURVEY REPLY.
4. Answer the questions below.

Name of congregation:

City and state:

Degree of involvement with Covenant Groups (shared ministry groups, Chalice Circles, etc.). Please choose one of the following:

- My congregation is not interested.
- We're considering using Covenant Groups.
- We are in the process of introducing the idea to our members.
- We've begun and we have _____ groups in place now.

Name we use (Covenant Groups, Chalice Circles, Small Group Ministry Groups, etc.):

Your estimate of the number of people currently participating in these small groups in your congregation:

Indicate whether you are a layperson or a minister:

Optional - Your name:

Also optional -- Any comments you'd like to add:

5. Hit "Send."
6. Give yourself a treat as a reward for having done a good deed.

I'm still flying high in the belief that Unitarian Universalism is on the verge of a Golden Age in large part because we finally have a way to serve well the basic needs of the men, women, and

children who need us most. Thank you for all you do toward making this dream daily more likely.

-- Bob

INITIAL SURVEY REPORT AND A REQUEST

FIRST, THE REQUEST: If you are going to GA in Cleveland in a couple of weeks, please let us know so we can be sure to keep you posted on Covenant Group events as they develop. We'll have a schedule of events in the next CGNews, and there may be last-minute additions which we'd like to let you know about. So, please, now, while you're thinking about it, do this:

1. Go to "Forward"
2. Type in my name for your address book or: bhill@u...
3. In the subject line, write: GOING TO GA! (and, if you're willing, your phone number)

SURVEY RESULTS

The best news of all resulting from your replies to the survey in the last CGNews is that we now know of almost 100 congregations involved with small group ministry to one degree or another, ranging from "thinking about it" to having significant percentages of their members actively involved in as many as 15 groups.

Leaders of 55 congregations replied that they are using Covenant Group techniques under one name or another (more about that in a moment). Three of them have more than 100 members involved: the Birmingham Church in Bloomfield, MI, has 162 or so in 15 groups, Eno River in Durham, NC, has 150 in 15 groups, and 1st Church, Dallas, has about 125 in 13 groups. Houston 1st is close behind with 95 in 14 groups. (Where ranges were given and where two reporters gave different but similar answers, I chose the mid-point numbers.)

Another 23 congregations reported that they are introducing small-group organization techniques to their members. First Parish in Lexington, MA, leads these congregations with two groups in place and 34 members involved; our church in Meriden, CT, has 18 members involved; 1st UU in Syracuse, NY, has 15; and 10 folk are taking part in the introduction processes in our Manchester, NH, and Sarasota, FL, congregations.

Nine more congregations are considering the use of Covenant Groups and members of two say their churches are not interested yet.

We may do more data analysis later, but for now let's look at names.

BY ANY OTHER NAME, A ROSE ...

Thirty-nine of the congregations in this survey use the name "Covenant Groups." Fourteen use "Small Group Ministries." Two congregations use "Chalice Circles" and two use "Friendship Circles." There are 18 other congregations (18!) which, in this sampling at least, have chosen names uniquely their own.

I'll omit the quotation marks and list them here: Shalom Groups, Journey Groups, Open Circles, E Groups (for "exploration" or "Emerson" or other "e" words), Deepening Groups, Small Group Fellowships, Branches Groups, Community Circles, Circle Groups, TIE Groups (for "Together In Exploration"), Spirit Circles, U and I Groups, Ministry Circles, Chalice Groups, Small Groups, Deep UU Groups, Finding Heart Groups, and Covenant Circles.

ENCOURAGING RESULTS, COMMENTS

So, knowing that surveys typically get low response rates (this one got about a 13% return) and that this was anything but a scientific poll, it is interesting to note that we can now say with confidence that between 5% and 10% of our UUA congregations are actively using small group ministry. My guess is that the real numbers, if we had them, would be much higher.

The comments that came in with these responses were extremely encouraging. Thank you, respondents, for your efforts and for your kind words.

The Rev. Doug Gallagher, minister of the Bloomfield, MI, congregation, noted that his church's success doubled his expectations and that they've had to do extra facilitator training. Recently, a severe health crisis struck a Covenant Group members and, Doug reports, "The folks really rallied round. It worked just like it's supposed to."

The Rev. Lynn Brodie's congregation in St. Cloud, MN, started a year and a half ago with small group ministry in place from day one. "It has been really exciting," she commented, "to use small group ministry from the beginning of a congregation's life. There is tremendous energy for it (obviously, since half the congregation is involved). ... I am 100 percent sure that some of our members joined as a result of their participation in Spirit Circles."

And Brenda Mendiola of 1st Church, Houston, wrote: "As chair of the Nominating Committee this year, we instituted an interview process for potential nominees to the Board. We interviewed seven candidates for four positions. When asked what they believed to be critical 'happenings' at First Church, every one said Chalice Circles, among other things like Children's Religious Education and Social Justice activities. I would say that's an indication of early success!"

Would you like your congregation's data to be added to what's been compiled so far? Great. Just highlight and copy the form that follows this CGNews, paste it into a new email addressed to me (not to ListBot), and I'll include your group in my next analysis.

Thanks, everyone! -- Bob