

Some Questions We've Been Asked about Covenant Group Ministry

1. What is Covenant Group Ministry (CGM)?

CGM is an intentional program designed to create and support a large congregation of small groups.

2. How does it work?

There is a facilitator group that meets once a month. Its function is to enhance the quality of CGM, and to expand the program. Each member of the facilitator group leads his or her own small group. Each of these groups forms around an area of common interest chosen by its members. While the direction of the group grows out of the process, there are several standard components which are important for success:

- Number of members – no more than 10.
- Format – Chalice lighting and reading, check-in, focus activity or discussion, closing.
- 3 Covenants – the group discusses and adopts a set of guidelines to promote trust and cohesiveness. Each group also agrees to perform some type of service for the church, and some service for the wider community.

3. What is the mission of CGM?

- Vision: A growing congregation of small groups.
- Mission: To connect people in groups for meaning, fellowship, study, and service under the guidance of the TUUC, the TUUC Covenant, and the UUA Principles.

4. What is the history of CGM at the TUUC?

In the winter of 1999-2000, a group of TUUC members, led by Rev. Frances Buckmaster, obtained permission from the Board of Trustees to start a CGM pilot project. Since then, there have typically been between 60 and 70 members involved at any given time.

5. It sounds exclusive. Is membership by invitation only?

No. Our goal is to have all interested members and friends participate, and to merit the interest of *all* members and friends. Only the “yes” votes count, and we work to have as many “yes” votes as we can.

6. Why should I participate?

To belong, to find meaning, to promote friendship and learning, to make a difference, and to strengthen Unitarian Universalism.

7. Won't CGM weaken the formal committee structure and function of the church?

People in CGM have served on the Board of Trustees, and in virtually every program and activity that the church offers. It is our belief that CGM results in the connection and commitment that help make committees strong, effective, and rewarding.

8. What is the relationship of CGM to growth?

As churches grow, it can be difficult for new members and friends to find a way to connect, and longstanding members may feel a loss of fellowship. In addition, a growing church is likely to bring in people of ever greater diversity of views. CGM provides a place for fellowship and a place for individual thought and action to be expressed. It is a method for supporting a wide variety of interests and opinions without sacrificing the advantages a larger institution can provide in terms of support, programs, finances, and guidance.

9. I don't like the word “ministry.”

“Ministry” merely means service. In CGM, the members are encouraged to adopt an attitude of mutual service to each other, as well as to the church and the wider community.

10. I don't like religious ritual or ceremony. I don't see how I could tolerate being in a religious small group.

There is a minimal format (or “ritual,” if you will) that establishes an atmosphere of trust among the members of a small group. Beyond this minimal expectation, the level of ceremony and every

other aspect of group life arise from the members of the group itself. In CGM, religion (being connected together again) comes from the two practices of gathering together regularly, and from attentive listening. The group can be extremely "religious," or completely secular, based on expectations discussed within the group.

11. I don't have the time.

Covenant Group Ministry is a grassroots process to help us decide what we really want and to encourage us to act individually and together on the basis of that want. Do we have time *not* to do CGM?

12. What is the relationship of CGM to UUism?

In some ways, UUism is a gathering of concerned people using the best tools they have to put the demands of their highest aspirations into action. This is a very important and noble cause in a world that badly needs this kind of work to be done without restraint by ideological, commercial, or popular cultural interests. Covenant Group Ministry is one of the greatest tools we have to draw people into Unitarian Universalism, and to inspire and support them as they do important work.

13. This sounds really boring.

As with many of the important things in life, the description is no substitute for the experience. Persistence and tenacity in creating a small group can result in enormous rewards.

14. How did CGM start in our denomination?

I quote Rev. Bob Hill: "In 1997, the Rev. Frances Buckmaster, soon after she became interim minister in Portland, Maine, took the Rev. Glenn Turner aside at a minister's gathering and, as if replaying a scene from "The Graduate," whispered into his ear, "I have only two words for you – meta church." Dustin Hoffman's character got only one word of advice from an older friend, and the movie gives no indication that "plastics" changed his life. Turner, however, who was District Minister for the Northeast District of the UUA at that time, took Buckmaster's message to heart and spread it to the Rev. Calvin Dame and the Augusta, Maine, congregation, and to me. None of us have been the same since." For those who don't know her, Rev. Buckmaster served as an interim minister at the TUUC in 1999. Thus, she started a movement on both coasts, almost simultaneously. We believe that CGM is even better than plastics.

15. How can I find out more about Covenant Group Ministry?

Everything you need to know to start is in the CGM brochure, which lists additional resources on the topic. It is posted at the TUUC website under "church groups" along with links to other resources. If you have additional questions, please contact Mark Backus, 759-5978, backusm@harbournet.com.

16. I'm interested in becoming a leader. What should I do?

Join the Leadership Group. The key to expanding CGM is more leaders. We would be pleased to help train anyone who is interested in starting a group. It isn't hard! If you think you may be interested, contact Mark Backus. We meet on the first Sunday of every month after the service. We ask for a commitment to attend every meeting as faithfully as possible. We also ask every member to start their own covenant group as soon as they think they are ready. You will receive a packet to help you get started, as well as encouragement from the rest of the crew.