

First UU Small Group Ministry Guidelines

Overview: A healthy, vital UU community is made up of people who are deeply connected to the spiritual, intellectual, caring, social, and service aspects of the UU movement and our own congregation. Like many UU churches across the country, First UU's Small Group Ministry supports these connections through **intentional** practice.



All First UU members and friends have the opportunity to be part of a group of 8-10 people who will meet regularly at the church or in homes to engage in:

Spiritual seeking - To deepen our spiritual lives and build on the benefits we receive from our regular worship services.

Community building - To foster positive connections among newer and long-time members of our congregation.

Ministry -To extend the ministry at First UU by caring for and ministering to one another.

Intellectual exploration -To expand our understanding of the world and ways to demonstrate our UU principles in our lives.

Living our values -To engage in service projects to benefit the church community, the neighborhood, or the larger society.

All groups are led by facilitators who are First UU members.

The Covenant Group Ministry program is an ongoing, church-wide engagement that involves the minister and staff, and all members and friends of our congregation. Its purpose is to help us better realize our mission as a religious community.

Expectations for Groups and Group Members

Regular meetings: Small Groups usually meet for one and a half to two hours per month. Some groups meet twice. The location may be at the church or in member homes.

Confidentiality. Meetings provide a safe environment for members to share their deepest thoughts. Groups make a covenant to keep confidential what is shared in the group.

Attendance. Group members make attendance at all Small Group meetings a high priority in their lives. If a member cannot attend a particular meeting, he or she is expected to notify the facilitator in advance.

Follow a format. Although each group develops its own preferences over time, all groups will include these basic activities: opening ritual, check-in, program/discussion, and closing ritual.

Open membership. In January and August new members may be added to existing groups. An “empty chair” at Small Group meetings is a great way to symbolize the group’s openness and welcome to new members.

Covenant. Each group develops a Covenant Statement that serves as the foundation for the Group’s practice.

Service. Each group will be expected to undertake at least two service projects a year, one for the congregation and one in the larger community.

What Covenant Group Ministry is intended to offer participants:

- A way to deepen our spirituality through shared practice.
- A way to come together to explore important and interesting topics.
- A way to deepen our connections with the congregation.
- A way to organize and practice service to the larger community.
- A way to connect across age, gender, ethnic, economic, and other differences.
- A way to help newer members engage with our community.
- A way to explore and deepen our practice of our shared UU principles.
- A way to be engaged, included, and heard in a safe, nurturing environment.

What Covenant Group Ministry is not intended to be:

- A social club, although ties between church members deepen through SGM.
- A debate society, although many important topics are discussed.
- A support or therapy group, although the atmosphere is positive.
- A worship service, although there is a strong spiritual aspect to the meeting structure and topics.
- A rigid template of activities, although there are general guidelines to follow.
- A closed “fraternity,” although groups must be limited in size to be effective.

Go with the flow. Group formation is based on the first UU principle honoring the worth and dignity of every person, and is intended to connect people across age, gender, ethnic, and other differences. Although it is understandable to gravitate toward a group that includes friends and people with whom we have much in common, People in Small Group programs around the denomination say that the most rewarding experiences result from meeting with people unlike themselves.