



Small Group Ministry – Building Blocks for UCC/Scripted  
December 11, 2022 10am In Person  
Order of Service

Worship Associate: Sara Hodgkins

Musician: Stefanie Barley

Worship Leaders/SGM Committee: Linda Findlay, Helen Zidowecki, Judy Gallant  
(Helen did not attend in person, due to illness. Linda read her parts.)

Technical Assistance: John Seksay

|                             |                 |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| <b>Pre-service Music</b>    | Stefanie Barley |
| <b>Inviting the Silence</b> | Sara            |
| <b>Prelude</b>              | Stefanie        |

|                         |      |
|-------------------------|------|
| <b>Chalice Lighting</b> | Sara |
|-------------------------|------|

“May the stories we share feed our souls and increase the meaningful connections that abound with our small group ministries.”

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| <b>Opening Words:</b> | Cheryl Ring |
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| <b>Hymn 354 We Laugh, We Cry</b> | Sara |
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| <b>Reading: Twenty-Five years and Ten Services!</b> | Linda Findlay |
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| <b>Building Blocks Introduction and Sharing</b>        | Helen                       |
| Speakers are asked to introduce themselves.            |                             |
| First Sharing           Groups, Growth                 | Jean Sizelove, Mary Shifman |
| Second Sharing       Intimacy, Ultimacy, Accessibility | Rachel Small                |

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| <b>Offering</b> | Sara |
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| Third Sharing           Intimacy, Service, Accessibility                        | Derek Goodwin             |
| Fourth Sharing       Poem   | Stefanie Barley and group |
| Fifth Sharing       Covenant  | Marilyn Dunn              |
| Reflections    Aimee O’Connor reading for Michael Conley; Linda for Gary Chapin |                           |

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| <b>Hymn 360 Here We Have Gathered</b> | Sara |
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| <b>Building Blocks Together</b> | Altar Builders |
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| <b>Building Blocks in Our Future</b> | Judy Gallant |
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| <b>Hymn 346 Come, Sing a Song With Me</b> | Sara Hodgkins |
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| <b>Closing words:</b> | Michaela Loisel, UCC Board President |
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| <b>Extinguishing the chalice</b> | Sara     |
| <b>Postlude</b>                  | Stefanie |
| <b>Announcements</b>             | Sara     |

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**Ingathering Music** Stefanie

**Welcome** Sara

**Inviting the Silence** Sara

**Prelude** Stefanie

**Chalice Lighting -** Sara

“May the stories we share feed our souls and increase the meaningful connections that abound in our small group ministries.”

**Opening Words:** Cheryl Ring  
*Cheryl gave brief notes about the beginning of Small Group Ministry and the role of UUCC here and in wider UU community before the opening words.*

We began by studying the dynamics and potential of the small group ministry.

We saw small group ministry as part of shared ministry.

We created groups that were open to new members and that evolved as group members changed.

We created time for sharing life issues and deeper spiritual journeys.

We committed financially to the sustainability of the program.

We shared with the broader Unitarian Universalist community and have made our program public!

Small group ministry has rapidly spread throughout our movement. It meets the needs for intimacy and spiritual growth. As we have transformed this congregation, so have we been leaders and shapers of this movement.

**Hymn 354 We Laugh, We Cry** Sara

**Reading: Twenty-Five Years and Ten Services!** Linda

Small Group Ministry started at UUCC in 1997. As we are going through transition in our community, it is timely to consider anew the role of Small Group Ministry, including changes over the years in the *congregation* and in the *Small Group Ministry model itself*. We are looking at what having this ministry provides to us individually and to our congregation. We are also looking at *what makes Small Group Ministry different from other aspects of church life*.

Many of the contributions of Small Group Ministry focus on relationships and how they are 'broadened', 'strengthened' and 'deepened' by participation. Qualities of Small Group Ministry have permeated our church culture, most notably an increase in civility at committee and membership meetings since we began this practice. Some unlikely friendships have developed through group participation. We have become clearer about what being a Unitarian Universalist means to us and learned to speak up about it in many settings. The opportunity to minister to one another through group participation is a gift for both giver and receiver. We are

grateful for the ability and willingness of groups to welcome and integrate those who are new to our community.

We have two specific notations this morning:

First, we have been working with Small Group Ministry for 25 years, from planning through implementation. Those who were involved in the very beginning and still in the area are welcome to stand, wave if in the sanctuary or put a note in the chat. ...[People whose names are in bold are still connected in some way with UUCC.]

**Cheryl Ring, Stefanie Barley, Harold Burnett; Susan Burnett; Lynne Caswell; Gary Chapin; Charlene Cleven;** Bill Galbraith; Carolyn Galbraith; **Jane Gilbert; Glenn Hodgkins;** and Nancy Niven

We started tracking who participated in Small Group Ministry a few years ago and we have a listing of at least 200 individuals. Not all are still connected with UUCC for a variety of reasons. But let's see who is here today:

--Those who are in a group, please stand, wave, or put a note in the chat.

--Many are connected with UUCC but not presently in a group. If you are in that status, please stand, wave or put a note in the chat.

--Those who are interested in being in a group, please see Linda Findlay or Helen Zidowecki.

Second, the first notation of Sunday services by Small Group Ministry that we have found was 2008, and today is the tenth SGM service. The groups themselves are a critical part of these services and you will be hearing from them this morning.

**Building Blocks [See Small Group Ministry Building Bocks at end of script.]** Altar Builders

The material from 25 years of SGM at UUCC repeatedly refers to what we have been calling '*elements*' of our Small Group Ministry. Today at UUCC we are talking about '*building blocks*' or core pieces within our congregational structure.

And then comes the question: Could the Small Group Ministry '*elements*' be the '*building blocks*' to enhance UUCC community as we move into the future? Let's see.

We have been considering a dozen key building blocks with the distinct characteristics:

*A building block is a unit or separate part that combines with another to create something else; it does not work on its own. The strength of a building block enhances the effectiveness of other building blocks.*

We are using blocks from Lifespan Faith Formation. Each one has the word of a Small Group Ministry element/building block. You will note some on the altar table: Small, Group, Ministry.

The Building Blocks are noted in the insert in the order of service, with comments on the importance of the building block. These are supplemented by the presentations from the SGM groups. As groups share this morning, blocks will be added to the altar. We won't talk about all of the Building Blocks and some blocks may be covered in more than one presentation.

Speakers are asked to introduce themselves.

**First Sharing: Thursday Morning:** *Groups, Growth* (Helen Zidowecki, Leader)

Jean Sizelove We are considering the Building Blocks of Group and Growth.

*"Group" Meeting once or twice a month over several months or years helps us connect newcomers to the church community and celebrate life's milestones. Diversity such as age, gender and sexual orientation, background, experience, spiritual orientation, and abilities broadens the group experience. We determine our meeting arrangements, session plans, service, and special activities.*

We were not the first group to organize. That was in April 1999, and we began in August 2000. Three of us are still with the group. Others joined us soon after, some have been with the group for a few years and some are fairly new. Of the over 200 people who have participated in SGM at UUCC, about 20 have been part of the Thursday AM group at one time or another—even though we have not always met on Thursdays. People change groups for a number of reasons. Several members have died or moved. Some had changes in work or family schedules, other circumstances or to know more people more intimately. Their situations may change so that they may join their original or another group again.

Groups are not static. Groups change each time members change. In fact, groups are somewhat different each time we meet because of the experiences since our last meeting. Groups are living entities. We change our ways of being together, such as adding special trips or meals. As you hear our sharing this morning, we have ways of making our groups unique within the parameters of Small Group Ministry overall.

Mary Shifman *“Growth” There is a chance to see what is of concern, what’s going on in the world, how we think about things and what we might do. We challenge ourselves. We participate, may lead sessions, represent our group in SGM joint meetings, develop skills and confidence within and beyond the group. Growth occurs when we feel supported.*

Small Group Ministry encourages *growth* among its members. When new people join a group, we take time to introduce ourselves, to tell our stories, how we got to UUCC or where we are spiritually. Each time that we tell our stories, we are at different places, such as from “I came to UUCC because I no longer believed the faith of my childhood” to adding and “now I am exploring Goddess, or Buddhism or ……” – you name it!

Our group’s preparation for this service was a growth experience. It was suggested that each group use the session plan “Building Blocks for UUCC”. After looking at the chart of the building blocks that came with the session plan, one person stated that she could not relate to it. There were definitions and descriptions -- and we were not the only ones to have expressed concern. Well, we set the chart aside—actually turned over so we could not see it -- and took about ten minutes for each of us write to “What SGM means to me.” The responses were collected and arranged according to the various building blocks. We had alluded to most of the blocks in our listings—in terms that were personal. Indeed, we suggested that the focus be changed from the institutional language that was used in the original Small Group Ministry in the chart to the more relational notations of the Building Block chart that is an insert in the order of service this morning.

So the growth shown in the process includes the assurance and comfort to challenge and change what had been “traditional”, to take the time (several meetings) to process change –which indeed does take time and energy—and the trust to express ourselves within a group, to be heard and to hear each other. And we can only count on change. It is a testimony to the church community that we are able to grow into knowing how to change. So we draw your attention to the Building Blocks of Group and Growth this morning. Thank you.

**Second Sharing: Time varies**      *Accessibility*      (Hannah Faulkner, Leader)

Rachel Small Our Small Group has decided on the Building Block Accessibility:

Accessibility according to the chart:

*We consider and respect the needs of each member—mobility, sensory concerns, allergies, time commitments, economics, etc. We are concerned about who is or can be included. Who may not be able to participate or may not be comfortable in a group or mentioning a concern? What assistance is needed for participation or alternatives? We are encouraged to share our needs so that we may participate.*

There is a definition of Accessibility to add to this which is the quality of being easily understood or appreciated.

For the group to get together it needs to be easily available; easy to get to. Some people don't drive and therefore need a ride. This group has always taken into account the limitations of each member. And has worked around those limitations by finding a time that works for all and/or a ride so we can all be together. Recently, our group has been meeting online because it is more convenient for us with our busy lives.

When our present leader first heard about small group ministry in the 1990's, she decided that she already was working on enough church committees. She thought that joining a small group would be too much, so she refrained from joining any group. Then, in 2010, she learned that a friend was starting a small group. She decided to become a member and found that the accessibility and other building blocks worked well for her. She has found her small group rewarding for the past 12 years!

Another member of our group has participated in several small groups over the years, some of which have disbanded. The strengths of this small group is that we are all present for one another and that there is true caring which makes it easier to be part of the group. Because the group is small, there is also a great deal of flexibility that makes the group accessible to all of us. We have experimented with the online programs that we've used to make participation easier for all of us.

## Offering

Sara

**Third Sharing** Monday afternoons *Intimacy, Service, Accessibility* (Derek Goodwin, Leader)

Ellis McKeen Men's Group Sharing for service 12/11/2022

Our group is named the Ellis McKeen Men's Group in honor and memory of one of our founding members. At the time, few men were participating in Small Group Ministry, and the men's group has been flourishing since its founding. Ellis was a gentle, generous and very funny participant who freely shared with us the wisdom and experience of a lifetime.

I would like to relate my own journey to the Ellis McKeen group. I was attending the UU church on Allen Avenue in Portland. They had a dinner to recruit new small group members and my partner at the time and I each joined a group. My group had both male and female members. Unfortunately, the group was experiencing the loss of several long-time members, due to other commitments and moving away, and then I moved away to the Augusta area myself to take a new job. We found the UUC and since I had had a good experience with my former group, I asked to join a SG and got assigned to the Men's Group. This works well for me as I am the only active member who is still working a full time job, being the youngest at age 60, and the group meets in the evening, probably because the group has been in existence for many years and so others in the group used to have a full time job.

We selected 3 building blocks to discuss: *Bonding—Intimacy, Going Deeper—Ultimacy, and Accessibility*.

*Bonding - Intimacy.* We often spend a good portion of the meeting on the check-in, sometimes as much time as for the topic. In this way we get to know each other on a more personal basis. One member suggested recently that he would like us to meet once in a while outside of our regular meeting perhaps for a meal and to just enjoy each other's company. One topic that is rather consistent is updates on medical conditions, as most of us are of a certain age...well I guess that I am as well now. Of course we keep everything discussed confidential.

*Going Deeper - Ultimacy.* The way that our group operates is that we take turns selecting a topic to discuss. The topic is often found in the UU SGM session library, but sometimes we make up our own topic. Sometimes it is politics, other times it may be a lesson in meditation, or how the love of our pets helps us cope with life. The

person presenting the topic also acts as the leader of the SG for the session. My role of leader is mostly just administrative. We share leadership equally regarding the presentation of topics.

*Accessibility.* We have one member who is always remote as he moved away and no longer participated until the pandemic forced us onto Zoom, and he is now a regular attendee as we have embraced the hybrid model, using the OWL in the Fellowship Hall. Another member moved during the pandemic and usually participates via Zoom as he dislikes driving at night. During the pandemic we wanted to meet in person and so met during the daytime rather than our usual evening time in Capitol Park sitting in lawn chairs. We did this in 2020 and 2021. Toward the end of 2021 we met in the UCC Garden so that we could take advantage of the wi-fi so that we could hold hybrid meetings. Zoom also allows us to meet when inclement weather would have caused a cancelation in the past.

**Fourth Sharing**      Wednesday Morning      Poem      (Stefanie Barley, Leader)

Here is the poem from our Wednesday morning SGM group, written by Martha Pelletier, following up on a group conversation from which she gleaned some of the ideas:

When life turns bitter cold  
The warmth of our church welcomes us.  
Around the flame we gather,  
kindred souls from many roads,  
to hear the old wisdom  
to sing sacred songs  
to share a joy or sorrow,  
to recognize each other in ourselves.

Yet some have ventured further, deeper still  
Into the recessed room of Small Group Ministry.  
Within this space, a holy flame now beckons  
A few souls gather, gently leaning in....  
    To sparking joy  
    To smoldering grief  
    To the daily fare and foibles  
    We call life.

The sacred trust we feel,  
forged in moments, over years,  
Cradles us, enfolds us,  
And from this sacred vessel, hearts' truth flows.  
The good shines even brighter once it's told  
The worst rests ever lighter when it's shared,  
And somehow, once again when we depart,  
The world's a softer place  
And so's my heart.  
    Stefanie, Martha, Nancee, Judy, Angie, Ken, Carolyn

**Fifth Sharing**      *Covenant*      Marilyn Dunn

Good Morning My name is Marilyn Dunn and I've been a member of the church since 2006. I did not raise my hand to speak at this service but when the last block, *covenant*, remained unclaimed, orphaned as it was, I was asked to take it on. I agreed with much grumbling since I would much rather deal with the real world and be

busy doing stuff than sitting still and thinking. That is why I am on the Building and Grounds Committee and not the Worship Committee.

Turns out I am so glad I said yes because it forced me to sit quietly and ponder a concept, which is one reason I joined SGM in the first place. And as it turns out that the Covenant Block is the perfect block for me because a covenant focuses on doing not thinking. So here is the summation of my musings.

Unlike the statement of the seven UU principles that we agree to "support and promote", very vague verbs — a SGM covenant commits the members to engage in specific actions and not engage in other action/behaviors with respect to interaction with each other. The covenant requires the members actually *do something* specific to support values held in common. But I realize now that in order for a covenant to be clear it should state both Value and Action. Our covenant will be reviewed at our January meeting and clearly needs work as it currently only lists Actions.

For instance, under ATTENDANCE our covenant would be clearer and more meaningful if it started with a value statement:

*Because we respect the value of each other's time and our time together, each participant will make a good faith effort to attend all sessions. If someone is unable to make it, they will let someone else know*

We have a caption CONFIDENTIALITY that implies that SGM meetings are confidential. It would be clearer to say

*Because intimacy is based on trust, all meetings are confidential.*

Like the concept of check-in, the concept of covenant is spreading within our church. The Finance Committee, of which I am a member, is in the process of writing a covenant. There have been murmurings of a congregational covenant. I'm excited that the concept of covenant is spreading as I am all for specific *actions* that support values.

Michael Conley, *Service* read by Aimee O'Connor

At the core of each Small Group is our covenant, an agreement created by its members, to govern the behavior and expectations each member can rely upon. Among the most important are confidentiality and mutual respect. The most vital, however, may be *service*.

One of the challenges for many of our small groups is to realize that they are part of a larger entity. Meetings take place either on-line, in person, or a combination of the two. Often this can lead to a sense of isolation from the congregation.

This is where the service component enters and why it is crucial in reminding each group and its members that they are part of the UUCC and Augusta, Maine, community. These service projects can occur once or twice a year and can involve improving the physical plant of the church. Or they can be hospitality for a visiting UU contingent, as our group performed some years ago.

Gary Chapin, read by Linda Findlay

Good morning, I've got flu. It's not COVID, but you'll still be glad I stayed home. There's a short list of things I keep in my mind of important things I have done that are meaningful, fulfilling, and have maybe brought joy into the world—places where I have been, in John Coltrane's phrase, "a force for good."

I include having kids on that list, of course, but also becoming a teacher, serving as the board president here, taking up the accordion. During the pandemic I wrote a book about education and justice, AND I started an international online accordion orchestra called the Free Reed Liberation Orchestra. These things are on my list of meaningful things I've done.

Also on the list is being on the committee that created Small Group here at UUCA. So many holes in the memory, but:

I remember

Glenn Turner giving a sermon about small groups here back when this room was windowless and faced East. I remember Calvin either on the same day or shortly after putting out an all call, “Anyone interested in looking into these ideas ...” I always say yes to things like that because I’m a nerd, but I really had found Glenn’s sermon fascinating.

I remember about 25 people being involved. I’m willing to be wrong about this, but that’s what I remember. And it was a pretty intense process that went on for months.

We watched a lot of videos from a very conservative Baptist church. And heard the phrase, “People come here for connection and we give them committee meetings.”

I remember thinking that I actually enjoyed committee meetings.

We formed small groups. I was a leader on one of them.

Then I had a sort of breakdown (I’m not suggesting it’s connected to the Small Group work) and had to drop out as my life fell apart.

BUT this thing that I had helped build, my little part—I’m not saying I was indispensable, no one wants to be indispensable—but this thing survived, and now, 25 years later, I’m still working on the things that small group is all about.

Relationships aren’t a means to an end. They are an end in itself. Belonging is the most precious of human experiences—belonging is the relationship that cannot be undone.

Here I am. In my small group. On paper. However.

I am here. My relationship with you all cannot be undone.

**Hymn 360** Here We Have Gathered

Sara

### **Building Blocks Together**

Altar Builders (Linda)

1. With the stories that we have shared, how is the structure that we have started?
2. If a building block is a unit or separate part that combines with something to create something new; and does not work on its own; what happens if a block is removed?
3. What happens to the remaining blocks?  
Remove a block from anywhere—hold it. [Not done during service.]  
What can the block that has been removed do on its own?  
What difference does that make to the remaining blocks?
4. How do we put the blocks back?

How was this process? Who became involved? How did it feel?

### **Reflections: Our Future**

Judy Gallant

Small Group Ministry started at UUCA when other churches in Maine and the Atlantic Provinces were also exploring ways to enhance the connections with the church community. And here at UUCA we involved the congregation in the exploration of the concept. Over the years, Small Group Ministry has continued with the groups as a basis for program as well as sharing the elements, or what we are calling building blocks, throughout the entire congregation.

Small Group Ministry transforms individuals and the congregation. Skills and practices from Small Group Ministry carry into other parts of church life, such as other small groups, committees and work groups. As relationships develop through Small Group Ministry, participants have increasing understanding of the gifts of more people that can enhance the work of the church, and people work across interests.

**Closing words:**

Michaela Loisel, Board President

Now is the time to renew our vision. Small Group Ministry holds great promise, it is a challenging vision of what we might become as a religious community. And it is a vision that needs to be restated regularly, both for those who are new to the congregation, and as a reminder for those who may take it for granted. We need to keep the program in the open. Small Group Ministry can help each of us deepen our own spiritual lives, welcome the stranger, weave the tapestry of community and strengthen the ministry and service of the church.

May the building blocks in Small Group Ministry continue to help us to grow into the congregation that we dream of being!

Extinguishing the Chalice

Sara

**Postlude**

Stefanie

**Announcements**

Sara

**SMALL GROUP MINISTRY BUILDING BLOCKS – On insert in Order of Service**

connect with the minister and Pastoral Ministry Team.

**"Small"** By interacting with fewer people we can be more intentional about our sharing, learn more about struggles and successes of others and discover shared strengths. A consistent group of fewer people allows us to establish trust and to be more comfortable in interactions. In a smaller group it is easier to introduce new members and to relate to changes and losses.

**Bonding (Intimacy)** We feel a sense of belonging when someone responds to us as individuals.

Friendship is getting to know each other intimately. Community is where deepest hopes, fears, dreams and even bad experiences can be shared amongst nonjudgmental friends. Doing things together unifies our group beyond just talking and brings compassion and caring.

**"Group"** Meeting once or twice a month over several months or years helps us connect newcomers to the church community and celebrate life's milestones. Diversity such as age, gender and sexual orientation, background, experience, spiritual orientation, and abilities broadens the group experience. We determine our meeting arrangements, session plans, service, and special activities

**Going Deeper (Ultimacy)** We explore topics of life. Opportunity to delve into issues where we know each other over time leads to deeper and diverse meaning. The focus is shared learning on how we are affected by a topic. Session plans present life topics in a way that encourages new insights. They are selected and created by individuals and groups. We read, sing, laugh, share, and constantly question.

**"Ministry"** We are part of the shared ministry at UUC. "Ministry" is caring or being present with another. This relates to the spiritual, the physical and the emotional well-being. We can call on other group members for help and support. We also give support to each other and the group as a whole. We

**Growth** There is a chance to see what is of concern, what's going on in the world, how we think about things and what we might do. We challenge ourselves. We participate, may lead sessions, represent our group in SGM joint meetings, develop

skills and confidence within and beyond the group. Growth occurs when we feel supported.

**Covenant** Our groups have commitment, integrity, and right relations within their groups. We make promises to each other and/or a group (small group, congregation), and have an understanding of how we will be together, with respect, sharing and caring and what we have to offer. Small Group Ministry is where everyone knows your name and your story and keeps it within the circle!

**Listening** We listen to others and learn and share from our souls. We do not need to comment nor expect others to comment on our sharing. As we listen to learn what another person has to offer, we try to speak so that others can understand what we are conveying. Listening is understanding beyond hearing the words. Listening does not require agreement and can leave opportunity to differ.

**Service** We work on concerns that affect the church and larger communities. Joint activities are a way to learn about each other's interests, increase the connection with the congregation, and give from the abundance of our group. Our service supports the congregational functions (buildings and grounds, meals and hospitality, programs). and enhances connection with the wider UU world as faith in action.

**Accessibility** We consider and respect the needs of each member -- mobility, sensory concerns, allergies, time commitments, economics, etc. We are concerned about who is or can be included. Who may not be able to participate or may not be comfortable in a group or mentioning a concern? What assistance is needed for participation or alternatives? We are encouraged to share our needs so that we may participate.

**Communications** We talk about Small Group Ministry –our own groups, interaction among groups and the UUC community. We add notices and articles by SGM participants in the E-Blast, newsletters, announcements, and the UUC and UUSGM Network websites. We try to let everyone in our group know and be involved with suggestions and plans and how we can participate.

**Presence** SGM has used ways of doing church, such as chalice lighting and personal check-in at group meetings and working with more people in differing capacities throughout the congregation. SGM offers some specific programs and Sunday Services annually. SGM is, by its nature, intimate, starting with check-ins and transitioning to the chosen session plan.