

MINISTER'S PAGE

Sharing the Ministry Through SGM

by Rev. Melissa Carvill-Ziemer

I learned as a ministerial intern that in order to truly practice shared ministry, ordained ministers need to be willing to share the best parts of ministry. I have taken this wisdom to heart and endeavored to find multiple ways to invite members and friends of the congregation I serve into meaningful and satisfying experiences of ministry. One of the most successful ways I have found to do this is through Small Group Ministry.

During my first year serving as the minister of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Kent, I worked with a small group of leaders to design a Small Group Ministry program tailored for our congregation. We considered the congregation's history with identity-based covenant groups and determined that an intentionally diverse small group ministry experience might be a welcome and energizing addition to our congregational life. We articulated a mission and a vision for ourselves and drafted promotional materials. With their permission, we adapted SGM sessions that one of our number had experienced at another church to fit a frame that we thought would provide the right amount of structure for our congregation.

We identified, recruited and trained facilitators in our model and set up a series of facilitator's meetings. Once we were ready, we began recruiting participants for a six-session pilot program in the spring. The response was great. It was so good, in fact, that we determined we would need to recruit and train additional facilitator's for our full-year session beginning in the fall.

We are now in the midst of our fourth year of Small Group Ministry in this congregation and count this as one of the more dynamic programs in our church. People participate in this ministry through multiple points of entry. Some participate as members of the groups, reflecting theologically with one another and sharing the support of those who know one another's joys and sorrows. New and not yet members get to meet long term members and leaders in our congregation, forming friendly relationships that often go much deeper. Some participate as leaders in our groups. While we have a few facilitators who have been with us from the beginning, others have become facilitators after a satisfying experience as a participant in a group or after serving as an assistant to their group's facilitator.

Some participate as members of our Small Group Ministry Steering Committee, overseeing the program as a whole, preparing and reviewing sessions and planning for the future of SGM in our congregation.

When we began, I had a significant coordinating role as the minister and I was intimately involved in every step of creation and execution. As our program has grown, we have been fortunate to have a skilled and committed lay leader step forward and assume the coordinating role. She has availed herself of opportunities to receive in-depth training on Small Group Ministry practices and has applied her learning and organizational skills to strengthen our own program. As the minister, I remain actively involved in SGM by attending facilitators and Steering Committee meetings, writing and reviewing sessions, and inviting new participants into our groups. I no longer, however, hold the bulk of the responsibility for making SGM happen in our congregation. We make SGM happen together and in this way we all have the satisfaction that comes when ministry is truly shared.

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