

Participant's Guide to Covenant Groups at UUFVB--2019

Purpose The Covenant Group program is an integral part of the Fellowship'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 sacrament of right relationship among the members and between the group and our Fellowship. Service to the Fellowship help strengthen the bonds between the group and the larger community.

Description

Covenant Groups have 8 -10 members and are led by trained facilitators. Groups meet at least once a month, such as the first or third Tuesday, either at the Fellowship or in group members' homes. Meetings last from 1 1/2 to 2 hours. Seasonal groups often choose to meet twice a month in order to cover the year's topics.

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 guidelines such as listening without interrupting, commitment through regular attendance, and confidentiality.

Covenant Group members are supportive of each other. When a member is in need, the other group members may provide assistance as a way of connecting with each other. The Pastoral Care Committee or minister can fill in as needed. Covenant Groups are part of a religious community—the Fellowship.

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 reflective interchange among group members.

Group Assignments

In placing people in groups, the primary consideration is the day and time the participant is available. As new people express interest in joining, they may be welcomed into a group during the year if openings are available and the existing group is in a good place to accept new members. Registration for new groups takes place fall during the open enrollment period and groups begin anew in January each year. Members may choose at that time to remain with their current group or move on to new opportunities and connections.

Format of a Covenant Group Meeting

1. Opening Reading & Chalice Lighting
2. Check-in - members share something of personal significance.
3. Opening Reading
4. Topic Discussion
5. Reflection on the content and process of the session

6. Closing Reading & Ritual – extinguish chalice.
7. Housekeeping

Expectations of a Covenant Group participant

1. To attend covenant group meetings regularly and to notify the group leader if you are unable to attend. Covenant groups cannot function unless members make this specific commitment.
2. To commit to listening without judgment or interruption to other group members.
3. To help write a covenant for the group or to participate in a review of any existing covenant.
4. To give regular attendance at weekly worship and service to the Fellowship high priority.

<h3>Sample Covenant</h3>

1. We agree to provide a safe place for expressing spirituality, considering religious questions, and growing spiritually. We offer support, encouragement, concern, respect, acceptance and a sense of humor.
2. We commit to the group for one year and will give attendance a very high priority in our lives. If a member needs to leave the group, he or she should say goodbye to the group at a regular meeting, whenever possible.
3. One person speaks at a time. We will all share responsibility for sharing share check-in and discussion time fairly.
4. We will listen attentively to each other, putting our own thoughts aside.
5. During check-in, we will share something of personal significance, allowing each person to speak without “cross talk”.
6. Members will respect confidentiality within the group.
7. We will assume good intentions of other group members. Sharing and group interactions will be in accord with the Unitarian Universalist Principles.
8. We will not attack people or groups in our meetings. It is OK to say how the person or group makes us feel.
9. We will work together with the Pastoral Care Committee and the minister, still providing whatever direct assistance we can to group members in need.
10. We will use non-judgmental reminders to assist with group process such as, “Are we wandering?” and “Let’s move on?”
11. We commit to planning and participating in a yearly service project to the congregation or to the greater community.
12. We commit to taking each month’s topic seriously by reading and giving thought to the session plan prior to the meeting.