

Young Adult Small Group Ministry at USG

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Covenant groups are a powerful tool for connecting young adults in church communities. At The Unitarian Society of Germantown (USG), these covenant groups are referred to as Small Group Ministry. Within the program there are young adult groups made up of no more than 10 members. At USG the term "young adult" refers to individuals in their 20s, 30s and 40s. The previous model was a mix of age groups. We noticed, however, that there were very few opportunities for singles and married couples with or without children to connect in a meaningful way outside of Sunday worship. Newcomers, in particular, sought a deeper understanding of the church and the Unitarian Universalist principles and traditions. By developing a SGM group for young adults specifically, we were able to better meet the needs of our growing church community.

As a married working mother of two young children, SGM has been an amazing way for me to commit to broadening my spiritual life at USG and beyond. I was involved in the first Young Adult SGM group many years ago. Fairly new to Unitarian Universalism, it was a great way for me to meet other newcomers as well as those raised in the church like my husband. It was important that the group meet in the evenings after work in a specific location at church. At the first session we reviewed a covenant provided to us by the group leader. All members agreed to weekly attendance. It was stressed that this was not a "support" group but a unique opportunity for developing our spiritual selves in community.

At USG, each SGM session is conducted as a worship service. A theme for the year and weekly topics are chosen in advance by the SGM Committee led by the minister, a chair or co-chairs. The objective is spiritual reflection and discussion. All SGM groups use the same topic each month and the minister preaches on this theme in a sermon to further encourage conversation in the broader church community. The session begins with an opening and lighting of the chalice, then members share their joys and sorrows of the past week. This is followed by a time for "deep listening." Each member shares their thoughts on the topic. This is not a time for discussion. There is no talking over anyone. It is purely a time for each person to make their voice heard. Young adult groups prefer more time allotted for this section. The leader keeps track of time so that each member has an equal opportunity to participate. Successful topics have been ones of particular interest to young adults such as defining one's spiritual journey and big questions. Examples are our place in the universe, what happens when we die, religion in our lives, life goals, heroes, negative emotions, mindfulness and our relationship with the earth. A poem, reading or song closes the session with the extinguishing of the chalice while holding hands.

Strong bonds are formed in SGM's intimate group setting. I have made lasting friendships with a diverse group of church members and visitors. SGM is a valuable way for young adult newcomers to gain a better understanding of the church and Unitarian Universalism while providing an opportunity for developing connections on a deeper level than at coffee hour or Sunday worship services. Young adult groups are essential to the growth of the church. Participants gravitate towards this unique opportunity to share their faith in small, welcoming groups. After meeting with the same individuals once a week for a year, SGM members become very comfortable with one another and feel more included in the church community. These are the individuals who choose to become church members and leaders of the younger generation.

**FOR EACH ONE OF US THERE IS A DESERT TO TRAVEL,
A STAR TO DISCOVER, AND A BEING WITHIN
OURSELVES TO BRING TO LIFE.**

- EDWARD ERICKSON

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