



Starting a Small Group

Before the First Meeting

- Meet with Marie Blohowiak, Congregational Life Coordinator, about your idea.
- Find others who are interested in joining the group.

Plan an introductory meeting.

Contact the Fellowship Secretary to book a room and get a building key.

Advertise your meeting in the weekly email and Order of Service by contacting the Fellowship Secretary.

At the First Meeting

- Come early to set up the room as you want it and to welcome everyone who comes.
- Encourage everyone to wear their nametags. Sticky nametags are available at the Welcome Table in the lobby if someone doesn't have one.
- At the beginning of the meeting, have everyone introduce themselves.
- Discuss the purpose of group.
- Discuss the goals for group.
- Set regular meeting dates and times (monthly usually works best).
- Set ritual: Most groups do an opening reading and chalice lighting, check in and closing reading.
- Gather people's contact information if you plan on doing email reminders or want to follow up in any way.

After the First Meeting

- Become an official Fellowship Small Group to have priority for building space, be featured on the website and listed in the Small Group Directory. To do this, fill out the attached Small Group Proposal Form and sign the Small Group Leader Guidelines form and return them to Marie Blohowiak, Congregational Life Coordinator.
- Have an agenda or plan for each group session to keep the group on task.
- Continue to be welcoming of newcomers.
- Don't be discouraged if you have a small turnout initially. Many groups build over time.
- Reassess the goals and purpose of the group at least yearly.

Small Group Leader FAQs

What is a small group?

Small groups are exactly what they sound like – small, grassroots gatherings of people that agree to come together for a common purpose. Current small groups include: book groups, Gathering Circle (pagan), women's/men's groups, Drumming Circle.

Small groups are everywhere. So, what is so special about small groups at the Fellowship?

Small groups at the Fellowship can receive support and resources from the congregation, such as: staff time, building usage, financial resources (vary by group), and Fellowship communications. With the privilege of congregational support also comes the expectation that Fellowship small groups will conduct themselves in a manner consistent with the values, practices, and mission of the Fellowship.

Why do we have small groups?

The Fellowship supports and encourages small groups because they are a great way to: make new friends, deepen connections, learn & grow, and progress on a spiritual path. Small groups keep the Fellowship feeling intimate... no matter what size we are!

What are good ground rules?

Basic ground rules for small groups at the Fellowship are below. Your group may have others you want to add.

- Following the Principles for a Healthy Congregation (available on the Fellowship web site)
- Confidentiality
- Right to pass
- “Converse, don't convert”

How do you greet newcomers?

Everyone who comes to a group should be welcomed. Introductions are appropriate whenever a newcomer is in attendance, as well as a quick orientation of what will happen during the meeting(s). Following up with newcomers during breaks and/or after meetings is always a good idea.

How do small groups interact with the larger Fellowship community?

Small groups exist to serve members. Each group is foremost accountable to the people within the specific group. However, small groups also play a role in our wider Fellowship community. Here are some examples of how small groups serve their wider community, while also increasing their own reach and visibility:

- Volunteer to help at a Wellspring Wednesday and/or staff the Congregational Life Table
- At your meetings, light a chalice and give thanks to/for the Fellowship
- Occasionally, read the 7 Principles or Principles for a Healthy Congregation as an opening reading

How do you engage people who don't talk? Or those who talk too much?

Introverts are welcome, too! We want to make sure everyone has a chance to share what they are thinking about, not just those who are naturally outspoken. At least once during each meeting try to structure a time for everyone in the group to share (e.g. check-in, going around the circle). People may still choose to pass... but at least everyone will have been given the opportunity to share.

Those who tend to dominate groups may need to be asked to step back to allow for the leadership of others to arise. The role of facilitator is important at meetings when strong personalities tend to dominate meeting time. Often, a few words spoken in private can help to “reign in” those who tend to monopolize group time. A good facilitator uses the authority of the group to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to contribute meaningfully.

What if the group has a problem or concern?

- General questions:** Marie Blohwiak, Congregational Life Coord. **Pastoral concerns:** Leah Hart-Landsberg, Associate Minister
marie@fvuuf.org; 920-731-0849 leah@fvuuf.org; 920-731-0849
- Major Conflict:** Contact a staff member immediately. At the discretion of the ministers, the Healthy Congregation Team may also become involved. They can also help with questions about process or group dynamics.

Publicizing Your Small Group at the Fellowship

Order of Service:

Occasionally, notices can be placed in the Order of Service Announcements. Send your ideas to Cyndi **by Wednesday at noon prior to the weekend** you want it placed. Preference will be given to special and one-time events.

Directions Weekly Email

Send ads to Cyndi Polakowski, Fellowship Secretary, at cyndi@fvuuf.org **by Wednesday at noon of the week** you want your ad posted.

Congregational Life Table (CLT):

All Small Groups will be invited to host the CLT occasionally. This is a great opportunity to showcase your group to the Fellowship community. Hosting the CLT includes the opportunity to:

- Place an ad in the Order of Service.
- Have a small display and/or brochures at the table.
- Have your group introduced during the verbal announcements at services.
- Meet congregants at the table before and after services.
- Bring candy or treats to encourage people to stop by.

Facebook:

You are welcome to post group information on the Fellowship Facebook page at any time:

<https://www.facebook.com/fvuuf>

This page is moderated. Inappropriate postings will be deleted.

Website:

All Small Groups are introduced on the Fellowship website. You are welcome to provide more information, links or photos. Send all information to Marie Blohowiak, Congregational Life Coordinator, at marie@fvuuf.org.

Do you have other ideas? We want to support you!

Talk to Marie Blohowiak, Congregational Life Coordinator, with your ideas and questions.

Contact Leah Hart-Landsberg with concerns of conflict or coaching needs.

Small Group Proposal: Sample

Women's Talking Circle

Background

The *Women's Talking Circle* is a new group idea for the Fellowship. During the bi-weekly drum circles during the winter of 2010, it was obvious that there is a need for a safe, welcoming, support/discussion group for adult women.

General purpose of the group

The *Talking Circle* format has its roots in ancient Native Teachings—whereby those in the Sacred Circle are invited to speak, on any topic, without judgment and, for as long as needed. (within reason) The Sacred Feather is passed from one person to the next—all are offered an opportunity to accept the Feather and speak from the heart, or—simply pass.

This group is not intended to be a therapy group. Referrals to the Fellowship's Ministers will be offered/made available as needed.

Proposed meetings dates, times and anticipated size

Dates will fluctuate month to month. Time: 6:30-8:30 This group will be offered one time per month. Number of women may be 10-20.

Small Group Proposal

Name of Group: _____

1) Background

2) General purpose of the group

3) Proposed meetings dates, times and anticipated size

4) Contact people

Guidelines for Leaders of Small Groups

Fox Valley Unitarian Universalist Fellowship Appleton, WI

The leaders of small groups have both a sacred trust and a special responsibility. In all groups there is an inherent power differential, recognized or unrecognized, between the leader and members of the group. Leaders hold greater power; therefore it is critically important that small group leaders understand and use their power with care and with strict adherence to guidelines that will ensure the safety of every person in the group. In this spirit, the following guidelines have been adopted by the Governing Board of the Fox Valley Unitarian Universalist Fellowship.

All leaders of small groups meeting at the Fellowship (affiliated with the Fellowship or not) are required to agree to the following guidelines and confirm their intention to abide by these guidelines by signing as indicated:

1. First and foremost, respect the inherent dignity and worth of all the people in their group.
2. Not discriminate against anyone in the group on the basis of age, race, religion, color, gender, national origin, ancestry, physical or mental challenge, sexual orientation, marital status or any other protected category (except to the extent required by the identity and purpose of the group, eg. Parents of Small Children Covenant Group).
3. Make the Fellowship aware in advance of any criteria for attendance, and ensure that those criteria are publicized.
4. Never make use of trust, information, or influence gained in their leadership capacity for personal gain.
5. Maintain appropriate behavior, relate to all group members with respect, and will not initiate, engage in or respond to any behavior which is illegal, abusive, or violent, or which is suggestive or overtly sexual in any way.
6. Be mindful of the limits of his/her role and training. In particular, small group leaders must avoid taking on the role of therapist with group members.

Departure from these guidelines may be cause for dismissal from leadership, the dissolution of the group, and/or the withdrawal of the privilege to meet at the Fellowship.

I, _____, am the/a leader of

_____ small group. I agree to abide by these guidelines.

Signed: _____ Date: _____