

## Quotes about Engagement Groups

**'Spirituality Matters' Group:** "My experience of our group has been like a series of lighted buoys, where for a moment I've tied my ship, with neither name, nor compass... I've been recognised and able to share experiences, even those I barely understood."

**Jesus Group:** "Our engagement group, exploring the life and teachings of Jesus, is the only place for me to deepen my liberal Christian faith without having to wrestle with dogmas I don't believe."

**Reading Group:** "Over the last five years, since our group formed, we have read and talked about over fifty books together. It is fascinating to read other people's recommendations and we have learned a lot about each other in the deep conversations that the books have inspired."

**Interfaith Group:** "It is wonderful to gather with people from different spiritual backgrounds and share sensitively on the great questions of life. We all grow, whatever our personal faith."

**Creativity Group:** "We have had a lot of fun playing together and learning new crafts from each other in our group. We have also worked on several big fund-raising projects – raising money for the church at our annual art and craft fair – and for other charities with a series of themed photographic exhibitions."

**'The Quest' Group:** "Our 'Quest' group has been a positive experience in which the participants have shared their life stories and sensitively supported each other while reflecting on their spiritual journeys. We advertised this group widely in the hope that we would attract non-church members to come along and it has indeed brought new faces through our doors. We had 10 more enquiries from people wanting to join after the group was full. It has been a great success."

*See inside for details of other Engagement Groups.*

## Engagement Groups Can...

- foster "right relationship"
- create a sense of community
- deepen the spiritual life of participants
- strengthen connection with the host congregation
- give spiritual seekers a way to find out what our Unitarian movement could offer them
- complement current worship and RE activities to help form a well-rounded programme of events
- encourage spiritual and numerical growth

With so many potential benefits,  
why not have a go at setting up an  
Engagement Group in your own community?

Contact the Engagement Support Panel:

Email: [info@unitarianengagementgroups.org.uk](mailto:info@unitarianengagementgroups.org.uk)  
Website: [www.unitarianengagementgroups.org.uk](http://www.unitarianengagementgroups.org.uk)

Information correct as of March 2008



## Engagement Groups and Small Group Ministry



Information for those new to Engagement Groups  
prepared by the Engagement Support Panel.

## Frequently Asked Questions about Engagement Groups/Small Group Ministry:

### *We already run small groups in our chapel – what’s special about an engagement group?*

The name “engagement group” denotes that the group is run according to a particular intention, set of principles, session structure, and style of facilitation/leadership. There is great flexibility –groups may be open or closed, time-limited or continuing, and on a huge variety of themes.

### *So what are engagement groups for?*

- to deepen the spiritual life of participants.
- to create community among the participants.
- to learn the principles of “right relationship”.
- to deepen connection to one’s church/chapel.

### *What is the difference between engagement groups and small group ministry?*

These names are often used interchangeably.

The term “engagement group” is usually used to refer to groups where the main focus is on spiritual themes and personal sharing.

The term “small group ministry” is more often used to encompass a wider range of groups which may have all manner of activities as their focus whilst retaining these central intentions.

### *What sort of thing might an engagement group or small group ministry focus on?*

There is a huge variety of activities and themes that a group may choose to focus on. Groups can be tailored to fit the particular needs of the host community.

### *So... how does an engagement group start? What do we need to do to make it happen?*

**Practicalities:** One way to start a group would be, firstly, to talk to others in your congregation and find out if there are shared interests around which you could form a group. The next step might be to contact the Engagement Support Panel (details on the back of this leaflet) who can put you in touch with a network of local leaders and provide other advice and support for potential engagement group facilitators.

**Covenant:** When a new engagement group starts, the participants are encouraged to draw up a set of principles regarding the way they want to relate with one another, and conduct their meetings. In engagement groups this is often referred to as the “group covenant”.

This covenant is one of the most important features of an engagement group and might typically include commitments to:

- allow one person to speak at a time.
- allow everyone an equal chance to participate.
- refrain from arguing or criticizing one another.
- speak your truth in a spirit of loving kindness.
- allow participants to “pass” on any activity.
- arrive on time for the start of each session.

**Structure:** Many engagement groups adopt a similar structure which has been found to help make the group a safe space for sharing. Sessions usually open with a reminder of the group covenant and some kind of ritual (maybe a candle-lighting, a reading, a meditation) which sets the tone and centres the group.

Before moving onto the activity which forms the central focus for the group there is a “check-in” by each participant (briefly stating how you are).

The core of the session can be conversation, reflection, or a shared project of some kind. In its simplest form it is people sharing their insights and spiritual journeys with one another. See the box below for details of other groups.

The group typically closes with a “check-out”.

**Facilitation:** Every engagement group needs a facilitator. Facilitation can be by one person, a team of co-facilitators, or by rotating facilitation between members of the group. The main role of the facilitator is to keep the session flowing, within agreed time limits and ensure that the principles of the group covenant are followed. Contact the Engagement Support Panel for details of forthcoming facilitator training events.

### **Theme/Focus of some Engagement Groups which have taken place across the UK since 2002**

*Crafts and Stories (Richmond), Creativity Group, Science and Religion, “Turning To One Another”: Conversations (Kensington), Spirituality in Everyday Life, “Bright Lights”: Intergenerational Group (Bristol), Social Responsibility, Creative Writing, Healing Circle (Croydon), Jesus Study Group, Interfaith Group, “Mystic of the Month” (Hampstead), “Gatherings”, Film Group (Leicester Fellowship), Spirituality Matters, Healing and Spirituality (York), Rambling, Cultural Group, Reading Group (Rochdale), E-Ministry Engagement Group, Ageing and Spirituality, Movement: “Let’s Dance Together” (Hucklow Summer School).*