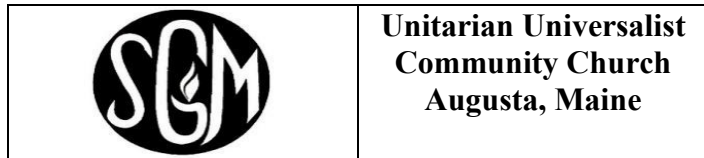


Small Group Ministry Handbook



WELCOME

If you arrive at the Unitarian Universalist Community Church of Augusta seeking deeper connections with people and greater meaning and purpose in your life, Small Group Ministry (SGM) offers opportunities for newcomers, the UUCC and the wider community to explore spiritual journeys.

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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 (in person and electronically) to develop connections within the church community.

Ministry is caring for or being present with one another. This relates to the spiritual, 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 group and of the congregation.

Service is 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, such as the annual SGM Sunday Service in the Fall, social services, and care of UU life itself with spiritual connections.

SGM logistics

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: such as a series about UU Values, or an unusual situation.

Meeting locations may vary, such as:

___ Personal homes

___ Church

___ In person

___ Electronically (Zoom) or Virtual (person/zoom)

Group meetings are scheduled with the Administrator and noted on the *church calendar* but not publicized.

___ Twice/month ___ Once/month

Details for meeting at church.

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

--Space and access are scheduled with the Church Administrator (207-622-3232).

--There are posted instructions in the building.

Additional needs of participants may be addresses by the group itself:

--Communications and technology accessibility, availability.

--Transportation

WHO IS INVOLVED IN SGM?

Small Group Ministry Participants:

Participants bring a positive attitude, as well as a willingness to share and grow. An important expectation is that members give the meetings a priority that provides continuity in the Small Group Ministry program. *Group participants do not need to be members of UUCC.*

There are two covenants that guide group participation. One of them is developed by the participants and describes the expectations that members have of one another. The other is between the group and the larger church community through service.

A Covenant is a promise or guideline for how we are in relationship in the group. Having a covenant makes it easier to describe the group to new members and reminds us of how we want the group to be. A Covenant is reviewed periodically and changed as needs of group members change. Each group develops a covenant that is consistent with the UUCC Covenant.

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 connect with members who may have missed a meeting. They stay in touch with the SGM Committee with changes in the roster. Groups may have two group leaders to share the leadership. The Group Leader(s) keep the SGM Committee updated about the SGM Roster for their group. *This is not a public list. The Group Leader is a member of UUCC.*

Group Facilitator: A Group Participant is the designated facilitator at each meeting. The Facilitator guides the group through the session plan. Facilitation can be done by the leader or shared among the group. As the group evolves, it is common for groups to rotate facilitation among the participants who are willing.

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 opportunities for Small Group Ministry within/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 UUCC, the part SGM has in the church community, and group dynamics and some of the challenges of group development.

The SGM Committee meets with the Group Leaders at least three times a year in addition to planning the SGM Sunday Service. Leaders review how the groups are doing in meeting the goals of SGM.

SGM Group Process: The original plan to grow SGM was to increase groups to a specific size, like ten, then split. The Group Facilitator would become SGM leader for one group and an apprentice facilitator taking the other, and vacancies would be filled in the two split groups. Our experience is that changes in groups have occurred more as people's lives change.

Becoming part of SGM Groups:

--For those interested in participating in SGM, complete the Application for joining Small Group Ministry. This is on the UUCC website (Connections/Small Group Ministry). Or it can be given to the SGM Committee Chair(s).

--Consideration is given to the needs of the groups and the needs of the applicants.

--*The planned length of time for a group is noted when the group is formed.*

--Discussion involves the applicant, the group leader, the SGM committee chair(s), and the minister on request.

--The placement in a group is the responsibility of the SGM Committee Chair(s).

Suggestions:

--That the first meeting of a group with a person considering joining use an introductory Session Plan.

--Likewise, that a closure session plan is suggested when a participant is leaving, for whatever reason.

Changing groups on a planned basis provides opportunity for increased bonding within UUCC, along with welcoming new participants. Groups welcome new members as size and situation allow, which includes growth of the congregation.

HOW A GROUP SESSION WORKS

The Small Group Ministry Session Plan has two key focuses:

--**Creating bonding** and intimacy through check-in and sharing and our covenant.

--**Going Deeper**, stepping onto the spiritual path toward knowing oneself better, growing in understanding of the world and pondering questions of faith.

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

How Topics Are Selected

--Groups decide how to select the session plan and decide on their own order and pace.

--Topics include personal religious histories, spiritual practices, and explorations; life passages, living in all ages; arts, fear, poetry, music and healing, among many others.

--Resources:

Over 225 plans created by UUCC

Over 1300 session plans on the UU SGM Network website

(www.smallgroupministry.net) under Group Session Plans.

--Soul Matters Share Circle background information to develop session plan for theme of the month.

--Other publications by themes for SGM, and by congregations, etc.

Session Plans --Format

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. Groups may light a Chalice or candle 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 reflection questions to 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.

Session Plan: A Universal Publication

We started using Session Plans when Small Group Ministry began at UUCC in 1997.

Note the diversity of people who have written and shared UUism broadly!

What Session Plans have to offer!

--Develop a Session Plan on a topic of interest to the group or individual.

--Suggest using a Session Plan Overview as a guide. (SGM Committee has these.)

How SGM Session Plans differ

--Created by a broad range of people: clergy, laity, SGM participants, writers.

--Designed for groups, session plans can also be used for personal spiritual study.

Suggestion: Each group create a Session Plan for other groups to use.

Service is a key part of the covenant that SGM has with UUCC in serving our congregation and the wider community. SGM participants work with their own groups and others in social justice and social service activities. Some examples of service activity follow.

Services that relate to UUCC:

--Work on buildings/grounds, from plants to renovation in three UUCC buildings

--Hospitality for Fellowship Lunches and Fellowship Hour

--Annual Sunday Morning SGM Service that is sponsored by SGM, with participants from all groups

--Participation and assisting in numerous fundraising activities

Services that started with SGM and have become part of the church structure.

--CLYNK bottles collection through Hannaford, adds to the budget.

--Hannaford Cards, adds to the budget

--Collecting clean/used Rx medicine bottles for an animal shelter.

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Services beyond UUCC

--Various protests, donations and collections

--Involvement in support of numerous social service and social justice organizations.

For more information about Small Group Ministry, look at the UUCC website (www.augustauu.org) under Connections on the banner, and scroll down to SGM section. Small Group Ministry activities started in 1999, after several years of planning.

September 2026, Unitarian Universalist Community Church, Augusta, ME