



SMALL GROUP MINISTRY
FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH OF SAN JOSE

Welcome, New 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 either of your group leaders:

Leader: _____ Co-leader: _____
Phone: _____ Phone: _____
Email: _____ Email: _____

What will you gain from participating in Small Group Ministries?

Small Group Ministries is a unique experience that differs from Adult Religious Education, study 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.

We hope it will soon become an important part of your life.

What should you expect in a Small Group Ministries session?

- 1) Each session has a Preparation, which is distributed by the leader ahead of time. It contains an explanation of the topic, 4-5 questions or exercises, and some related quotes. You choose whichever questions or exercises are relevant to you.
- 2) Each session has an Order of Worship somewhat like what we follow in Sunday service. Here's what is similar: lighting the chalice, readings, silence, simple singing, and closing/extinguishing the chalice.
- 3) Here's what's different:
 - a) Check-in: Each member has 1-2 minutes to share the high or low point of his or her life that week. There's no discussion or crosstalk during this time.
 - b) Reading Round-the-Circle and Readings From the Common Bowl: Sometimes we include a text that is read in parts by each member in turn, or quotes from small pieces of paper that are passed around.
 - c) Sharing/Deep Listening: Each member has about 5 minutes to share 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.
 - d) Discussion: Some sessions include a brief period for discussion after all have shared. This is not 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.

- e) **Feedback:** Sometimes we ask for members to provide brief, specific feedback to others about their sharing, always of a positive nature.
 - f) Additional elements are explained by the leader or described in the Order of Worship.
- 4) 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.

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

No, the Preparation, check-in, readings, sharing, discussion, and feedback are optional. But our reason for being in SGM 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's understanding of you and your needs. Sometimes, you may not feel like participating, but if that happens on a regular basis, please talk to the leader(s) about what can be done to create a more satisfying experience.

Is the sharing confidential?

No, unless a member specifically asks that something is kept confidential.

How long are the sessions?

Usually, we plan for around 90 minutes. The leaders have a schedule in their notes. It's really important to be respectful of time to make sure everyone has the chance to share equally. Some groups even use timers or watches to help them stay on track.

What are the responsibilities of the leaders?

The leaders are providing a service to the members, not leading groups in a traditional sense. Their responsibilities are to organize the group, facilitate the sessions and keep them on track, handle any problems, facilitate group transitions (such as adding new members or members leaving), and minister to the group members in a variety of ways. If you're ever interested in leading a group, please talk to Julia Rodriguez for more information and an application.

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

Try to contact the leader or co-leader ahead of time, if you can. Please make a commitment to attend as many sessions as possible.

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

It's always best to talk to the leader and/or the co-leader first. You may also contact Small Group Ministries Council members Jennie Larson or Julia Rodriguez.

Who develops the content for the sessions?

The Content Team writes and distributes the content to the leaders. If you have any comments on the content, or would like to work on a topic, please contact Julia Rodriguez. We welcome your input.

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. Usually new members will be added to a group once or twice a year. Members generally stay in a group for a year or so, then they may choose to move to another group or perhaps lead a new group. Sometimes groups of 10-12 members will split, or "birth," into two separate groups. Your group will have a chance to discuss and decide on any major changes together.