

THE WALES TO MAINE CONNECTION

Michael Conley, Chair, Small Group Ministry Committee,
Unitarian Universalist Community Church, Augusta, Maine, December 2018
Article for the UU Small Group Ministry Network, *Covenant Group News*

2018 was the year that Small Group Ministry at the Unitarian Universalist Community Church of Augusta, ME, went international! While SGM has been an integral part of church life here at the UUC for twenty years, it had been focused in the local area during the past two decades until our minister, the Reverend Carie Johnsen, decided to explore her ethnic roots in Celtic Wales a few years ago.

Exhilarated by that journey and the vitality of the Welsh UU congregations, she arranged a ministerial swap with the Reverend Alun-wyn Dafis. This month-long exchange saw Carie spend part of this fall in Wales, while Alun-wyn boarded a British Airways flight for a month here in Maine. And what a success that turned out to be on all levels.

While Alun was here, one of the Small Groups invited him to a session to introduce him to this very special ministry. He proved to be a delightful participant, and the members had an opportunity to experience his warmth and Welsh charm up close. In the meantime, Carie brought SGM materials to the congregations in Alun-wyn's homeland.

In anticipation of the exchange, we had developed a session plan around UUism and SGM internationally. During Alun-wyn's visit, the SGM Committee celebrated the year in Small Group Ministry by hosting the October 21st worship service. We had reports about UUism from Paris (where a UUC member and her daughter had introduced SGM), India, Transylvania, New Zealand, historically in Maine, of course, from Wales. The session plan and the transcript of the service are available on the UUC website.

The question then becomes: where does SGM in Augusta go from here? With the availability to effectively connect electronically anywhere in the world, it seems clear that our next step will be to establish a relationship with Alun-wyn and his congregation via Skype. Interacting with his folks and vice-versa will enliven our groups here and offer the potential to nurture any incipient groups there.

With the bridges built during the past year, 2019 has the promise of being a milestone in the evolution of Small Group Ministry not only here in Augusta, but also in Wales and beyond.

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website
Group Session Plan
UU's Around the World
Unitarian Universalist Community Church, Augusta, Maine, September 2018

Note: Terminology: Unitarian Universalist is used in this session plan to include Universalist and Unitarian communities, although their names may differ.

Opening Words

Our community gives us grounding, connections, and a perspective on Unitarian Universalism.

Here we are introduced to the values and principles.

Here we share rituals and worship, intimacy and ultimacy, social action and meditation/reflection.

Here we read and sing, and gather with others in activities.

Here we learn from the modeling of the faith by others, and become living models ourselves.

But other Unitarian Universalist communities, be they near to us or far, have a Unitarian Universalist perspective.

They, too, engage with the values and principles, worded like ours or differently.

They, too, have worship, community, and take action that arise from their own setting.
They, too, have readings and songs and activities and traditions that expand the expression of our faith.
They, too, can model the faith to us as we share and can model the faith for them.

May we become part of a world-wide faith traditions as Unitarian Universalists, now and ongoing.
May we join more fully in the liberal faith of the generations in our own place and around the world.
May we expand our world view through connections, in person and with the many ways available today.
May we model a way of being in our own lives, in our own community, in the larger world.
May we be truly part of a faith tradition that is needed in and by the world, that will be stronger because *our* world view expands.

Check-in/Sharing

Topic/Activity:

Engage with some of the descriptions of congregations around the world. These are only samplings that were readily available on the internet. These can be distributed to the group prior to the session, or read at the session.

1. Share experiences that you may have had with other UU congregations, especially world-wide.
2. Reflect on being part of a world-wide faith tradition.
3. What would you like to know about a Unitarian Universalist community in another country?
4. What would you like them to know about you?

Check-out/Likes and Wishes: How was the session for you?

Closing Words: The group is invited to create the closing words, or to give a statement that reflects the experience of considering our own community in the context of the larger world.

Please share these words with the other groups/larger congregation, such as part of the Small Group Ministry service on October 21, 2018.

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Written in preparation for exchange between UUC and Welch congregations, Fall 2018.

RESOURCES: UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISTS AROUND THE WORLD

To learn more about Unitarianism in the UK and Brondeifi Chapel:

Brondeifi Chapel <http://ukunitarians.org.uk/swda/brondeifi.htm>

South Wales Unitarians <http://www.ukunitarians.org.uk/swda/>

Unitarians of Wales <http://www.ukunitarians.org.uk/wales/links.htm>

Unitarians of United Kingdom <https://www.unitarian.org.uk>

[ps://www.uua.org/international/uus-abroad/travel](https://www.uua.org/international/uus-abroad/travel)

<https://www.uua.org/international>

Connecting with Unitarian, Universalist and UU Groups Around the World

International Engagement & Building Peace

Unitarian Universalists (UUs) who are planning permanent or temporary stays in countries outside the United States, or those who are planning short-term trips, can often find community with Unitarian, Universalist or Unitarian Universalist (U/U) congregations or groups in the places where they plan to be. There are [UU congregations and groups](#) in nearly 30 countries around the world—some are very small, and some are quite large. And, most of these congregations deeply enjoy having visitors and new members.

But, keep in mind that **UUism varies dramatically from country to country**, even more so than it varies from congregation to congregation in the United States. While all global UU groups share a great deal in common, we also each have unique qualities. These qualities make our global faith diverse and beautiful, though they can

also be surprising to a visitor. A visitor from the United States might be surprised, for example, that a Unitarian church in Transylvania doesn't include a "chalice lighting" during their service, or that a Unitarian church in the UK uses a hymnbook during worship that is unfamiliar. Other examples are abundant.

Please also remember that UU groups and churches around the world are likely to conduct their worship services in languages other than English. But, there are **English-language UU worship services outside the USA** in the following places:

- Most [Canadian Unitarian churches](#)
 - Most [Unitarian churches in the UK](#)
 - Two UU congregations in Mexico: San Miguel de Allende and [Lake Chapala](#)
 - [Unitarian and UU congregations in Australia and New Zealand](#)
 - European UU (EUU) congregations in:
 - Brussels, Belgium (3rd Sunday of the month: contact Vicki Roberts-Gassler, vickijane999@yahoo.com)
 - [Paris, France](#) (one Sunday per month)
 - [Frankfurt, Germany](#) (2nd Sunday of the month)
 - [Kaiserslautern, Germany](#) (2nd and 4th Sundays of the month)
 - [Amsterdam, The Netherlands](#) (1st and 3rd Sundays of the month)
 - [Geneva, Switzerland](#) (3rd Sunday of the month)
 - Basel, Switzerland (group forming—contact international@uua.org for more information)
 - [The Unitarian Fellowship of Tokyo, Japan](#)
 - [South Africa National Assembly of Unitarians](#)
- Finally, consider other tips for "[Journeying with Faith](#)" and have a wonderful visit!
- [Google Map of UU Headquarters around the World](#)
 - "[Journeying with Faith](#)"

Organizations:

ICUU—International Council of Unitarian Universalists

Mapping the Global U/U Story

<https://www.uua.org/beliefs/who-we-are/history/global>

Unitarians, Universalists, and Unitarian Universalists Around the World

<https://www.uua.org/international/uus-abroad>

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST COMMUNITY CHURCH

Small Group Ministry Explores Unitarian-Universalism Around the World

Sunday Services, October 21, 2018

Welcome

Peter Mendell, worship associate

Inviting the Silence

Choral Prelude: "Sing a Song Today" by Katherine R. Mitchell-Parker With Karen Foust, piano

Chalice Lighting:

Judy Gallant, SGM Committee

The chalice is the light of 2000 years of liberal theology and social justice that grounds us still today.

It shined on Transylvania and other parts of Europe, and then across the sea to America 400 years ago.

And from here it was spread through Unitarian and Universalist missions in Japan and India, and other parts of Asia.

It draws us into a world-wide community of liberal religion and social justice.

May we feel the connection beyond ourselves, and into the universe!

Opening Words:

Linda Findlay, SGM Committee

At the Unitarian Universalist Community Church, the ministry of the congregation is widely shared. Small Group Ministry is one among many opportunities to care for others and to be cared for, as well.

Small means a group with a maximum of 10 people. Groups of this size provide an opportunity to relate on a more intentional level.

Group is a gathering of individuals, sometimes selected at random, sometimes selected for a specific interest or characteristic.

Ministry is the process or act of caring or being present with one another. This relates to the spiritual as well as the physical and emotional well-being of the group's participants.

The groups select session plans and decide the order and pace of each meeting. The session plan is a scripted guide and springboard for interaction.

Hymn: #134 "Our World is One World"

Group Challenge:

Michael Conley, SGM Committee

At the September Small Group Ministry facilitator meeting, the imminent arrival of the Reverend Alun Dafis prompted us to consider expanding our spiritual horizons to include SGM in context of the greater international UU community in this service.

As Carie reminded us, the traditions in Wales are more Christian centered than they are here in the US. A glance at other UU congregations overseas, we felt, would be a wonderful exercise in increasing our own insight and appreciation of our denomination's ongoing vigor and diversity.

Connections 1: (Text at the end.)

Paris, Wales

Wisdom Story:

Monique McAuliffe, RE Coordinator

(making a web with yarn, involving total congregation)

Offering: #402 From you I receive...

Singing the Children Out

Connections 2: (Text at the end.)

Maine, Transylvania

Choral Anthem: "Gentle Words" Shaker Tune arr. by Wayland Rogers Karen Foust, piano

Connections 3: (Text at the end.)

India, New Zealand

Hymn: #145 "As Tranquil Streams"

Closing words:

We are part of a world-wide faith traditions as Unitarian Universalists, now and ongoing.

May we join more fully in the liberal faith of the generations in our own place and around the world.

May we expand our world view through connections, in person and with the many ways available today.

May we model a way of being in our own lives, in our own community, in the larger world.

May we be truly part of a faith tradition that is needed in and by the world, that will be stronger as *our* world view expands.

Extinguish the chalice

Benediction:

Take what we have shared this morning throughout this week, and we will look forward to seeing you again next Sunday.

Michael Conley, SGM Committee

Postlude

Connections: Texts for the presentations, in order of presentation during the service.

How Small Group Ministry came to the Unitarian-Universalist Fellowship of Paris (UUFP) (France) from Laurie, daughter of Lois Whitcomb who was long-time member of UUCC, now living in Colorado with family.

I have lived in Paris, France, for over 30 years and have been an active member of the lay-led UUFPP for most of that time. We hold services once a month from September through June in a liberal French Protestant church/community center. Typically, we have visiting ministers for about eight services per year. Three or four ministers are more or less regulars who come over from the UK for a weekend.

Ministers from the US are usually coming to Europe for other reasons (a sabbatical, a vacation, a trip to Thich Nhat Hanh's Plum Village, the twice-a-year European Unitarian-Universalist Retreats.). It is usually pretty easy to convince American ministers to stop off in Paris for a weekend to conduct a service for us.

The size of the Paris Fellowship varies quite a lot from year to year because of the transient nature of expats in big cities. We have a roughly 30-strong core group of lifers (of which I am one) and 30 or so others who attend quite regularly. We typically have between 40 to 50 people at our monthly services. Some years ago, I served as the service coordinator, meaning I was the visiting minister booking agent, so to speak. I held that role for over seven years, after having manned the coffee-hour table for three years. I currently do not hold any leadership role in the Fellowship.

I don't remember what year Small Group Ministry must have started in the Augusta UU church, but I know my mother, Lois Whitcomb, became involved very early on. She would tell me about the meetings during our weekly phone calls. It was clear what an important part the SGM played in my mother's life and how the members of her group had become her closest friends. I too wanted to belong to a Small Group Ministry and thought it could be a good thing for the Paris Fellowship; some members had expressed a need for more frequent meetings and deeper spiritual connection and that the monthly services just weren't enough. My mother offered to run a demo session on one of her future visits so that UUFPP members could see what it was like. The Paris Fellowship leadership team was enthusiastic about the idea.

When my mom visited in the winter of 2003 or 2004, we held the demo session at a member's home on the eastern side of Paris. There were probably about 20 people there. Lois ran the meeting which included a shortened SGM session and Q&A. (And, in keeping with good American UU tradition, it also included a copious potluck supper.) Following that meeting, two SGMs were formed. One met at my home on the north western side of Paris, the other met at the same member's home where the demo session had been held. Members picked their group mainly based on which location was most convenient for them on the metro. We used photocopies from the Augusta SGM handbook.

My group met once a month and indeed it became the high point of the month for me and the members became dear friends. I probably would have continued facilitating SGM meetings in my home indefinitely however I left Paris for an overseas assignment in Shanghai, China, in August of 2009. I passed on my copy of the handbook to one of the other members.

When returned to Paris in September 2011, there were still two active groups but in locations that were hard for me to get to as I no longer lived in the city center; the logistics of organizing care for my daughter were also daunting. I have had good intentions of hosting a group in my home again but haven't managed to get it off the ground. I am not currently a member of an SGM but there are still two groups, one of which is bilingual (English-French), that meet - more or less - monthly in different parts of Paris.

I know there have been workshops about how to organize and run SGM groups at European Unitarian Universalist Retreats, but I am not aware if there are SGMs meeting in other UU fellowships around Europe. (The Paris Fellowship is the largest of the European UU groups.) I can confirm, however, that Small Group Ministry has become a staple of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Paris, in very large part, thanks to Lois Whitcomb.

Wales

Rev. Alun presented some thoughts about the Unitarian churches in Wales. We do not have his notes.

Unitarian Universalism in Maine

Thursday AM SGM, Helen Zidowecki, Jean Sizelove

We *celebrate* the broadmindedness of UUCA that encourages us to seek other points of view, diversity. We *appreciate* the acceptance and interest in other practices that may be new to US. We *accept* the encouragement to participate in quiet activity during meetings/services. (coloring, etc.) We *cherish* the encouragement to speak our minds without attack or criticism. We *enjoy* engaging material from other cultures, such as through musical selections and Wisdom Stories in Sunday services, and spiritual practice through Buddhist and pagan traditions. We *accepted the challenge* to learning more about others Unitarian Universalist communities, especially Wales through the ministerial exchange and look forward to more exchanges in the future.

And we are interested in learning more about different UU churches here in Maine. In a newly published book, *Universalists & Unitarians of Maine*, Rev. Peter Tufts Richardson comments,

"The stories of liberal religion in Maine are legion, scattered through 16 counties, often in obscure places, rich oral traditions, and disappearing I found 409 local stories, substantial enough to give them a mention and to weave each into a statewide narrative. In an age so abjectly dependent upon electricity for our living and survival, it is hard to imagine a world without it and a world where liberal religion was more widely distributed than it is today. Some wonder how a liberal form of religion could be wedded to institutions at all. Religion of course is the communal form of human spirituality. And these religious communities built hundreds of meeting houses in which to convene and from which to interact with the larger society."

Indeed, his approach is to show connections between the local community and the church community. In Augusta, he searched our historic documents, and those of historical societies, and noted UUs in cemeteries. The Unitarian Universalist tradition may start within the walls and meetings of the local congregation or group, but it moves into the community to survive. And as we briefly considered Unitarian Universalist presence in the world, through personal experiences such as those of Lois Whitcomb, or looking on websites and in publications, we note the connections to community settings and concerns. Although the life of a congregation is set within a time and place, the issues faced connect us globally.

Please raise your hand if you have:

Attended a service or other event in another UU church or setting in Maine?

Outside of Maine? Outside of the US?

We offer this challenge: Be aware of UU churches, activities and presence. Look for, visit and participate with other UUs whenever possible, while traveling — literally—or while exploring with the Internet. This will enrich our own UU experience here in Augusta, Maine, through a broader world perspective.

And when you visit other Unitarian Universalist communities, please bring greetings from UUCA here in Augusta, Maine.

Unitarian Universalism in Transylvania and Romania

by Hannah Faulkner and Rachel Small for Small Group Ministry Sunday 10/21/18.

Our small group has chosen to research Unitarian Universalism in Romania, originating in the principality which in the 16th century was called Transylvania.

Wikipedia tells us that The Unitarian Church of Transylvania was established in 1568 by a proclamation called the Edict of Torda. This edict was the first edict of religious toleration in history. It was given during the reign of Transylvania's first and only King, John Sigismund. According to a pamphlet by Mark W. Harris, the church was first led by Sigismund's court preacher, a man named Francis (Ferenc in their language) David, a Calvinist bishop who two years earlier had first begun preaching the Unitarian doctrine of the oneness of God.

Mr. Harris tells us that "Francis had successively converted from Catholicism to Lutheranism to Calvinism and finally to Unitarianism because he could find no biblical basis for the doctrine of the Trinity. Arguing that people should be allowed to choose among these faiths, he said, "We need not think alike to love alike."

Early on, this very successful church included 425 parishes, the majority of whose members were Hungarians. However, both the Roman Catholic and the mainline Protestant churches regarded the Unitarians as heretics, people who wanted to choose their own faith, and persecuted them. They imprisoned Unitarian leader Francis David, who died in prison in 1579. The church then went into a period of decline until it was strengthened by refugees from the exiled Polish Brethren in 1658 and Mihaly Lombard de Szentabraham in the 1730's. Mr. Harris points out that the Transylvanian churches continue to preach the Unitarian message in present-day Romania. Like their heretic forebears from ancient times, these liberals could not see how the deification of a human being or the simple recitation of creeds could help them to live better lives. They said that we must follow Jesus, not worship him.

Wikipedia shows that in contrast with our American UU churches, each of which is an independent unit governed democratically by its own members, the Transylvanian churches remain quasi episcopal; that is the Unitarian Church of Transylvania is administrated in a hierarchical fashion by a Bishop and two Curators-General, being divided into five Archpriestships.

Their worship is similar to ours in some ways, such as the time of the Sunday services, the singing, the sermon length and the announcements. However, they stick close to Christian liturgy, using the Bible and praying and meditating more than we do each week. They still look mainly to the Christian Bible for their sermon sources. On the other hand, in this New Age, UU churches in the U. S. look to a wide variety of sources for our service topics.

Learning about Unitarian Universalism in Romania has helped us to feel even more connected with countries on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean.

Unitarian Universalism in India for 10/21/18 service, Linda Findlay, SGM Committee

When the SGM Committee chose the topic of looking at UUs world wide, it seemed both daunting and exciting. I chose to look at UUism in the Third World Country of India. AS of 2018, the population of India, according to Sin, is 1,349,217,956. In this mostly Hindu country of this size, was there any room for UUs? Apparently, YES, as there are approximately 9,000 UUs throughout the country!

India's religious landscape includes three types of Unitarian-Universalism. The Brahmo Samay founded in 1828 by Rommohun Roy, the Unitarian Church of the Khasi Hills founded in 1887 by Hajjom Singh, and the Unitarian Christian Church of Chennai in Madras founded in 1795. Unitarian Universalist churches in India have many connections with Hinduism. Ideas and practices are welcome in UUism. Worship services have drawn from Hindu sources of poetry, scripture, philosophy and kirtan, which means narrating or telling a story or idea through music.

I chose to look a little deeper into the churches of Khasi Hills and found that on September 18, 1887, Babu Hajjom Singh founded the Unitarian faith there. A Rev. Dahl, who was visiting in Calcutta at the time, provided him with some materials, and Hajjom Singh preached the faith, walking over the hills of Meghalaya establishing many loyal congregations.

On December 12, 1987, the Indian Council of Unitarian Churches (ICUC) was founded during the Centenary Celebration of North East India at Jowal. It was formed with the mutual consent of the Unitarians in North East India, Madras, and Hyderabad. Its aims and objectives were to spread Unitarianism all over India by joining hands together. There are Unitarian congregations in Hyderabad, Udaipur and Erate. In 2012, the Unitarian Union of North East India celebrated 125 years! Today there is a very active Unitarian Community here, and some new church buildings and schools being built.

It was interesting to me, though not surprising, that UUs in India have taken on many of the same challenges, causes, and programs as we here in the United States. In fact in recent decades, many United States congregations have been partnered with Indian Congregations.

Within the past decade, the Khasi headquarters published a revised UU Hymnal for all the congregations. It contains 542 pages of songs, readings, writings, prayers and even various services. It is titled KA JING SHAI BLEI which means The Divine Light.

The UU Holdeen Indian Program, which was established in 1984, is a powerful expression of UU commitment to social justice issues. People involved with the running of this program work in solidarity with child laborers, Dalits (who are marginalized communities in the south Asian caste system), indigenous tribes, women living with poverty, and modern day slaves as they fight for equity and social change. For example, they sponsored a running race for 600 through the Khasi hills for Environmental Awareness. Recently they held an International Women's Day where they focused on a global campaign against domestic violence. At the core of much that they do is the philosophy of empowerment through education. Building schools that are accessible to children has also been a top priority.

I spent some time "visiting" past youth conferences posted on the web and was impressed with the passion/compassion/and awareness of these young folks.

UUs played a significant role in getting the Indian government to grant rights to transgender people.

These are just a few of the accomplishments and issues that our brother and sister UUs in India have been working on almost as long as we have. I encourage you to go on the web and access UU in India, or any country for that matter, to learn more about what is happening globally with our faith.

Small Group Ministry in Auckland, New Zealand

Michael Conley, SGM Committee

The Auckland, NZ, Unitarian church was founded in the mid-1800s in order to provide a space for free-thinking people whose beliefs failed to fit orthodox Christianity. The church was formally founded in 1898. The initial congregants were from either Britain or Australia, and were either recent converts or learned of UUism through their parents. The first minister was an Irishman, Rev. William Jellie, from England, whose influence continued well past his death in 1963. And from 1948 through 1958, the congregation was served by Rev. Ellis Morris from Wales.

Ministers and members of the Church have helped to found social organizations in Auckland. For example, Nellie Ferner started the Sunshine Clubs for elderly people in Auckland in the 1930's and Maurice Wilsie and Nancy Fox started the Mental Health Association. Later on in the 1960s, there was another flurry of activity with Eem Sikkema and others starting the Humanist Society and Noel and Thelma Blyth formed the Rafters Folk Club. Wayne Facer and other university students held a Friday evening coffee and discussion group, while later in the 1970s, Douglas Webster and Gwen Harwood helped to found the Civilian Maimed Association. Ministers and members of the Church have also helped existing Auckland organizations to function, such as the Workers Educational Association, Halt All Racist Tours, Campaign for Racial Equality, Amnesty International, by offering use of the Church building and resources and taking leadership roles. The Church was one of the first to be involved in Church Radio Broadcasts in the 1930's.

The Auckland church calls their Small Group Ministry units Circle Groups. There are currently three active groups, the Eden/Epsom, North Shore and Titirangi, and there are 5 members on the Circle Group Committee. The Eden/Epsom Group is now in its 9th year, following the guidelines from the UUA on SGM and they have used several of their study guides and books as their guidelines. The group is currently using a recent UUA publication called the *Sustainable Soul: Eco-spiritual Reflections and Practices* by Rebecca James Hecking. As they describe the book, it has a decidedly American flavor, which they then complement with readings from the group member who is coordinating that month's meeting. They report that they enjoy the deeper reflections and discussions that these Circle Groups stimulate.

Major accomplishments that they report this year are keeping the group stimulated and interested in supporting each other. The group also re-covenanted and re-confirmed their mutual commitments to support and share their spiritual growth together.

One of the lessons learned were that groups of 6-7 seem to work best to promote deeper sharing. They have also set a membership goal of encouraging 2 more church members to join a local Circle Group. They have found that travel is a key determinant in placing new group members.