

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network CGN July 2011

To Connect or To Isolate

By Rev. Helen Zidowecki, President, UU SGM Network

We expect groups to be actively connected with the congregation. In fact, one of the frequently heard concerns is that groups will become isolated. As that happens, we are likely to hear phrases like, "My group is just perfect. We don't need to meet with others. Everything is fine."

Now look at the programmatic level. One of the most frequently heard questions or concerns at the GA booth and in general communications between the Network and congregations is how to keep programs going long term--how to keep the energy. And we also hear congregational representatives say that things are going just fine, and there are no problems, there is no need to connect with others. Maybe both of these perspectives are indications of isolation.

Small Group Ministry is about connections - deeper connections within a small group AND broader connections with the larger community. The broader connections, the engaging with someone or a group beyond ourselves, keeps the group and the program fresh. This is also part of the imagery of the empty chair used by Bob Hill - there is someone, something beyond the present setting waiting to participate. Engage the broader connection.

I am pleased with the efforts going on within many districts to bring training in small group ministry to congregations and to facilitate sharing between congregations. Let us hear about efforts in your district.

The Small Group Ministry Institute is another wonderful place to broaden perspectives and celebrate what is going well; it is also a place to shape this UU ministry. The Institute is for all levels of involvement and experience with small group ministry. Sharing diverse perspectives, options, practices, successes, challenges and issues has allowed for the evolution of small group ministry in a truly Unitarian Universalist fashion. This year at the Institute, we will also begin to discuss how we can all work with our own districts and regions to provide support to congregations doing small group ministry and enhance opportunities for sharing.