

Preparation for Session M145 – Creating A Small Group Covenant

Background Reading On Covenants

“The Judaic-Christian tradition has had a long history of covenants, beginning in the time of the Old Testament, continued through the New Testament period, and influencing the early religious traditions even into the 17th Century as Europeans began to settle in North America. The basis for covenant within these two traditions was theological...A firm belief that God demanded promises, not only to him, but also between religious believers themselves. It is out of this tradition that early Unitarians, and Universalists, chose to make covenants. They believed that God wanted them to live in respect, love, compassion and commitment, toward God and toward one another.

From our two rich histories, both of Unitarians and of Universalists, we see a commitment to make and keep promises, covenants, with one another. Though we have always refused to adopt any creedal statement in either tradition, we had historically viewed our covenants as relating to God, as well as to one another. But, as Unitarians and Universalists merged in 1961, and as we have grown in our understanding of diversity and moving beyond mere tolerance, we have many members and friends who do not accept the concept of covenanting with God. Nor do we believe in theological or biblical bases for covenanting. Yet, today we need covenant more than ever.

It is the act of covenant that holds congregations together.

Consider the promises associated with agreeing to live by our seven UU principles.

When we affirm the inherent worth and dignity of all beings, we are saying that we respect one another's person hood and we will not violate it. When we affirm justice, equity, and compassion in human relations, we are saying that we will treat each other with justice, equity, and compassion. When we say we accept one another and encourage one another's spiritual growth, we are promising to strive for understanding of differences. When we strike out on a free and responsible search for truth and meaning, we are demonstrating our belief in a free faith.

When we affirm the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process, we are acknowledging our diversity of belief and committing to the use of fair practices for decision-making. When we strive for world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all, we are agreeing that all beings require peace, liberty and justice.

And when we affirm our respect for the interdependent web of existence, we are acknowledging that we are dependent upon one another, that we cannot live in isolation from one another, nor can we disregard the needs of our mother earth and father sky.

In essence, we are saying to one another and to the larger world, "you are safe with us. We will respect you. We will encourage your growth. We will work to understand who you are and we will not force you to be other than you are. When we have differences of opinion, we will talk them through respectfully and we will make decisions democratically."

Covenants are the foundation of safe congregations, growing and healthy congregations, lively and joyful congregations.” -Rev. Margo McKenna

CREATING SGM COVENANTS

Please answer the following questions that will be the basis of the small group ministry covenant your group will form together. Look over SGM FAQ's 1.2, 6.1 & 6.2 (listed below) to help inform your answers. It may be useful to respond to the questions in the covenantal form: *We the members of small group ministry covenant together to:*

What are the ways we want to be together?

What are the promises we want to make to each other? .

What do we need from each other?

SGM FAQ'S

1.2 In what way is the small group ministry to be ministry?

The SGM is ministry in that:

1. It enables us to discover what we really value, and encourages us to express those values in our actions,... transforming our society
2. Its primary emphasis is to care for people---to serve them, encourage them to spiritual growth, and meet their needs for affirmation and acceptance.
3. It creates an open, supportive, nurturing environment that promotes and facilitates spiritual growth and mutual, interactive care for one another.
4. It offers opportunities to search and grow at our own pace and in our own way through telling our stories, learning, loving one another, and contributing ourselves and our resources.
5. It offers an open chair, recognizing that everybody needs a place to experience community. Excitement and enthusiasm arise as lives change and new people enter into meaningful relationship in community in which everybody is cared for.
6. It provides a quality of caring and intimacy that many people long for.
7. Although its leaders are not trained to be professional counselors, it provides opportunities for members to be referred to sources of the appropriate care they require.
8. In the small groups we can identify and use our spiritual gifts.

6.1 Is each group member expected to make certain commitments to the group, to the congregation, or to the wider community? Yes:

1. Commitment to the Group
 - a. Maintain basic UU principles
 - b. Fully participate as you are able and in your own mode of expression
 - c. Be present in mind, body, and spirit
 - d. Be open to knowing others; be open to knowing yourself
 - e. One person speaks at a time, while all others listen respectfully
 - f. Maintain confidentiality when requested and when appropriate
 - g. Respect each other by asking permission to give feedback
 - h. Minister to each other
 - i. Welcome new members to the group
 - j. Commit to attend meetings for at least 6 months
 - k. Begin and end meetings on time
 - l. Let the leader and/or co-leader know when you cannot attend

2. Commitment to the church
 - a. Folks participating in SGM should share, as appropriate, their experience with new members and others interested in the SGM concept
 - b. It is not a requirement to make a commitment to work on community projects to participate in a Small Group. However, it is believed that working as a group on community projects will enhance the SGM experience
 - c. A participant does not need to be a member of the church

6.2 Is the group expected to make certain commitments to each member? If so, what are the expected commitments?

1. Provide the opportunity for every member to fully participate in their own way
2. Provide the opportunity for every member to be heard
3. Contact a member when they do not attend
4. Respect the form of interaction defined by the activity. For example, radical listening versus group discussion
5. Provide a period for personal discussions after the meeting