

Sample Brochure for Small Group Ministry

What Is Small Group Ministry?

Small Group Ministry is a network of small groups, whose main objectives are to strengthen the congregation by drawing us into mutual ministry.

Why are we developing Small Group Ministry in our congregation?

We expect through Small Group Ministry to continuously develop lay leadership, deepen our understanding of Unitarian-Universalist principles and values, be further challenged to action and spiritual growth, as well as to be prompted to express, in a more consistent way, our principles and values in the community.

Tell me more about these ministry groups!

The primary emphasis of Small Group Ministry is to care for people—to serve them, encourage them to spiritual growth, and meet their needs for affirmation and acceptance. By creating an open, supportive, and nurturing environment, Small Group Ministry promotes and facilitates spiritual growth and mutual interactive care for one another, therefore providing a quality of caring that most people can only wish for.

Additionally, Small Group Ministry offers opportunities to search and grow at the individual's own pace and in the individual's own way through learning together and loving one another. As individuals identify and use their own spiritual gifts, they will be moved to contribute of themselves and their resources.

When are we going to begin the Small Group Ministry in our congregation?

Signups will begin on Sunday, September 30. The small groups will begin meeting starting Sunday, October 21.

How can I be involved?

There are several ways in which you can be involved in Small Group Ministry: As an Small Group Ministry Council member, as a Leader or Coleader of a small group, and as a group member. Any way you are able to, or at any time you decide to participate, your involvement will be always welcome.

—First Unitarian Church, San Jose, California

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Purpose

To provide an opportunity for friends and members of the church to develop deeper connections and wider service within the church community through small-group organization.

Goals

1. To provide regular opportunities for lifting one's mental/emotional horizons up from the mundane considerations of day-to-day life.
2. And, in the relative safety of carefully-led small groups, to help people get to know and be known by up to 10 others with similar interests.

About the Groups

- These small groups meet a minimum of once a month in a member's home or at the church.
- All groups have trained facilitators, use a regular format, and covenant together how they will relate to each other and how they will serve the congregation.
- Groups are always open to new members.

Groups are developed around topics of interest to members and friends of the church.

Conscious Consuming: Learn what it takes to make the goods we crave, and how to make more socially responsible spending choices. Facilitator: Kari Darken-Thompson

Cooking: We believe that food provides social and spiritual as well as physical nourishment when it is shared. Share current life experiences and food, followed by a discussion of the recipe and related topics. Facilitators: Mike Brown and Alan Hart

Deep Listening: Explore individual life journeys through shared thoughts and experiences. Facilitator: Corie Haring

Dialogues: The group aims beyond debate and discussion, and strives for genuine dialogue. The participants work as hard at listening as at speaking. The topics flow freely, but in its best moments, the group achieves a genuine intimacy through dialogue. Facilitator: Jim Gordon

Experience Art: A safe, nurturing place to make art. Facilitator: Maureen Harvey

Explore and Celebrate Diversity: Discussion of topics related to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender issues in a safe, nurturing environment. Facilitator: Laura Hanson

Exploring Creativity: This group will explore the creative process. How does creativity enhance your daily life, your interests, and learning? Facilitator: Gene Roseboom

Exploring Spirituality: We explore various spiritual practices and ideas in a safe, nurturing environment. Facilitator: Margaret Roseboom

Fabric Artistry: Discuss, share, and work on projects. Participants bring their own sewing, quilting, and fabric art projects. Facilitator: Ann McDermott

Movie Discussion: Like movies? Like to talk about them? Join this group. Facilitators: Debbie Allen and Deidra Murray

Music Group: Music is a sacred experience to many UUs in this church. This group provides a place to perform and share all kinds of music with each other. Facilitator: Bob Hurst

Parenting: Facilitator: Pam Yarbrough

Sacred Treasures: We explore our spiritual lives. We include a time of silence during each meeting, often share poetry and music that is meaningful to us, and address the topics that group members find compelling. Facilitator: Wil Scott

Sound, Movement, Touch, and Breath: Facilitator: Marne Harveland-Botkin

Spiritual Journeys: We share our individual spiritual journeys. How did you come to be who and where you are now? Facilitator: Jonalu Johnstone

Spirituality Books: This covenant group meets monthly to talk about books that have a spiritual theme. Facilitator: Chris Lopez

—First Unitarian Church, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Sample Registration Form

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Phone _____

E-mail _____

I am already a member of a Chalice Circle.

I wish to recommit to my present circle

I wish to switch to a different circle

I am unable to continue at this time

Comments:

I wish to join a Chalice Circle

I am available on the following days and times:

(circle all that apply)

Monday	morning	afternoon	evening
Tuesday	morning	afternoon	evening
Wednesday	morning	afternoon	evening
Thursday	morning	afternoon	evening
Friday	morning	afternoon	evening
Saturday	morning	afternoon	evening
Sunday	(none)	afternoon	evening

I have the following special need in order for me to be able to participate in a Chalice Circle.

Please return your form to the First Parish Office no later than Oct. 1.

—First Parish of Sudbury, Massachusetts

Sample Invitation to Potential Facilitators

You've heard about our exciting new Chalice Circle group program. Have you considered being a facilitator?

Why?

Churches across the country have enthusiastically shared the opportunities and benefits provided by small group programs. *You* could be a part of bringing this cutting edge ministry to First Church! *You* could help provide important new avenues for the growth and spiritual development of both our individual members and for our church community overall! As we get our program off the ground we are seeking adventurous members such as yourself to consider applying to be our first facilitators.

Who?

Facilitators need to meet certain criteria including being a member of the congregation, being self-aware and willing to learn, being a good listener, being receptive and unprejudiced, and being comfortable in a group setting.

What would I need to do?

Facilitators will be expected to help set a tone of acceptance and respect for all members, to follow the established group format (e.g., starting each group with the lighting of the chalice and a check-in), to encourage each member to participate as they are willing, to intervene if the group needs redirection, and to coordinate or delegate the coordination of the business aspects of the group (e.g., When's the next meeting? Does someone want to bring a snack?).

Would I receive training?

Yes! The applicants selected will participate in five two-hour group training sessions modeling the Chalice Circle format and covering the topics of spirituality, leadership, and small group theory. Training sessions will occur at the church and are mandatory. The training dates to span five consecutive Tuesdays evenings (7:00-9:00) beginning on January 8 and running until February 5. Our trainers, Candice Haight and Robert Szymanski, are talented and experienced educators. In the final session they will invite trainees to evaluate whether they are still interested in making a commitment to the program.

What about ongoing support?

The monthly facilitator meetings are designed to offer ongoing support and assistance in helping you develop your skills and troubleshooting any difficulties that arise.

What's the time commitment?

Leading a small group would require attendance at Chalice Circle meetings once or twice monthly, in addition to monthly facilitator meetings. All of the meetings are two hours in duration. The day and time of your small group would be set at your convenience; the schedule for the facilitator meetings will be decided by the facilitator group. Groups are planned to launch in February of 2002 and we request facilitators to commit to serving their group through the next church year ending in May 2003. Whether groups continue to meet during the summer will be up to them.

You're interested?

Here's the next step . . . Pick up and complete an application form available at the Membership Table during coffee hour. Return the application by November 18th to the Member Services table or mail it to First Church "attn: Lisa Radtke." We hope to interview all applicants (if numbers permit) and plan to make final decisions by mid-December.

Although we realize we will be interviewing many qualified candidates we are restricted to selecting only eight individuals for this initial training. Those we are unable to select initially will be invited to participate in a group as a member or await the next facilitator training opportunity.

—First Unitarian Society of Milwaukee, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Sample Facilitator's Application Form

1. What interests you in becoming a facilitator for a Chalice Circle group at First Church?
2. What skills/qualities do you possess which you think might be useful to you in the role of facilitator?
3. Please describe any prior small group experiences you have had, as facilitator or participant.
4. From what you know about the Chalice Circle groups, what do you hope they could do for you and for the church community at large?
5. What training do you believe you would need to be an effective facilitator?
6. Is there anything else you would like us to know, or that you think would be helpful for us to know as we consider you for this position?

Thank you very much for your interest in the Chalice Circle group program.

Application deadline: November 18, 2001. Applications may be turned into the Member Services Table on Sunday morning, or send to the church office marked "Attention: Lisa Radtke."

Name: _____

Phone: day _____ eve _____

—First Unitarian Society of Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Sample Facilitator's Training Session

Reading, Chalice Lighting, and Silence

Check-In: Why do you want to be a covenant group leader?

Review Agenda

History & Development of Covenant Groups

Purpose of Covenant Groups

- To provide a sense of intimacy and community for people.
That's why we shoot for the magic number of ten people involved in a group. It's simply the maximum number which experience has shown can sustain the intimacy needed to meet people's needs. Go beyond that and there is less participation and more burnout on the part of the leaders. If you go beyond ten you have a class rather than a relational group.
- The groups provide a place for spiritual exploration and growth.
In an environment where people are encouraged and supported in the sharing of stories, experiences, ideas and feelings, they are able to develop spiritually.
- The groups are encouraged to commit themselves to reaching out to the church and community.
- Groups are challenged to provide the opportunity for others to be involved by helping to create more covenant groups. Groups are also asked to take responsibility for a project in the church or community, such as volunteering to put on Coffee Hour together on a Sunday morning or working together on a Habitat for Humanity home. Participants are asked to invite friends to their group, whether they are members or not.

The Covenant Group Process

Opening Reading and Chalice Lighting followed by period of silence (this responsibility is moved around the group)

Check-in: About yourself, your day, your high and low since the last meeting

Group discussion: The group facilitator chooses an overall topic that he/she is passionate about, but the group can decide where to go with it.

Check-out: Brief feedback about the meeting, what people liked, what they would change.

Closing reading

Facilitator Job Description

- Commit to organize and facilitate a covenant group of up to 10 people for a year.
 - Decide what kind of group you want to lead, how often, and location, and then advertise for members in the *Arlingtarian*.
 - Take care of mechanics by making sure things are assigned and done. Have an opening and closing reading in hand.
 - Facilitate a good discussion and help keep the group on task, model good process and listening skills, and help the group adhere to their own covenants with each other about behavior, including starting the meetings on time and ending on time.
 - Don't conduct a meeting or teach or do therapy and don't lead too much. Remember that it is the members who "own" the group and have the primary responsibility for its success or failure.
- Train a cofacilitator by choosing someone in the group who you believe will make a good facilitator and ask that person to cofacilitate and train with you. After each meeting go over the process with the cofacilitator. When the group divides the cofacilitator will lead the second group.
- Meet with the ministers in a covenant group on a regular basis.

Questions & Discussion

Check-Out

Closing Reading

—Unitarian Universalist Church, Arlington, Virginia

Sample Covenanting Process

1. Participants write the answers to two questions on cards in each of the first three sessions.
 - What do I hope to bring from my life to the group?
 - What do I hope to take from the group to my life?

Answers are read aloud, either by the leader or the participants.

2. Leader types up the answers and distributes the lists in session four.
3. Using a flip chart and with the assistance of the facilitator, the group writes a covenant statement.

Note: Many facilitators are afraid. (What if we can't write one or it's inadequate?) This process can be a little scary at first even for those with experience and training in facilitation. You just have to have faith that a good covenant will emerge. When it does the groups are very proud of their statements, even a little euphoric.

—Unitarian Church, Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Resources

Books and Tapes, General

Andrews, Cecile. *The Circle of Simplicity: Return to the Good Life*. New York: Harper-Collins, 1997.

Corrigan, Thom, and Richard Pearce. *Learning to Care: Developing Community in Small Groups*. Colorado Springs, CO: Pilgrimage/NavPress, 1997.

Davis, Deena, ed. *Discipleship Journal's 101 Best Small-Group Ideas*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1996.

Donahue, Bill. *The Willow Creek Guide to Leading Life-Changing Small Groups*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996.

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———. *Nine Keys to Effective Small Group Leadership*. Mansfield, PA: Kingdom Publishing, 1997.

———. *Prepare Your Church for the Future*. Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 1991.

Hudgens, A. Gayle. *Collaborative Spunk: The Feisty Guide for Reviving People and Our Planet*. Helena, MT: SOS Press, 2002.

Hunter, Dale, Anne Bailey, and Bill Taylor. *The Art of Facilitation*. Cambridge, MA: Fisher Books, 1995.

Kouzes, James M., and Barry Z. Posner. *Encouraging the Heart: A Leader's Guide to Rewarding and Recognizing Others*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1999.

McBride, Neal F. *How to Build a Small-Groups Ministry*. Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1995.

Ray, Paul H. *The Integral Culture Survey: A Study of the Emergence of Transformational Values in America*. Sausalito, CA: Institute of Noetic Sciences, and Kalamazoo, MI: Fetzer Institute, 1993.

Ray, Paul H., and Sherry Ruth Anderson. *The Cultural Creatives: How 50 Million People Are Shaping the World*. New York: Harmony Books, 2000. (For more on cultural creatives, see www.culturalcreatives.org.)

Thandeka. *Engagement Groups: Bringing Forth the Future from the Past*. London: Lindsey Press, 2002.

———. "The Spiritual Life of Unitarian Universalists, Lost and Found," *A Global Conversation: Unitarian/Universalism at the Dawn of the 21st Century*. Edited by Andrew M. Hill, Jill K. McAllister, and Clifford M. Reed. Prague: International Council of Unitarians and Universalists, 2002.

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Ward, Allan. *Beyond the Visible Spectrum*. Little Rock, AR: Award Press, 2002.

Wuthnow, Robert. *Sharing the Journey: Support Groups and America's New Quest for Community*. New York: Free Press, 1994.

———, ed. *"I Came Away Stronger": How Small Groups Are Shaping American Religion*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994.

Printed Materials Specific to Unitarian Universalism

Fry, Christine, et al. *Good Life Covenant Group: A Resource Guide, 2001–2002*. Davis, CA: Unitarian Universalist Church, 2000. Available from Unitarian Universalist Church, 27074 Patwin Rd., Davis, CA 95616–9720.

Hamilton-Holway, Barbara. *Evensong: An Eight-Week Series of Gatherings*. Boston: Skinner House Books, 2001.

Herz, Walter P., ed. *Redeeming Time: Endowing Your Church with the Power of the Covenant*. Boston: Skinner House Books, 1998.

Morgan, John. *The Devotional Heart: Pietism and the Renewal of American Unitarian Universalism*. Boston: Skinner House Books, 1995.

Phillips, Roy D. *Transforming Liberal Congregations for the New Millennium*. St. Paul: Unity Church, Unitarian, 1996.

Smith Valley, Judith. "The Small Group Ministry Project of the First Parish Unitarian Universalist Church Kennebunk, Maine." Ph.D. diss., Bangor Theological Seminary, 2001.

Resources Available On-line or by E-mail

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Bumbaugh, David. "A Contemporary Assessment of Unitarian Universalism." *Journal of Liberal Religion* 3, no. 2 (2002). Available at <http://www.meadville.edu/> in the "Journal" section.

Cavanaugh, Rob. *Rob's Covenant Group Manual*. Available from the author at RCavanaugh@uua.org.

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Dame, Calvin. *A Small Group Ministry Resource Book*. "Session Questions" and other materials available from the Unitarian Universalist Community Church, 69 Winthrop St., Augusta, ME 04330-5505, or <http://home.gwi.net/~uuccaug/sgm.htm>.

Hill, Robert L., ed. *Covenant Group News*. Available at www.swuuc.org in the "Programs" section.

Turner, Glenn H. *Designing and Implementing a Small Group Ministry Focus for Your Congregation*. Available from the Unitarian Universalist Community Church, 69 Winthrop St., Augusta, ME 04330-5505, or <http://home.gwi.net/~uuccaug/sgm.htm>.

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Unitarian Universalist Association. Discussion of small group ministry issues available at http://www.uua.org/mailman/listinfo/covenant_group_ministry. A search for “Covenant Groups” at www.uua.org will produce additional resources as they are added.

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