

Welcome, New Covenant Group Member!

Here's some basic information to help you get acquainted with Small Group Ministries. If you have any questions or concerns at any time, please contact me:

Facilitator: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Philosophy

Our first priorities in church life are to walk with and to support one another on our various religious journeys - - and to **care for one another**. To commit our energies to maintain this religious community in all it's many facets. Especially our **Covenant Groups**, which are units of 6-10 people that meet once a month for 2-1/2 hours convivial sharing and celebration. Each group has its own facilitator(s). The facilitators meet regularly, in their covenant group, under the guidance of the minister.

Our hope is that almost everyone in the church will be served by a covenant group, and along with Sunday Worship, along with participation in other areas of the church life, you will find your participation in a covenant group to be foundational to our common spiritual endeavor.

Goals of a Covenant Group - to develop a growing network of Covenant Groups that:

1. Draw us into mutual ministry.
2. Strengthen our congregation by contributing to its growth and health.
3. Deepen our understanding of Unitarian-Universalist principles and values.
4. Continuously develop lay leadership.
5. Challenge us to action and spiritual growth.
6. Express our principles and values in the community.
7. Help members identify their own calling, expression of and participation in lay ministry.

What will you gain from participating in a Covenant Group?

Covenant Groups are a unique experience that differs from Adult Religious Education, study groups, Neighborhood groups, social networks, support groups, or anything else you do at church or in the community. It will give you the opportunity to:

1. Discover what you really value, and express those values in your actions.
2. Participate in an open, supportive, nurturing environment that promotes and facilitates spiritual growth and mutual, interactive care for one another.
3. Search and grow at your own pace and in your own way through telling your story, learning, loving others, and contributing yourself and your resources.
4. Feel affirmed and accepted.
5. Experience a high level of caring and intimacy.
6. Identify and use your spiritual gifts.
7. Develop an expanded circle of friends.

What should you expect in a Covenant Group Session?

Opening Ritual to draw us together as UU in spiritual search.

Opening Check-in Each person, in turn, speaks about the concerns of her/his life – by way of responding to a question such as, “What have you thought about most consistently this week?” or “What do you need to leave behind for a couple of hours in order to be fully present here?”

Reading and Discussion (Roughly half the time) With an emphasis more on sharing and all being heard rather than debate, the group talks about topics chosen with an eye toward current church life, Unitarian Universalist values and principles and general philosophical/religious interest. The discussion will be based upon a topic introduced by a reading.

- a) Sharing/Deep Listening: Each member shares his or her thoughts on the topic. There is no crosstalk, feedback, or discussion; the other members engage in active listening. Members speak whenever they are ready, in any order, and sometimes pause in-between to allow the previous speaker's ideas to be absorbed.
- b) Discussion: Some sessions include a brief period for discussion after all have shared. This is not a debate, but it gives you a chance to bring up ideas that might have occurred to you as others shared. Members are asked to be brief and supportive in their remarks.
- c) Occasionally, a special situation in a member's life needs to be acknowledged with a short session called a Life Ritual. This is usually done at the end of a regular session. We have several rituals for both good and sad occurrences. The leader will explain when this is appropriate.

Break This is a time of transition from the discussion to the business portion of the covenant group meeting.

The Business This is a time to deal with group process and maintenance concerns like creating openings, transitioning and ending rituals; selecting and planning a service project that a covenant has committed itself to do for the church or community at large; how to prepare for the birthing of new groups when one group becomes two; bringing snacks; etc. It is also an opportunity for the members of the group to share their likes about the day's session, to thank one another for their comments (sharing) and to express wishes for future topics, use of specific readings, etc.

Closing Check-out each person is given an opportunity to share their likes about today's session and wishes for future sessions as the meeting draws to an end.

Closing Reading or Ritual and extinguishing the Chalice

Do you have to participate in every element of the session?

No. The check-in, readings, sharing, and discussion optional. But our reason for being in a covenant group is to grow—in our personal lives, our spirituality, our commitment to the church, and our ability to minister to each other. The more you do and say, the better your experience, and the better the group members understand who you are, your values, your beliefs and your needs. Sometimes, you may not feel like participating and it is okay to pass. If this happens on a regular basis and it diminishes your participation, please talk to the facilitator(s) about what can be done to create a more satisfying experience for you.

Is the sharing confidential?

Yes, we covenant to maintain the privacy of one another outside the group. A group member is free to share about their own experience but agrees that one must not share anything about another participant without their explicit permission to do so. This also includes discussing with a covenant group member about what they did share without their permission in the group and outside the group. There are times when we share in the group but do not wish any further discussion about it.

What should you do if you have to miss a session?

Contact the facilitator ahead of time by phone (preferred) or by email as soon as you are able.

What should you do if you have a concern about your group?

It's always best to talk to your facilitator first. You may also contact Rev. Chester McCall @ 215.840.6656 or by email @ minister@uurestoration.us

Who develops the content for the sessions?

The minister(s) writes and distributes the curriculum for the facilitator(s) use. If you have any comments on the content, or would like to work on a topic, please contact your covenant group facilitator. We welcome your input and topic ideas.

How long will your group stay together?

We have a policy called the "open chair," which symbolizes our readiness to share this wonderful experience with new people. New members will be added to a group until it reaches 10 and no more than 12 members. Groups of 10-12 members will give "birth," or spawn a new group becoming two separate groups. In this way we accomplish the underlying purpose of the Covenant Group Process which is to strengthen and deepen the entire community of Restoration. The splitting and birthing of new groups as our existing groups reach capacity is a part of our commitment to the growth and health of our whole church community. The birthing and spawning of new groups will be acknowledged with a ceremony and celebration that is determined by each covenant group for it is a time for joyful anticipation of new relationships and recognition of the group's success in building a stronger community.

Once a year in February all covenant groups will recreate themselves and participants will sign up for new groups. We started our covenant groups February 2008.

Each group member is expected to make certain commitments to**1. *The group***

- a. Maintain basic UU principles.
- b. Fully participate as you are able and in your own mode of expression.
- c. Be present in mind, body, and spirit.
- d. Be open to knowing others; be open to knowing yourself.
- e. One person speaks at a time, while all others listen respectfully.
- f. Maintain confidentiality.
- g. Minister to each other.
- h. Welcome new members to the group.
- i. Commit to attend meetings.
- j. Begin and end meetings on time.
- k. Let the leader and/or co-leader know when you cannot attend.

2. *The church*

- a. Participants in covenant groups should share, as appropriate, their experience with new members and others interested in covenant groups.
- b. Commitment to doing a group community project(s). It is believed that working, as a group on community projects will enhance the covenant group experience.

The group is expected to make certain commitments to each member:

1. To share our religious selves
2. To provide the opportunity to be heard.
3. To allow members to “pass” if they choose.
4. To care for one another
5. To maintain the integrity meeting structure
6. To attend faithfully our monthly meetings
7. To maintain the privacy of one another outside the group
8. To participate in the group service project
9. To accept joyfully the eventual division of the group.

The responsibilities of facilitators are:

1. Gather the group. Explain the rules and responsibilities of group members when a group is forming and meeting for the first time. Also remind group of responsibilities as required (such as when a new member joins).
2. Promote awareness of the programs, activities, and governance of the church.
3. Attend monthly Facilitator Gatherings.
4. Facilitate the group process and interactions of group members, including defining the topic such that there is a meeting focus.
5. Encourage and facilitate the group’s stages, including adding members, releasing members, and birthing new groups.
6. Encourage mutual care-giving.
7. Call group members when they miss a meeting or do not call into state they are not attending.
8. Contact minister(s) when the leader has knowledge of a situation requiring support beyond the scope of the covenant group.
9. Keep meetings on track: Gently intervene when a member talks too long. Encourage quiet members to speak or ask for opinions as appropriate. Keep track of time (or have someone else help track time) for each section or portion of the meeting.
10. Look for potential new members for the group and invite them to participate in the covenant group program.
11. Look for potential new facilitators within the group and within the congregation to recommend to the minister(s) for consideration. All recommended facilitators must be members of First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Diego.

Facilitators may not:

1. Allow the group to function as a therapy session. (A therapy group focuses on advice giving and personal problem solving.)
2. Promote philosophies that are contrary to UU principles and values.
3. Allow disrespectful behavior within the group.
4. Use the group as a platform for the leader’s own perspective.
5. Dominate the group