








Small Group Ministry **in the Small Congregation**

Over and over, people say the reason they love their small congregation is because of the intimacy it provides. Sometimes people say, “We don’t need a Small Group Ministry program... we’re already a small group!”

But a Small Group Ministry program is different than being a small group. It is an intentional way to deepen spiritually, and to really get to know a group of people. It is a simple way to become intimate and honest with one another, and to learn to care for one another in times of joy and in times of need.

What defines Small Group Ministry?

-  A group is made up of no more than 10-12 participants, preferably 6-8.
-  A group meets on a regular basis, as chosen by the group, generally every other week or twice a month, for 2 hours per session.
-  A group creates a covenant that expresses how they will be together.
-  There is a facilitator for each session. The facilitator can be the same person each time, or can rotate, depending on the preference of a group.
-  Each meeting follows the same format: opening words, check-in, discussion of the topic through a reading and specific questions, “likes and wishes,” and closing words.
-  There is an “empty chair” – that is, new members are welcomed within the limit of 10-12 people. When a group reaches 10-12 people, it splits in two.
-  There is a connection to the church community through an annual service project for the church, and one for the larger community. However, not all participants have to be church members.

over for more...

Tell me more!

Every congregation that has a Small Group Ministry program needs to have at least two groups, even if there are only 3 or 4 people in each group. It's better to spread the energy around, and by having more than one group, you can offer them at different times (a day group and an evening group, for example) or in different geographic locations in the area your congregation serves.

The facilitators need to have basic training in group process, and support for their on-going work. The facilitators can be trained and supported by your minister, if you have one, or partner with a nearby larger congregation that has such a program. Perhaps District staff can train and support your facilitators. Be creative! In a group that rotates facilitators, there should be training for everyone, and one or two contact people that receive on-going support.

Small Group Ministry can be done with children and teens, and can work well as a Religious Education program. The same model holds, except an adult will need to facilitate with smaller children.

It is a wonderful way to bring new folks into the congregation. Friends can invite friends as an introduction to our faith. Many people find a Small Group to be less threatening – and more meaningful – than attending worship. It is also a great way for new people to be assimilated into the life of the congregation very quickly and deeply.

Lesson plans can be created by the minister or facilitator, or found through many of the current Unitarian Universalist resources on Small Group Ministry (see Resource box below). There are often workshops on how to do Small Group Ministry at the District and regional level, as well as at General Assembly. If you're interested, plan on attending a workshop, or ask your District staff for help.

Small Group Ministry is perfect for the small congregation as a way to increase intimacy and commitment, and bring new people into our faith!

Small Group Ministry Resources

🌸 The book *Small Group Ministry*, by Bob Hill, available through the UUA Bookstore (800.215.9076, or www.uua.org/bookstore)

🌸 The many publications offered by the UU Community Church of Augusta, ME (207.622.3232, or <http://home.gwi.net/~uuccaug>)

🌸 The UU Small Group Ministry Network has been formed and their website is chock-full of any and all information you might need, at www.smallgroupministry.net

🌸 Ferry Beach is holding a Small Group Ministry conference, August 13-19, 2005. Visit www.ferrybeach.org.



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