

## Going Deeper!

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We use the term “going deeper” in Small Group Ministry/ Covenant Groups. “Deeper” that what? Than brief and usually cursory conversations at fellowship hour on Sunday morning? Than one-on-one conversations where only two perspectives are shared? And why do we want to “go deeper?” Because the human need for connection is increasingly critical as technology occupies our lives? Because so much of our lives are packed with doing to the exclusion of being and reflecting?

Deeper relates to both the Intimacy and Ultimacy of Small Group Ministry. **Going deeper with Intimacy**, or relationships, is directly related to at least three factors: group development, group dynamics, and the Unitarian Universalist perspective. *Group development* occurs over time. There are various descriptions of this, including “Building Community: The Spiral in Small Group Ministry” (*Implementing Small Group Ministry*, GA 2011). As the group moves through phases of bonding, opening, affirming, stretching, and deeper sharing, the character of the sharing changes. We reveal more of our personal experiences, values and dilemmas. *Group dynamics*, set within the perimeters of a group covenant, provide a setting for sharing and exploring. This includes being present, listening from the heart without judgment or need to respond, and willingness to share from experiences and life/spiritual journeys. *The Unitarian Universalist perspective* provides opportunity for connecting within a group that has similar values, such as expressed in the UU Principles or Affirmations. The similar values themselves are bonding. The deeper connection with Intimacy allows deeper explorations that are part of Ultimacy.

**Going deeper with Ultimacy** is related to at least four factors: the questions, the diversity within the group, sharing from the heart, and reception. *Questions* that open into exploration rather than directing attention towards a particular perspective, and which can elicit response in several directions set the stage for going deeper. Honoring the *diversity* within the group presumes that people in the group hold differing views on almost any topic, based on differing life experiences and stages and worldviews. Ask questions that honor the individual, the group as a whole, and diversity. Diversity is enhanced within a group because of numbers, as opposed to one-to-one conversations, allowing for broader insights. The diversity within a group increases the depth of consideration to a topic. *Sharing from the heart* rather than the head is essential to going deeper. Questions such as “What do you think about.....?” or “What does this mean to you?” asks for analysis. And analysis provides opportunity for people to take sides, and invites discussion toward specific outcomes or preferences, which is not what Small Group Ministry is about. Focusing on analysis diverts attention from the deeper feelings and needs that come in sharing from the heart. Inviting people to share an experience and to ask how a topic relates to life or spiritual journey sets the expectation of personal responses that do not need analysis. *Reception* to sharing that honors the inherent worth and dignity of the individual, enhances selfreflection, and affirms that the exploration is worth our time and consideration.

The balance between Intimacy and Ultimacy is critical to going deeper. Intimacy provides the comfort and safety for going deeper, and Ultimacy gives structure that keeps us moving forward on our search for meaning. Take time to consider this balance. Take time to assess the importance of each part to the total group dynamic. Take time to reflect on how the group has deepened and what that means to group members.

“Small Groups, Deep Connections” is a favorite saying of the UU Small Group Ministry Network. The size of the groups, the ongoing nature of a group over time, and the focus on ministry or caring for each

other are integral strategies in enriching our experience in Small Group Ministry/Covenant Groups.

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-Taken from the Small Group Ministry Network Quarterly, Winter 2012