

Small Group Ministry Handbook



Unitarian Universalist Community Church Augusta, Maine

Welcome to the Unitarian Universalist Community Church of Augusta. If you arrive at UUCC seeking deeper connections with people and greater meaning and purpose in the busyness of your life, Small Group Ministry may be just what you are looking for. This ministry provides opportunities for newcomers and members of UUCC and the wider community to explore spiritual journeys.

Small Group Ministry groups of 8-10 people meet for two hours once or twice a month at times and places designated by the group members, such as a home or the church, electronically or “virtually” (in person and electronically) to develop connections within the church community.

Small Group Ministry is an active part of the UUCC guided by *covenants* developed by groups to describe the relationships of members within groups and with the larger church community.

--"Ministry" is the process or act of caring or being present with another. This relates to the spiritual as well as the physical and emotional well-being of the group participants. Small Group Ministry is lay-led small groups that deepen and expand the ministry of the congregation.

--*Service* as a grateful response to life's blessings. Small Group Ministry is an opportunity to serve our congregation and the wider community through projects large and small. The Small Group Ministry Sunday Morning Service in the Fall celebrates the collaboration between the groups and community. We hope that you will join us for that and our other opportunities for bonding and for deeper with spiritual connections.

SMALL GROUP MINISTRY LOGISTICS

We are starting with the essential details of groups, like who is involved and where groups meet. This is followed by more information on SGM at UUCC.

These decisions are largely made by the Groups.

Meeting time: General length of a meeting is 1.5-2hrs. once or twice a month.

Time of day: _____ Daytime _____ Evening

Duration of a Group: The intent of the group is connecting people within the congregation over a period of time. Groups may be defined as:

Existing Group

Newly formed Group

Time-limited Group: Specify. This can be a series like UU Values, or an unusual situation.

Groups welcome new members as size and situation allow. The process to join, change or leave a group includes discussions with the SGM Committee Chair, and as appropriate with the Group Leader.

Location suggestions: Group meetings are scheduled on the church calendar with the Administrator, regardless of where it is being held. Meeting locations may vary.

Personal homes

*Church (Space, keys-contact Administrator)

Another location

Zoom or Virtual (In person/zoom)

**Details for meeting at the church.*

--*Parking at the church is limited on the street and the lot of the yellow house on Summer St. in non-business hours. When there is a parking ban in Augusta, services will be postponed or redirected.

--*Space is scheduled and a key is arranged with the Administrator (207-622-3232).

--*Food: bring the food and clean up.

--*When leaving: Lower heat, turn off AC, and air purifier, and lights.

--*Lock doors if you are last to leave.

Needs of participants:

--Communications and technology accessibility, availability and usage may vary among group participants.

--Transportation

--Check in regularly in this changing environment.

WHO IS INVOLVED IN GROUPS?

The Group Leader keeps the SGM Committee updated regarding changes. Information includes names, e-mail addresses, phone(s). Distribution is to the participants themselves, the SGM Committee, Minister, administrator. Opportunities for SGM to collaborate with other parts of the congregation should be planned through the SGM Committee. This is not a public list.

Small Group Ministry Participants

Participants bring a willingness to share and grow. An important expectation is that members give the meetings high priority. The groups develop their own covenant that describes the expectations that they have of one another. This covenant follows the UUCC congregational covenant. Participants do not need to be UUCC members.

Respect for confidentiality is fundamental to building trust that allows intimacy to flourish. Each group is encouraged to be clear about how confidentiality is practiced within that group; it is an essential element of the group's covenant. When a member has a need which might be addressed by the minister or a pastoral associate, the member can be encouraged to make that connection, or another member may ask permission to pass the concern along to the appropriate resource.

Group Leaders

Small Group Ministry group leaders support the life of the group. They make sure the group begins and ends on time, remind people of the next meeting, and contact members who miss a meeting. They stay in touch with the Small Group Ministry Committee, to maintain a connection with the congregation.

Group Facilitation

At each meeting of a group, one person is the designated facilitator. Facilitation can be done by the leader or shared among the group. The Facilitator guides the group through the session plan. As the group evolves, members grow comfortable with their covenant and get to know one another. It is common for groups to begin to rotate the role of facilitator among the members.

Small Group Ministry Committee

The SGM Committee works to ensure the vitality of the UUCC Small Group Ministry program as it furthers the mission of the church. The Committee is comprised of the Chair of the Committee, and members from the congregation and groups who

1. Encourage increased opportunities for Small Group Ministry within and beyond UUCC.
2. Recruit/support participants and leaders for Small Group Ministry
3. Create and update session plans, the Handbook, and other materials used by Small Group Ministry
4. Offer new opportunities to work collaboratively with all parts of UUCC and its ongoing ministry and mission.

Leadership Support

Group leaders meet with the SGM Committee, either singly or in a group for initial orientation. Leaders learn about the history of SGM at our church and are introduced to the Basic Elements of Small Group Ministry. They also learn about group dynamics and look at how to respond to some possible rough spots that can occur in groups.

Ongoing orientation is through leader meetings with SGM Committee. At these meetings leaders discuss concerns they have and review how the groups are doing in meeting the goals of Small Group Ministry. In this way the groups stay in touch with one another and with the larger church.

The SGM Committee is available at any time if questions or concerns arise about interactions in any of the groups. One does not need to be a skilled facilitator to be a group leader. Those skills will develop over time.

How Long Are Groups Together?

In the original vision for Small Group Ministry, taken from successful evangelical programs, groups would grow to twelve or so, and then split, with the facilitator taking one group and an apprentice facilitator taking the other. Over time, people would bond with a greater number of people in the congregation than groups that did not split. However, once groups feel connected, they may not want to split. As the circumstances of people's lives change, they may choose to leave their group. New

members are warmly welcomed and changing groups expand the circle of connection.

-- The Small Group Ministry Committee fills vacancies with an eye to serving the overall vision of Small Group Ministry. People who leave a group may request to join another group.

-- Groups are expected to be willing to consider new members.

--In addition, groups may have a specific time limit, such as a year, set when they are created. This presents an opportunity to become acquainted with more people in the congregation over time.

GROUP MEETINGS: Content, Session Plans

Each group develops its own schedule; the most common pattern is to meet twice a month on a first and third or second- and fourth-week schedule. Some groups meet once a month. The regularity of meetings is an important component of the intimacy, fellowship and growth which participants experience through their groups.

The focus of the group meeting is the topic of the selected session plan. Each group receives a collection of session plans, and more are available through the internet. Groups decide how to select the session plan and decide on their own order and pace. Topics include personal religious histories, spiritual practices, loneliness, fear, poetry, music and healing, among many others.

Session Plans

The session plans format includes:

Opening Words: The opening serves to gather people in, to remind participants of the special opportunity of the gathering, and to reflect on the chosen topic. Some groups light a Chalice as well.

Check-in/Sharing: Participants share news of what has been happening in their lives. Each group develops its own customs as to the length of sharing or how to respond. This portion of the meeting may expand from time to time when necessary.

Topic/Discussion: A paragraph or two lays out a topic and presents questions that will elicit thoughtful discussion and significant reflection.

Check out/ Likes and Wishes: This is a format for feedback on the session itself or on how the meeting went overall.

Closing Words: This brings the formal session to an end.

How Are Topics Selected?

The groups select their topics from various resources. We have had a subcommittee that develops topics around suggestions that have been submitted and works with groups as they develop their own sessions. There is also an extensive range of session plans on the UU Small Group Ministry Network website (www.smallgroupministry.net) under Group Session Plans. Guidelines for developing session plans are available from the Small Group Ministry Committee. With the initiation of Theme-Based Ministry, the focus of at least one meeting of the group per month frequently follows the monthly theme, often using material from the Soul Matters packet.

How Does Service Fit In?

Service is woven into the fabric of Small Group Ministry. Groups maintain connection with the congregation and the larger community through annual service projects. Service may include participating in worship, greeting or hospitality on Sunday; fund raising events; helping with buildings and grounds; or adopting a family in need during the Christmas season or a crisis. Service beyond the group is important for two reasons. First, it brings the group closer together as they make connections beyond the group. Second, service is a way for a growing spiritual life and living a life of faith. Service moves the group beyond discussion to action and provides a different way of relating with each other and the congregation.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT SMALL GROUP MINISTRY:

Look for information and updates on Small Group Ministry activities in Small Group Ministry Brochure, The Flaming Chalice Newsletter, The Annual Reports, announcements in the E-Blast and the Annual SGM Sunday Service or talk to the SGM Committee Chair.

We look forward to receiving your Application to join a group. Options will be discussed with the SGM Committee Chair, group leaders and the applicant. Your first meeting with a group will likely be the Session Plan, "Come, Join Us" for introduction.

SMALL GROUP MINISTRY BUILDING BLOCKS



A Building Block combines with another to create something else. It does not work on its own but enhances the effectiveness of other building blocks.

"Small" By interacting with fewer people we can be more intentional about our sharing, learn more about struggles and successes of others and discover shared strengths. A consistent group of fewer people allows us to establish trust and to be more comfortable in interactions. It is easier to introduce new members and to relate to changes and losses.

"Group" Meeting once or twice a month over several months or years helps us connect newcomers to the church community and celebrate life's milestones. Diversity such as age, gender and sexual orientation, background, experience, spiritual orientation, and abilities broadens the group. We determine our meeting arrangements, session plans, service and activities.

"Ministry" We are part of the shared ministry at UUCC. "Ministry" is caring or being present with another. This relates to the spiritual, the physical and the emotional well-being. We can call on other group members for help and support. We also give support to each other and the group as a whole. We connect with the minister and Pastoral Ministry Team.

Bonding (Intimacy) We feel a sense of belonging when someone responds to us as individuals. Friendship is getting to know each other intimately. Community is where deepest hopes, fears, dreams and even bad experiences can be shared amongst nonjudgmental friends. Doing things together unifies our group beyond just talking and brings compassion and caring.

Going Deeper (Ultimacy) We explore topics of life. Opportunity to delve into issues where we know each other over time leads to deeper and diverse meaning. The focus is shared learning on how we are affected by a topic. Session plans present life topics in a way that encourages new insights. They are selected and created by individuals and groups. We read, sing, laugh, share, and constantly question.

Growth There is a chance to see what is of concern, what's going on in the world, how we think about things and what we might do. We challenge ourselves. We participate, may lead sessions, represent our group in SGM joint meetings, develop skills and confidence within and beyond the group. Growth occurs when we feel supported.

Covenant Our groups have commitment, integrity, and right relations within their groups. We make promises to each other and/or a groups and congregation and have an understanding of how we will be together, with respect, sharing and caring and what we have to offer. Small Group Ministry is where everyone knows your name and your story and keeps it within the circle!

Listening We listen to others and learn and share from our souls. We do not need to comment nor expect others to comment on our sharing. As we listen to learn what another person has to offer, we try to speak so that others can understand what we are conveying. Listening is understanding beyond hearing the words. Listening does not require agreement and can leave opportunity to differ.

Service We work on concerns that affect the church and larger communities. Joint activities are a way to learn about each other's interests, increase the connection with the congregation, and give from the abundance of our group. Our service supports the congregational functions (buildings and grounds, meals and hospitality, programs). and enhances connection with the wider UU world as faith in action.

Accessibility We consider and respect the needs of each member -- mobility, sensory concerns, allergies, time commitments, economics, etc. We are concerned about who is or can be included. Who may not be able to participate or may not be comfortable in a group or mentioning a concern? What assistance is needed for participation or alternatives? We are encouraged to share our needs so that we may participate.

Communications We talk about Small Group Ministry – our own groups, interaction among groups and the UUCC community. We add notices and articles by SGM participants in the E-Blast, newsletters, announcements, and the UUCC and UUSGM Network websites. We try to let everyone in our group know and be involved with suggestions and plans and how we can participate.

Presence SGM has used ways of doing church, such as chalice lighting and personal check-in at group meetings and working with more people in differing capacities throughout the congregation. SGM offers some specific programs and Sunday Services annually. SGM is, by its nature, intimate, starting with check-ins and transitioning to the chosen session plan.

Insert was in the Order of Service December 11, 2022, "SGM—Building Blocks for UUCC."