

COMMUNITY UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH

Participant's Guide to *Covenant Groups*

PURPOSE: The *Covenant Group* Program is part of the Church's ministry. *Covenant Groups* encourage people in their spiritual growth and help them develop relationships of substance and depth. The subject matter of *Covenant Groups* is the members' lives. *Covenant Groups* are a religious and spiritual practice of right relationship among the members and between the *Groups* and our Church.

Description

Covenant Groups have 6 -10 members and are led by trained lay people. *Groups* meet twice a month in group members' homes. Meetings last 1.5-2 hours.

Covenant Groups serve to enrich our community with the sort of conversation and attentiveness that can be difficult in the busy life of a congregation. Group members listen to each other, but don't attempt to solve each other's problems. They are not therapy or encounter groups. Each group makes and abides by a covenant that defines the group's relationship to the church and to each other. The covenant includes listening without interrupting, starting and ending on time, regular attendance, and confidentiality.

Covenant Group members are supportive of each other, but *Covenant Groups* are not support groups. When a member is in need, the other group members may provide assistance as a way of connecting with each other. The Caring Committee or Minister can fill in as needed. *Covenant Groups* are part of a religious community—the *Church*. *Groups* are expected to take on two service projects each year for the church and/or the larger community.

Session plans are provided for each meeting. Some topics are spiritual in nature (joy, trust, faith, prayer); others reflect universally human themes (mentors, loss, forgiveness, humor). Members respond to the topic questions by sharing personal experiences. *Covenant Groups* are not study groups or debate teams. The focus is on respectful listening, reflection, and creative interchange among group members.

Pilot Group Sessions:

We will begin a Pilot Program of *Covenant Groups* that will run from March through May 2009. Registration will occur in mid-February, 2009, and group assignments will be made by the last week in February. In placing people in groups, the primary consideration is the day and time the participant is available. As new people sign up, they are welcomed into a group that has openings.

Format of a *Covenant Group* Meeting

1. Opening Reading & Ritual – chalice lighting, for example.
2. Check-in - members share something of personal significance. It's OK to pass.
3. Discussion - topics include love, forgiveness, gratitude, mentors, faith, etc.
4. Check-out – a brief statement of how members experienced the session.
5. Housekeeping – logistics of the next meeting; service activity discussion.
6. Closing Reading & Ritual – extinguish chalice.

Expectations of a Pilot Program *Covenant Group* participant

1. To commit to participation.
2. To give attendance at *Covenant Group* meetings a high priority.
3. To commit to listening to other group members.
4. To participate in developing and confirming of the group's covenant.
5. To give church attendance a high priority.

For more information: *Covenant Groups* Implementation Team: Donna Bening, Paul Gandy, Amanda Miller, Bill Snell, and led by Reverend Patrick Price.