

Small Group Ministry

SMALL GROUP MINISTRY is a way of introducing UU Women's Heritage to congregations. Sessions have been used at workshops at General Assemblies. This section describes the Small Group Ministry process and includes some session plans. This material has not been updated since 2012.

So what is Small Group Ministry? HOW CAN IT WORK FOR UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST WOMEN'S HERITAGE

Rev. Helen Zidowecki, for Unitarian Universalist Women's Heritage Society

Come to worship – Hear the words of Unitarian Universalist women from our heritage. Hear their challenges, sing their hymns, engage with their struggles. *Come to Small Group Ministry* – Connect with these historic women in listening and telling your own stories in a small group of about 8 people. *Come, take a spiritual journey* – Invite these inspiring women to be part of your life journey and see how their lives and words are leading others on spiritual journeys. *Come and care, come and share* – Yes! The heritage of their lives inspires us to make a difference!

WHAT IS SMALL GROUP MINISTRY?

Gathering in small groups to study Unitarian Universalist Women's Heritage is not new. What we are adding here is the concept of Small Group Ministry. What makes a small group a "ministry group"? The answer lies in the name itself.

- "Small" means a group with a maximum of 8–10 people. Groups of this size provide an opportunity to relate on a more intentional level.
- "Group" is a gathering of individuals, sometimes selected at random, sometimes selected for a specific interest or characteristic. What separates these groups from others is a focus on "ministry."
- "Ministry" is the process or act of caring for another. This relates to the spiritual as well as the physical and emotional well-being of the group participants.

Small Group Ministry provides a *connection with the faith community*. Ministry groups are developed under the sponsorship of the congregation (or district or other Unitarian Universalist group). This connection is essential as we take our spiritual journeys with the support of a faith community. *Service to the congregation or larger community* stem from the call to faith in action that comes from living out of our spiritual journey, and is compelled by our own increasing sense of ministry as part of a growing spiritual life.

FOCUS ON WOMEN'S HERITAGE

The voices, actions and very lives of the women in our Unitarian Universalist heritage inspire us in our lives. Small Group Ministry sessions draw from the words and examples of women from Unitarian Universalist heritage.

The Small Group Ministry session itself is more for reflection on the theme than for discussion of the historic material. These reflections allow participants to share their own stories and to hear the stories of others. The engagement with the material from our heritage provides opportunity for connecting with history as well as with the people in the group. From this also comes a deeper understanding of the impact of history on the lives of women and men and on spiritual journeys.

People are interested in hearing the words, in connecting historical facts, sharing what we know about the history, and hearing the historic stories. We do this by making materials available to participants in other ways, such as by having presentations for exploration of the historical perspective, or by having worship services related to historic women

Many of the Small Group Ministry sessions that are developed on this site will be related to the worship services that are also on this site. There are also a few sessions specifically related to how we view the making and recapturing of history.

A Small Group Ministry group can be focused on the heritage of Unitarian Universalist Women. Also, Small Group Ministry sessions on Unitarian Universalist Women's Heritage can be used as occasional topics by groups.

Session plans are being developed on an ongoing basis. Congregations and individuals are invited to submitted session plans for inclusion on the site, with specific notation. Send comments on the session plans included here, plans to be added to the site to, inquiries about Small Group Ministry itself to

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SMALL GROUP MINISTRY IN GENERAL

The **purpose of the sessions** is to minister to each other as well as to provide opportunity for spiritual growth by

- paying attention/listening to each other's needs and wants, and stories.
- acknowledging that all are "teachers" and all are "learners."
- Encouraging each other and sharing on our spiritual journeys.

Time and frequency of sessions. Small Group Ministry usually involves meeting once and preferably at least twice a month for 2 hours over a period of time.

Size of the group. A major consideration is the size of the group. We connect on a personal level better with small groups. The suggested maximum size is 8, including the facilitators. When the number of participants exceeds this size, and not more than 10, a new group needs to be started in order to preserve the relational aspect.

Develop a covenant or “Guidelines for Being Together” within each group so that the participants have input and expectations are stated in the language of the group. This practice can be a covenant, or promise on how to act, moving from just avoiding disruption and conflict to a way of caring. Developing a covenant should be one of the first sessions of a group, and reviewed when a new person joins the group and at least annually.

Empty Chair symbolizes those who have not yet joined the group or who are absent for some reason. This presents the concept of outreach, that the group needs to remain open to change.

Facilitators are chosen for their interpersonal skills and commitment to the program. Facilitation can also be rotated within the group. The role of the facilitator is to

- Build community in the group, making sure that each person is included, heard, and valued
- Help participants bring their own experiences to the living tradition we share
- Ensure that the group begins and ends on time and maintains its covenant.
- Guide the group through the session outline.
- Makes sure that the tone and feeling of the session is comfortable and inclusive

The facilitator is also a participant in the dialog, but the first consideration of the facilitator is the group process. It is vital that facilitators don't 'lead' too much. They are to be present, to help keep things on track. They may have to move discussions along, but it is the members who “own” the group and have the primary responsibility for its success or failure.

The **format** of the sessions provides a simple structure:

Chalice lighting/opening words gathers people, and sets the time for being together as special. The opening may be:

- Generic, focused on calling the group together or
- Specific related to the topic of the meeting, such as words from historic women.

Check-in allows everyone an opportunity to speak, without interruption. (It may be helpful to set a time for this, such as 2 minutes, with the option of extending the time if needed and if agreed by the group.) Check-in can focus on

- Sharing accomplishments or concerns, highlights in your life since the last session
- Specific theme of the opening words

Passing on sharing is acceptable. Someone who passes may wish to speak after others have shared. Not all sharing is appropriate in the group. When a person needs more discussion, make plans for that outside of the session time.

Topic/Activity provides thoughts or reflective questions for the group to start the *dialogue*. In using dialogue:

- Participants talk about the topic as it relates to them, without being disputed.
- Participants share from their own experience
- Participants can learn from the stories and sharing of others

The development of session topics may be done by the minister, religious educator, advisor or youth, individually or as a group. The critical part of developing the session plans is the manner in which the questions are asked.

- To elicit or impart information is an *educational* approach.
- To engage the individual from their spiritual base and feelings is *ministry*—the focus of the session.

Closing words may be

- Generic, or used for each session
- Related to the topic.

As with the *Opening Words*, the closing words can be from various sources, and are included in established session plans. If a chalice or candle has been lit, it is extinguished now.

Likes/Wishes. Participants have a chance to comment on how the session went for them, and to make suggestions for enhancing the session or the group process. This allows time to review plans for the next session.

More information on Small Group Ministry can be found on various web sites, such as Unitarian Universalist Association Small Group Ministry Network at <http://www.smallgroupministry.net/> You may also request more information by writing to the UUWHS or e-mail to the web site.

1993. Let Us Now Praise Universalist Women

1994. Women Blazing Trails

1995. No service

1996. A Hundred Years Hence

1997. Women and Religion: Deep Roots and Hidden History

1998. They Showed the Way

1999. Women of the West

2000. Women of the South

2001. Voices of Courage

2002. Joining Hands Around the World: Women Making Peace

1. Let Us Now Praise Universalist Women (SGM) *SGM Let Us Now Praise Universalist Women*, 1993
2. Women Blazing Trails (SGM) *SGM Women Blazing Trails*, 1994
3. A Hundred Years Hence (SGM) *SGM A Hundred Years Hence*, 1996
4. Women and Religion: Deep Roots/Hidden History (SGM) *SGM Women and Religion: Deep Roots & Hidden History*, 1997
5. Women of the West (SGM) *SGM Women of the West*, 1999