



## **“SOUL MATTERS” COVENANT GROUPS**

### **MAKING CONNECTIONS IN A GROWING CHURCH COMMUNITY**

**By Sherry Bohlen, Membership Coordinator**

Being a part of a growing church community brings rich rewards including the gifts of new people, fresh ideas and invigorating energy. We're blessed to be experiencing all of these things here at UUCUC right now as more and more people join us.

But a growing church community also results in creation of unintentional consequences such as perceived loss of strong sense of community, group identity and intimate connections.

At the peak of our attendance last church year, when our sanctuary was bursting at the seams and almost every seat was filled, people often said some version of this to me.... *“I come into the sanctuary and I don't know the people I'm sitting beside anymore. Where did my church go?”*

Or I often heard as people walked into Fellowship Hall for Social Hour.... *“I walk into this crowded room and I don't see anyone I know. I don't feel as at home here as I once did.”*

Or an elderly church member told me one day.... *“Things are changing too fast. This isn't the church I joined years ago.”*

We've heard your concerns and we understand. The good news is that there are known ways to rediscover a sense of intimacy, connection and community – even in a larger church. Toward that end, we're offering a small group ministry program focusing on the creation of small “Covenant Groups” which will borrow from a national Unitarian Universalist program called “Soul Matters”.



Our Covenant Groups will be guided by this unique model of spiritual discernment and community building – a national program shared by many UU churches around the country. Through Soul Matters, there is a monthly theme that winds through small groups, worship service, music and religious education. For example, the theme for September is “A People of Vision”.

Rev. Catherine Cullen, Minister, First Parish Church, Duxbury, Massachusetts said this about Soul Matters: *“Every month Soul Matters gives us what we need to help make the soul of our church and the souls of our folks in the pews come alive and thrive! It's all here -- resources for religious education, worship and small groups, music & visual art suggestions--all topped off with loads of support!”*

Each of our small groups of 8-10 people will have a facilitator that Rev. Florence will support, train and mentor. No more than 10 people will be assigned to each group so that true connections and deep relationships can be formed.

Each small group will meet six times in members' homes between mid-September and mid-December – one time in September, two times in October, two times in November and one time in December. The specific meeting time and location of each Covenant Group will be determined by the group itself. It is not necessary to host a gathering to join a group.

The commitment of each person in the group to be present for themselves and for each other at each gathering is a vital component of the covenant that we'll make to each other.

Bay Waltman, who is a Small Group Facilitator at UU Church at Washington Crossing, Titusville, New Jersey said this about the experience of a Covenant Group: *"The Soul Matters experience has not just given me a way to practice my spirituality. It has provided me with a deeper understanding of what it means to practice... Working through the exercises and sharing that experience in our small-group circle teaches me the simple act of giving attention to what is here. I've learned to listen to my own life, as I listen deeply to the experiences of my group members."*

After mid-December, each Covenant Group will have the opportunity to assess and decide how it goes forward – either by continuing on with their current group or by mixing up their group composition and coordinating with other group facilitators to facilitate people transferring in-and-out of groups.

Suzanne Clausser, who is a member of a Covenant Group at UU Church of Delaware County in Media, PA, said: *"I think this (Soul Matters Covenant Groups) is the best thing our church does."*

I hope that you'll join one of our Covenant Groups and discover this for yourself. So how do you join? Look for the Soul Matters Covenant Group sign-up sheet on the Hub Table!

We're confident that integration of our Soul Matters Covenant Groups is a step that will create opportunity for us all to adapt to our growing church community in a way that builds intimate connections and deepens our own spiritual practice.

Questions? See Membership Coordinator, Sherry Bohlen. [MembershipCoordinator@uucuc.org](mailto:MembershipCoordinator@uucuc.org) or call 217.384.8862.