



Saving the World, 10 People at a Time

*A Worship Service by the REV. JEFF BRIERE
Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga
September 18, 2011*

CONNECTIONS

Welcome to the Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga. My name is Rich Dwyer and I am a member of the congregation. We begin each Sunday at this time with Connections. This is a time of community and contemplation, where we share the joys and the sorrows going on in our lives. This is not a time for announcements, politics or expressions of personal anger, but a time of deep sharing, where we are reminded that we are all human beings and we're all in this together.

Enjoy the experience of sitting in restorative silence until you are moved to speak. Please allow a breath of silence after each person speaks, so that we may focus our attention on what has been said. If you have something to share, please come forward, tell us your name and what's on your mind.



Let us pause to dwell inward. Spirit of Life, please meet us where we are, in the struggles we choose for ourselves; in the ways we move forward in our lives, and bring our world forward with us. It is right that we pause to remember those who need love and support; who are ill or in pain, either in body or in spirit; who are lonely or have been wronged. Let us open our minds and hearts to a place of quiet, to a silent prayer for the healing of pain, and the soft, gentle coming of love. In this time of silence let our thoughts be with those who have spoken or been spoken about this morning. Amen and Blessed Be.

Please rise now and greet your neighbors at the door. Welcome them into the sanctuary with a hand of warmth and a smile.

Good morning. My name is Jeff Briere and I am happy to welcome you to the Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga. I am the minister of this church and we're gonna open our service a bit differently this morning. Normally, we open with a hymn or round, but today, we'll open with two hymns. If you don't like to sing, standby, there'll be a lot of talking later on.

You probably know this, but it bears mention: It has begun to feel cooler lately. Notice that? Temperatures moderated right after Lee passed through. In a few days, Autumn will begin, so to begin our service, let's sing Hymn 73, "Chant for the Seasons." We'll sing just verse one, for Autumn.

HYMN 73, Chant for the Seasons (Autumn)

HYMN 402, FROM YOU I RECEIVE

For the second song, the Small Group Steering Team chose Hymn 402, "From You I Receive." This is a pretty simple song, only two lines and we repeat it several times. Put your hymnals down. Put 'em all down. Read the screen for this one. We'll sing it through once, and then as we repeat, walk around and greet people. Hold your hand out and take your neighbor's hand as you pass by. If you are a square dancer, this is gonna look and feel like a giant, chaotic Dos-Si-Dos. Now watch where you're going, and don't try to read the screen and look at the person in front of you at the same time.

Kate will remind you of the melody and then after the first time through, we'll sing it several times as we walk around.

Now stay where you are for a moment, if you will, please. Around you are your friends and neighbors, your fellow congregants. You know many of them, but I'll bet you don't know them all. So in the next few minutes, find someone you don't know and make a new friend. Or someone you don't know very well, and deepen your connection. I am told this can be a little overwhelming for visitors, so please take it easy and don't all of y'all pounce on the same person. OK, everyone, greet your new friends!

GREETINGS

Alan. Thanks so much for joining us in worship today. We hope you find the service rewarding and that you leave here inspired and uplifted. And thank you so much for helping to create a reverent atmosphere during *Connections*.

This being the third Sunday of the month, there are **no religious education classes** scheduled today. Children are welcome to stay with us for the entire service.

If you have a particular **joy or sorrow** or something you'd like added

to the prayer of the people, please clearly write it on an index card and drop it in the basket back there. You may sign it or not, as you wish.

Registration continues today for **small group ministries**. Small groups are a good way to deepen your spirituality, and make stronger connections with other congregants in the church. Please check out the table in the fellowship area after the service.

Please check out **the complete listing of announcements** included with the bulletin. The best way to find out what's happening around here is to sign up for a weekly e-mail. To do that, please see Chris in the office.

We're happy to welcome Tiffany Envid to our service this morning. Listen closely and you'll hear a hymn that we occasionally sing in her prelude.

PRELUDE

LIGHTING THE CHALICE

Martha Berry, would you light the chalice, please? To accompany the lighting of the chalice, I have a responsive reading, so please read with me. Your words are in italics.

This place has been waiting for us,
To gather our dreams of justice and peace.

This place has been waiting for us,
To honor it by opening our hearts and speaking our minds.

This place has been waiting for us,
To fill it with compassion and loving kindness.

This place has been waiting for us,
To draw from it a breath of common purpose.

This place has been waiting for us,
To listen to the wisdom of its silence.

This place has been waiting for us,
To fill it with the urgency of new possibilities.

This place has been waiting for us,
To make it sacred by our presence.

STORY: Chirps and Dirt

Minister. Do you have friends? Do you have a best friend? Do you know what you have to do to be a real good friend?

Narrator 1. Christine Cricket and Thomas Toad were good friends. They hung out together around the pond and went for walks in the fields. They were always seen in each other's company. Tommy and Chris; Chris and Tommy. You might say they were an item. As much an item as a cricket and a toad could be.

Narrator 2. One thing, though. In all the years of their friendship, they had never dined together. There is a reason for that, and it mostly had to do with the fact that toads are known to eat crickets. But to maintain their friendship, Tommy Toad repressed his desire to gobble up his friend. For her part, Christine endeavored to look as unappetizing as possible and point out other insects that Tommy could eat.

Narrator 1. One day, as they were sunning themselves on a rock at the edge of the pond, Tommy Toad got a bright idea.

Tommy. Chris, dear friend, tomorrow come and dine at my house. I will prepare a special meal. We will eat it together.

Narrator 1. Well, Chris was unsure, you know, because anything to do with Tommy's diet was a touchy subject. But Tommy was her friend, so she agreed. And on the following day, Christine Cricket arrived at Tommy Toad's place in the early evening.

Narrator 2. Before sitting down to eat, Tommy washed his forelegs, and invited Christine to do the same. So Christine washed up and when she was drying her forelegs, she made a loud noise.

[SFX: Chirp!]

Narrator 2. Chris couldn't help it, it was a normal cricket noise.

Narrator 1. You've heard crickets haven't you? Well, Tommy was freaked out.

Tommy. My dear friend Christine! Can't you leave your chirping until later? I cannot eat with such a noise.

Narrator 1. Christine tried to eat without making any noise, but it was impossible. Each time she chirped, Tommy complained and asked her to be quiet.

Narrator 2. Well, after several chirps from Chris and angry glances and complaints from Tommy, Chris lost her appetite.

Chris. Look, Tommy. I'm sorry my chirping bothers you, but it's just my nature to chirp. I can't help it. Why don't we eat at my place tomorrow? Maybe it will be better for both of us.

Narrator 2. So the next day, Tommy Toad arrived at Christine Cricket's home in the early evening. As soon as the meal was ready, Chris washed up and invited Tommy to do the same. Tommy did so, and then hopped to the table.

Christine was disgusted at the mud on Tommy's feet and almost barfed after seeing him spatter mud all over the table.

Chris. Thomas! Don't you have any manners? You had better go back and wash up again. All that hopping in the dirt has made your forelegs dirty again.

Narrator 2. Tommy hopped back to the water jar, washed again, then hopped back to the table, and was ready to reach out for some food from one of the platters when Christine stopped him.

Chris. Puuuuh—leeeez don't put your dirty paws into the food. Go and wash up again.

Narrator 2. Tommy couldn't believe it.

Narrator 1. After all he was just being himself.

Tommy. You just don't want me to eat with you! You know very well that I must use my legs and feet to get around. I cannot help it if they get a bit dirty between the water jar and the table.

Chris. And you know very well that I can't abide the dirt you drop in the food!

[Glaring]

Tommy. I'll just go eat outside.

Narrator 1. And so he sat outside and sadly ate his meal alone. Christine sat inside. With every bite she chirped another note of a sad melody but pretty soon, she stopped eating and went outside.

Narrator 2. She sat on the far side of the tree from Tommy. She chirped a few quiet notes. Tommy hopped a few feet closer. Christine chirped. Tommy hopped. Finally, the two friends were sitting close together.

Chris. You know I cannot help but chirp. It's in my nature as a cricket.

Tommy. I know. And I can't get around without putting my feet on the ground. *[Beat]* You know, I don't mind your chirping.

Chris. And, I don't mind your hopping all over the place.

Narrator 2. And so the two friends sat together, chirping and hopping, until the sun went down.

Today we are going to be talking about Small Group Ministry. In Small Group Ministry, everyone is accepted as they are—even if they chirp and hop.

OFFERTORY

I have a couple stories of generosity today, which I suppose is appropriate, inasmuch as this is the offertory. You probably know this fellow. Henry Ford. While on vacation in Dublin, Ireland, Ford was asked if he would contribute to a collection for a new orphanage. Judging the cause worthy, Ford promptly wrote out a check for £2,000. His generosity made headline news in the local paper the following day. The amount of the check, however, was wrongly quoted as £20,000. The director of the orphanage called on Ford at his hotel to apologize. "I'll phone the editor straight away and tell him to correct the mistake," he said.

"There's no need for that," replied Ford, taking out his checkbook and pen. "I'll give you a check for the remaining eighteen thousand pounds, but only on one condition. When the new building opens, I want this in-scription on it: *I Was a Stranger, and You Took Me In.*"

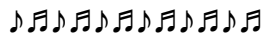
Here's another generous person. King Abdul-Aziz, the first monarch of the third Saudi state, Saudi Arabia. He was commonly known as Ibn Saud. Ibn Saud, advanced in years, visited the town of Hofuf to bathe in its hot springs. During the cure, one of the men of Hofuf presented the king with a handsome gray horse. Ibn Saud, delighted

with the gift, called for the ledger in which he personally recorded the details of the presents that he bestowed upon visitors and well-wishers. Against the name of the donor of the horse he wrote “300 Riyals,” a sum greatly in excess of the worth of the horse.

As he was writing, the nib of his pen broke and sputtered and a shower of little ink blobs scattered across the page, turning “300 Riyals” into “300,000 Riyals.” You see, the Arabic sign for zero is a dot, like a period, rather than a zero, and the ink spatter made a lot of dots on the paper. The vizier respectfully drew his lord’s attention to the spattered page. “I see my pen has clearly stated 300,000,” said Ibn Saud, “so that is what you must pay. My hand wrote it, and I cannot have anyone say that my hand is more generous than my heart.”

Now you can say these two guys were rich; they could afford to be generous. That’s one way of looking at it, I suppose. I’d say that rich or poor, we cannot afford *not* to be generous. And this is not only about money. I mean we must be generous with ourselves. We’ll receive the morning offering now for the support and ministry of this church, and, if you insist, we will allow do-overs if your pen breaks or you add an extra zero or three.

If you have a pledge payment, please mark it as such. As always, the Wood–Wilhoit Memorial Food Bank is happy to accept your donations of non–perishable food and household items for the Community Kitchen. The collection basket for that is by the front door. If you wish to light a personal candle of joy or sorrow, you may step up here and Mary Hunter will assist you.



Eternal Spirit of life and love, we are profoundly thankful for the blessings we experience today. Would that we recognize our blessings every day and remember to be thankful for them.

Jesse & Christina, please lead us in our Hymn of Thanksgiving.

HYMN OF THANKSGIVING

Oh, we give thanks, for this precious day,
For all gathered here, and those far away,
For this time we share, with love and care,
Oh, we give thanks, for this precious day.

ORISON

Dona Nobis Pacem. Give Us Peace. Dona Nobis Pacem.

This morning, I offer a prayer for those without a job, who are looking for employment. May they be in the right place at the right time and find meaningful work.

This is the prayer of the people, in these next few moments, please say aloud the name of someone or something that needs our prayers and good wishes.

Please join me in the Orison.

Thou, which are everywhere,
Many are your names.
May we always feel your presence,
May love and wisdom guide us,
In our deeds as well as in our dreams.
May we have what sustains our body and soul;
Lead us first to forgive the mistakes of others
Even as we hope our own mistakes will soon be forgiven.
May we resist the temptation of the quick and easy,
And be delivered from that which demeans and destroys life.
May we live purposefully and joyfully
in every moment, in every encounter,

now, and in the time to come.

During this time of silence let us hold close to our hearts those who strive everyday to make the world a better place, but let us never forget those who suffer the fallout of war.

Dona Nobis Pacem. Give Us Peace. Dona Nobis Pacem.

RESPONSE

When our heart is in a holy place,
when our heart is in a holy place,
We are blessed with love and amazing grace,
when our heart is in a holy place.

HERE

Here may no one be altogether a stranger,
no honesty of thought ignored,
no depth of feeling dismissed,
no life belittled, and no life shut out.

Here may clarity of mind and heart
be humbly treasured,
brought to bear toward word and person.

Here may fellowship be treasured most of all
and paths to sustain and renew it
be sought and found.

Here may growth of spirit be our purpose;
such understanding as shall lead us
to make the world a better place.

SERMON: Saving the World, 10 People At a Time

My sermon title is “Saving the World, 10 People at a Time.” Sounds great, doesn’t it? Lofty goal, but no heavy lifting. It’s the title of a book by the Rev. Bob Hill concerning Small Group Ministry. You may have heard about small groups; you’re about to hear more, I think, both today and next month when we welcome the Rev. Helen Zidoweicki to our community. She is the president of the small group ministry network. And I want to thank Chasity Masters for her design of this logo that we use.

Small Group Ministry is a transformational practice, a movement that is changing the way we relate to each other, that is changing the way religious communities welcome newcomers into their midst and that is changing the role of ministers and congregations in ministering to each other.

You may have heard me tell the story that I used to get mail addressed to James Luther Adams. Adams was the foremost Unitarian Universalist theologian in the last century. He used to teach at my seminary, Meadville Lombard. He must have lived in the same place as I did, for many years after he died, I was still getting mail addressed to him. It’s quite impressive, I can tell you, for a young minister–wannabe to get mail addressed to James Luther Adams, the brightest light of Unitarian Universalist theologians.

I bring up Adams because when asked why people come to church, he answered that they come for ultimacy and intimacy. He went on to explain that they came to wrestle with—and from time to time actually find answers to—life’s ultimate questions. Who am I? In what or whom do I trust? In what community do I belong? And they came for a sense of intimacy, a safe place in which they could be accepted while making connections with others.

People come for ultimacy and they come for intimacy. To seek answers to the big questions of life and to connect with other people in deeper, more meaningful ways than we find in our secular world. Religious communities, and communities that would never call

themselves religious, are finding small groups are the best way for people to connect with others more intimately. In the process, they often also connect with the ultimate, more intimately.

It is estimated that 40% of the adult population are involved in some type of small group. Bible study groups, self-help groups, bridge clubs, book clubs; the list of groups is endless. For many years membership in traditional, mainline religion societies has declined while membership in small groups, such as 12-step recovery meetings and men's and women's groups has soared. Something magical seems to happen when people gather to discuss, to learn, to focus on a similar issue together.

So if people come to our congregations seeking intimacy and spiritual growth, we cannot give them committee meetings and Sunday morning worship. Neither of these adequately meets their needs.

We do our best to be friendly and talk to newcomers when they come to our congregation. Hopefully, we produce a service that has some relevance in their lives. Hopefully, our music and rituals touch their souls. Hopefully our principles, our purposes, our vision of liberal religion resonates with them. Hopefully, they leave feeling good about their experience here and hopefully they come back.

But no matter how wonderful our services are on Sunday morning, no matter how friendly and caring we are over a cup of coffee and a piece of fruit, no matter how eager we may be to help do the work of the congregation through committee service, these things are not enough for most people who walk through our doors and sit in our sanctuary—no matter if they have been doing it for a few weeks, a few years or a few decades.

I know something to be true, but I cannot prove it. Anyone who lives in this fast paced, neighborhood-less society and who makes connections through email and cell phone calls more often than in person wants to connect more deeply, more widely, more intimately

than sitting in a worship service or a committee meeting allows them to do. They want to have more intimacy with others; more ultimacy with the questions, the struggles, the challenges that life provides.

We yearn to be able to get to know people at a deeper level than we can at coffee hour, we yearn to talk to someone about our lives longer than the time it takes us to light a candle, we yearn—even if we are not sure how to do it—to listen and to be listened to. This is the reason for small group ministries: so that we can spend one or two nights a months, in the middle of our busy lives, hanging out with 6-10 people with no other goal than to listen and to be heard.

Wendy. I'd like to tell you a story this morning. This is the story of how Small Group Ministry came to the Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga, what it has meant to this church, and where it may go this year—maybe, just maybe, with you along for the ride.

I want to begin by repeating the definition of small groups. Small Group Ministries are groups of 6 10 people who meet once or twice a month for a time of deep sharing. The group members commit to attending meetings—yes, commit. This isn't a group that you can drop in and out of easily. The members commit to being at every meeting unless something major interferes. They develop a covenant for how they will behave within their group, and they perform two service projects throughout the year in addition to their regular meetings. These meetings are not discussion groups, or debates, or book clubs. Small Group Ministry is a chance for people to share from their personal experiences as it relates to the topics or themes the group chooses.

Though accurate, that is a pretty dry description of Small Group Ministry. Kay McCurdy, who participated in small groups over the past two years, summed it up better when she reflected on her first year in Small Group Ministry.

Kate. Nervous and a bit wary....that's how I felt the first time I sat

in the meeting circle and waited for the SGM facilitator to explain the rules. Would we be holding hands and meditating? Solving the world's problems, one at a time? Running naked through the woods while beating on drums?

The answers: *Nope. Not at all. Under no circumstances.*

Small Group Ministry isn't therapy, but it can be therapeutic. It isn't a support group, but members undoubtedly feel supported. Imagine a place where confidentiality is the rule and judgment is suspended....a safe zone where you're encouraged to speak your truths, whatever they may be....an environment that teaches you how to listen with your whole heart and mind.

Now, instead of hand-picking a select group of your closest friends to create the group....imagine randomly choosing folks you don't know. People you've maybe bumped into before, or after, service, but never actually spoken with, like....the woman who always wears those fabulous boots or the man with the contagious laugh.

Thankfully, this is a small enough church that it's possible to have a friendly rapport with most of the members and friends who attend regularly. But Small Group Ministry allows us to get to know each other on a deeper and more substantial level.

Wendy. I want some of these people to share with you what these groups have been up to. So I pulled quotes from the words of these people, maybe from something they wrote for the newsletter or from an evaluation they submitted. I asked (Male) to read the words of the men and Kate to read the words of the women for us.

It all began about five years ago, when Dez Papendorp asked our minister, Jeff Briere, where the small groups met. He replied that we didn't have any small group ministries. To make a long story short, this church sent Dez to the Mountain Retreat Center for training in Small Group Ministry and she came back excited and energized.

In the summer of 2009, she formed a Small Group Ministry steering team to decide how the program would unfold here. Now, I have to give that first team of people a lot of credit—they didn't know what Small Group Ministry was or what it could be, but they took a chance, they showed up and they worked hard. They created a vision for Small Group Ministry here in our church.

The vision of Small Group Ministry at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga is threefold; to deepen our spirituality, strengthen the church and foster our community services.

After all the hard work Dez and the Steering Team put in, the first Small Group Ministry groups began meeting that fall.

Starting with that first summer steering team, seventy members and friends of this church have been involved in Small Group Ministry. Yes, I said 70, seven-zero. Some served on summer steering teams, some were facilitators, some were participants, some were coordinators, and some were involved in more than one role. And, of course, Jeff was involved as our minister.

If you are one of those seventy people, please stand up.

Wow, that's almost (half) of the people in this room.

For new members, like Heather Simmons Alexander, Small Group Ministry allowed them to get to know other church members.

Kate. After just starting to attend services here at this church, I joined the SGM THOM group last January. What a difference it makes to walk into church and know there are nine other people here with whom I have growing friendships! SGM helped me feel a sense of belonging, to our group and to our church community.

Wendy. Even long time members felt more involved.

Kate. I started to feel more and more a part of the church community, and not just someone who goes to church there on Sundays.

Bob. I believe that SGM has added a new dimension of value to this church. It's a better church with small groups than it was without. SGM participants not only feel more a part of the church, most also build strong bonds with the members of their group.

Kate. Getting to know the ...[people] and learn about their lives and hearing their thoughts makes me feel closer to the church, since my belief is that the church *is* people.

Wendy. Bob Barnhart spoke about the community that developed within the group he co-facilitated two years ago.

Bob. The men's SGM group, called It's a gUUy Thing, decided that since one of our valued members was ill we would take the meeting to him. Since the inception of our group Matt Hoyt has been diligent to make every meeting. Rich Dwyer, my co-facilitator, and I proposed to the group that we could car pool and take our meeting to Matt while he was in a hospital nearby. Wednesday night came; we piled into two cars and headed to Siskin Medical Center.

After arriving in the lobby, we called Matt to come see us. We celebrated Matt's progress back to health after a sudden collapse a few weeks earlier. Our SGM group session time happened right then and there with Matt present.

The common view of "maleness" is not so much of love for your friends, or mankind. We males are supposed to be "macho" and "tough." Interestingly enough, it was our love and caring for our fellow group member/valued friend that drove us to take the meeting to Matt. Real men aren't afraid to show compassion and love for their friends.

Wendy. Steve Hollingsworth described what happened in his group,

VenUUe Q.

Bob. VenUUe Q is eight people who have met on a journey together, all with remarkable stories to tell. Not fully believing that ministry to themselves is something that can happen together in a small group—or maybe specifically this group—grace has come without asking and despite any expectations to the contrary.

Wendy. So how did the sense of closeness and community build? Most participants said it came from listening and sharing. Listening, really listening without judgment nor offering advice, is hard. SGM provides a structure to practice deep listening and gives us the opportunity to be truly heard.

Rich Dwyer, a former co-facilitator, describes SGM groups.

Bob. a place where you can speak and be heard, a place where you don't have to speak to be acknowledge, a place where you are a welcome member, and part of a caring group.

Wendy. Kristie McKinley spoke of how listening and sharing in her group affected her.

Kate. How can I possibly begin to explain how incredibly beautiful these nine people sitting around me are? How can I properly explain and give them the admiration they deserve? Each has taught me how to be a better person and that gem is priceless.

Wendy. Another man says he felt safe in his group.

Bob. I don't think twice about anything I say with the group. Ordinarily in group settings I am at least partly detached— watching, trying to figure out what the people are all about and how I should participate. Everything is natural with this group, and I never sit as a detached observer having to try to figure out group dynamics.

Wendy. Of course it is not just the meetings that are meaningful to people. Groups also commit to completing two service projects throughout the year; one for the church and one for the community. Linda Park reflected on her group's service projects.

Kate. My favorite memories are when we worked together outside of the monthly group meetings on our church and community activity. Our group is awesome, and I love getting together with them. One of the overall memories I have of this group is how much fun we have had together—we laughed a lot.

Wendy. In fact, many participants say that the service projects are their favorite part of Small Group Ministry. Some groups even choose to complete three service projects instead of just two.

The service projects varied as much as the groups. Some groups have gathered needed supplies for community organizations such as the Children's Home/Chambliss Shelter.

And the Northside Neighborhood House. This group combined their clothing drive with a Fat Tuesday dinner providing a chance for fun and fellowship—and good food—for the church along with the gathering of donations. That is a King Cake.

Another group raised money by participating in the Strides of March Walk

Other groups volunteered in the community by painting a room at Room in the Inn

Cooking dinner at the Ronald McDonald House

And helping out at the McKamey Animal Shelter.

Another group hosted a suicide prevention workshop at the church that was open to the community.

For their service to the church, two groups chose to lead Sunday services during the first year of the program.

The women's group and the Men's group

Another group setup and cleaned up events like our ever-popular Seder supper

And another hosted our Chili Cook-off fundraiser. That big red thing that Nicole Barnhart is holding is the treasured chili pepper hat that goes to the winner.

Another group cleaned up our church playground

And made Christmas cards for the church's caring committee.

Now, if you have never been in Small Group Ministry, I know what you are thinking. How in the world do people have time for their groups and their service projects on top of everything else they have to do?

Kate. Small Group Ministry is a highlight of my month. The one time I am allowed to be free of all obligations and truly be fully present and alive in the moment... It's so comforting and so genuine.

Wendy. Members of groups are asked to commit to being at meetings and participating in the service projects; this is not a "come if you can" experience. But, perhaps surprisingly, the participants don't find the responsibility burdensome.

Kate. The THOMsters struck gold together. Every meeting was not to be missed because who knew what might unfold? And each member of the group gave their heart and soul to the work we did both for the community and for the church.

Wendy. Now you know how Small Group Ministry started, and

what has been happening, but you don't know where it is going. Actually, no one knows that. What I can tell you is what we planned for this year. There is some exciting new growth in the program with new opportunities for people to participate.

We will continue the traditional groups. We are starting with two evening groups and one day time group. Many people have already registered, and today is the last day to sign up if you want to be assigned to the initial groups. You can always join a group later—groups are always open to new members. If they get too large, the group divides into two smaller groups—but if you can it is best to join at the beginning. Groups are kind of like movies. The experience is best if you start at the beginning rather than walking in the middle.

This summer, we started something new: Chalice Circles. Chalice Circles is a drop-in group on Sunday mornings. It follows the same format and principles as traditional small group ministry groups, but you do not have to register or commit to come—you can come every time or only once or whenever you are able. Because the members of the group are different each time, there is no covenant and no service commitment. Chalice Circle currently meets once a month on the fourth Sunday morning at 9:30. Everyone is welcome.

And our other new venture is offering Small Group Ministry to the Teens. Starting next Sunday, the teens will use Small Group Ministry as the format for their religious education class. This is a great opportunity for our teens to experience personal or spiritual growth, build their sense of community, give back through volunteering, and develop leadership skills.

So that's what Small Group Ministry has planned for the year. The Small Group Ministry steering team will be available after the service to answer any questions, help you register for a group, or just share a cookie with you. I hope you will join us in Small Group Ministry this year.

Minister. Very few people come to a religious community to become invisible, to become anonymous. I want our congregation and movement to grow because, as was evident last Sunday, I know our message heals and transforms lives. I also want everyone who comes into our community to be known, to be loved. Small group ministry ensures that everyone has a chance to be seen, to be heard, to touch and to be touched. And now, we will install the facilitators. You all have a part in this. Please check the insert to the bulletin, hang onto it and be ready when your part comes around.

INSTALLATION OF SMALL GROUP FACILITATORS

MINISTER. The Unitarian Universalist tradition affirms that the ministry of the congregation is the responsibility of the membership, not just the called professional clergy; we are aware this calling cannot be accomplished by anyone alone. In our ministry the called ministers serve as leaders and guides to empower the members to care for one another, and for the larger community. Small Group Ministry Facilitators have made a commitment to be intentional and accountable in their service, and deserve the honor of being commissioned by the congregation in this annual ceremony.

PRESIDENT. As President of the Board of Trustees, I would like to introduce each facilitator. The church will present you with a new nametag which identifies you as a lay leader of ministry, a small group ministry facilitator. As I call your name, please step forward and receive your nametag.

Elaine Watkins
Heather Simmons Alexander
Linda Park
Linda Helton
Matt Hoyt

Mary Hunter
Chasity Masters
Nicole Barnhart
Dez Papendorp

Our church is grateful for your willingness to facilitate our second year of Small Group Ministry here at the Unitarian Universalist

Church of Chattanooga.

MINISTER. It is my honor to install you as Small Group Ministry Facilitators. Your willingness to learn and to serve makes you an essential part of our ministry. We welcome your wisdom and energy, time and talent, as we work together in the development of depth and breadth, intimacy and ultimacy in our religious experience. I remind you of the sacred nature of our work as we honor the inherent worth and dignity of every person, and the creation of a more just and peaceful world; and I invite you to call upon us if we can be of assistance.

CONGREGATION. We welcome your commitment and ability as you help us be a caring community. We honor your courage to enter into our lives, your willingness to minister and facilitate our spiritual development. We appreciate your decision to serve among us; we entrust you with the responsibilities it involves, and promise to support you as you help us grow.

FACILITATORS. As Small Group Ministry Facilitators we pledge ourselves along with the members of our groups to this program, which encourages people in their spiritual growth, helping them develop relationships of substance and depth, and meeting their needs to worship, to serve, and to be in community.

PRESIDENT. We, the members of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga, affirm the necessity of everyone in our religious community reaching out to support one another, to encourage spiritual growth, and to extend our principles into the larger community. We appreciate your willingness to commit to this ministry, and gratefully install you as Small Group Ministry Facilitators.

MINISTER. The Small Group Ministry Facilitators are an extension of our ministry, providing support and opportunities for spiritual growth. Please join me in congratulating our Facilitators, opening

our minds to them, and welcoming them to our hearts.

Please join me now in singing Hymn 354, “We Laugh, We Cry.”

HYMN 354, We Laugh, We Cry

EXTINGUISHING THE CHALICE

Martha Berry, please extinguish our chalice.

We extinguish this flame,
but not the light of its truth,
the warmth of this community,
nor the fire of our commitment.
These we carry in our hearts
and share with all the world.

BENEDICTION

For a benediction, I give you these words of Margaret Mead.

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed it's the only thing that ever has.

POSTLUDE