

### **What is a covenant group?**

A Covenant Group is a group of eight to ten people who meet under a set of mutually agreed-upon guidelines—a covenant. Covenant Groups provide an opportunity for members to build strong relationships with each other and with the congregation as a whole.

### **How often do Covenant Groups meet?**

Covenant Groups meet at least once a month. Each group decides the frequency and location of its meetings. Typically, groups meet for a minimum of nine months.

### **How are Covenant Groups formed?**

Once enough people have expressed interest in joining Covenant Groups, they will be assigned a group based on geographical location, date and time availability. After groups are formed, they may be enlarged or new groups formed as potential members identify themselves.

### **What is a typical Covenant Group meeting like?**

Typical Covenant Group meetings last two hours and are led by trained co-facilitators. Meetings begin with a

chalice-lighting, a check-in by participants, and a reading that introduces the session topic. Group members are then invited to share topic-related life stories that help members understand each other. The meeting ends with a checkout, a closing reading and extinguishing of the chalice.

### **How does a Covenant Group differ from Religious Education?**

Traditionally, Religious Education involves discussing viewpoints and ideas. Covenant Groups build relationships by sharing experiences. In Religious Education, debate and argument can dominate, often at the expense of building relationships. In Covenant Groups, each person's life story is valued as a unique source of truth and meaning.

### **What responsibilities do members have?**

Group members are expected to attend all Covenant Group meetings except when out-of-town or in cases of personal emergency. They are encouraged to participate openly in discussions, listen actively when others speak, and abide by the group's covenant.

### **Goals of the Covenant Group Program**

- Deepen and broaden connections
- Build empathy and trust
- Share life stories

### **How do I enroll in a Covenant Group?**

Fill out the enclosed Covenant Group registration form and give it to one of the Covenant Group Task Force members:

- Sarah Cheverton  
[cheverse@comcast.net](mailto:cheverse@comcast.net)
- David Lane  
[lanedj@jmu.edu](mailto:lanedj@jmu.edu)
- Merle Wenger  
[mrfurn@msn.com](mailto:mrfurn@msn.com)

Harrisonburg Unitarian Universalists  
4101 Rawley Pike  
Harrisonburg, VA 22801  
[huuweb.org](http://huuweb.org)

***A Language of Personal Expression***  
~ Merle Wenger

At HUU we ask our congregants to create their own theology and to do this by taking little “Lego blocks” of life experience and connecting them to build a strong spiritual framework, a framework strong enough to compete with centuries-old creeds used by many of our neighbors. For some of us, the verbal expression of these convictions comes easily. For others, voicing personal convictions is difficult if not impossible.

Small groups help to develop a language of personal expression for all. The glue of the small group experience is sharing personal life experiences – a process that gives each member equal standing in the group.

The small group ministry practiced by many UU churches and other faith communities is a proven way to focus on spiritual, less cerebral interchange. At the same time it teaches all who take part to be more compassionate listeners.

***Why I Want To Be Involved***  
~ Sarah Cheverton

I want to be involved in small group ministry because I want to experience deeper and more meaningful *relationships* with more people at HUU. I want everyone to experience being heard by peers, to be heard without judgment of ideas, to simply be heard. I want everyone to experience listening to others, really listening, not with judgment, but simply listening.

I believe that this *unusual experience* of being heard and of listening will help us know ourselves better and help us learn to simply be with one another. I believe that what we learn this way will transform us into a more peaceful and mature *community*, a community that can carry what we have learned in our spiritual home to others as we work for justice and peace outside of that safe and sacred space.

The *discipline* of regular gatherings, focused discussion, equal time for members to talk, and listening w/out interruption is fundamental to meaningful *growth and transformation*. We as individuals will not change if we do not stretch beyond our norm. And the world will not change if we stay the same.

## Covenant Groups:

### What are they and how do I join?



**Harrisonburg Unitarian  
Universalists**  
*One Journey, Many Paths*