

Small Group Ministry Marketing 101

*Ann Davis, Unitarian Universalist Fellowship at Easton, Maryland
UU SGM Quarterly, Winter 2010, From Our Members*

The marketing plan for Small Group Ministry is a collaboration of the Minister and the SGM Coordinator, and is overseen by the Chairs of the Adult Enrichment Committee. The following description is the marketing plan used at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship at Easton (UUFE).

Though flyers have been placed on the chairs in the sanctuary for several weeks and it has been highlighted in the events section of the Order of Service, Small Group Ministry Sunday is the first major product introduction. SGM Sunday is a day in October when the Reverend Gabriel Parks delivers what she likes to call an “infosermon” about Small Group Ministry in general, and about Covenant Groups in particular. She covers the history of SGM within Unitarian Universalism. She explains how the shared search for intimacy and ultimacy is a powerful spiritual gift that is available to all who participate. Reverend Parks acknowledges the role of covenant groups as an important aspect of the ministry “of” and “to” the entire congregation.

The “hard sell” comes when members of current groups speak about their experiences in their covenant groups. There is nothing as effective as the testimony of a SGM consumer, a satisfied customer. Having a SGM participant make a statement such as, “I finally know what it’s like to be truly listened to and heard,” impresses potential consumers. When a group member says, “My covenant group members are my dearest friends, like no others I have had in my whole life,” others are drawn to seek the same relationships. The testimony has as much impact as the minister’s message, because these folks aren’t “paid” to be enthusiastic about SGM. Following the service, the SGM Coordinator approaches folks during coffee hour to elicit signups for the SGM Session Sampler scheduled for the following Sunday.

This will be their opportunity to try the product, i.e., take it for a test drive. The next Sunday is SGM Sampler Sunday. Following the church service and coffee hour, a soup and salad lunch is served to those who have signed up to try out a SGM session. During lunch, conversation is stimulated about how a covenant group works. Questions are answered about the elements, selection of topics, how groups are formed, the variety of ways the topics can be selected, logistics, and any other questions the group may have. The meaning of the word covenant is explored. A set of “Ground Rules” or “expectations” of how the group will “be” together is set.

An abbreviated one hour session then follows. This is the “test drive”. The only adjustment to a typical session is that each person has less time to speak. Generally, this means that each person speaks for several minutes, giving their initial reaction to the topic and discussion questions. If it is a group of ten, there isn’t much time left for reactions to what was said by others. However, it seems to be adequate to deliver an impression of a full session. Test marketing is usually very successful.

When the session is ended, each person who thinks they would like to join a group/buy the product completes a registration form. Beyond name and contact information, the form includes a table of days of the week and times of day. Each person indicates when they are available for two hour sessions twice per month. Based on the availability of the folks who are registering and the facilitators, groups are formed.

The Coordinator informs the facilitators of the names and contact information of their groups. The facilitator contacts his/her group members to set the time and place of the first session. This is the strategy that is used to “sell” small group ministry at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship at Easton.

-Taken from the Small Group Ministry Network Quarterly, Winter 2010