

**MAKING SFBC DIFFERENT, BOLD AND BETTER
DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AN EXPANDED
SMALL GROUP MINISTRY
AUGUST, 2021**

OUR PROCESS: HOW THE SMALL GROUP MINISTRY TASK FORCE GOT FROM NOWHERE TO HERE

The Small Group Ministry Task Force is composed of Doug Beasley, Cherry Johnson, Margaret Norton-Arnold (chair) and Rev. Anita Peebles (pastoral liaison). The group has met regularly since December of 2020.

The task force began its work by brainstorming various possibilities for the Small Group Ministry. We reviewed the small groups currently in place at the church and developed a starting-point list of the types of small groups we might offer in the future. We also wrestled with how small groups might be defined, the purpose they will serve, and the ways in which they should be managed and supported by the church.

The group benefited from readings and research about best practices with regard to small group ministries in other churches (listed in the Appendix.) All this input informed the Task Force's recommendations. One illustration comes from the work of Julie Gorman, DMin¹ (professor of Christian Education and Discipleship at Fuller Theological Seminary). She describes an evolutionary process in churches related to small group ministry: *"In the Traditional Church," she says, "groups are one programmatic option. ... In the Transitional Church groups are an integral part of the church...viewed as essential to the nature and functioning of the church [with] strong pastoral support for groups."* We believe that SFBC is currently a "Traditional Church" in Gorman's terms, but that the Small Group Ministry as proposed would evolve us over time to being what she calls "Transitional."

While this document represents the group's best ideas up to this point, it is still very much a "working draft." The task force looks forward to comments, suggestions, and edits, not only from SFBC leadership, but from the congregation as a whole and from all stakeholders. We garnered input on our early drafts from the Executive Committee, the Antiracism Task Force and the Senior Ministries Task Force and have made changes based on their input. We reached out to the Pastoral Transition Task Force to let them know how we are envisioning this ministry and how that might impact their work. Once congregational input is studied and further changes made, a final version will be presented to the Diaconate with a proposed budget (target timeline October, 2021). Together, our church community will create the best small group ministry possible -- one that not only provides excellent offerings, but also an enhanced sense of our presence with and belonging to one another.

Once/if the Recommendation is approved, an Advisory Group will be formed to take on the task of discerning how to implement the ministry and how best to accomplish its mission (by honing the nitty-gritty details of things like training, norms and monitoring). We hope that the ministry will be ready to "launch" in early 2022.

PREFACE

During the 2019-20 Long Range Planning process, 67% of focus group participants endorsed the need for some form of small group ministry. They also identified the sense of "community" and of "belonging" as key personal needs, and many identified the recent "Place at the Table" gatherings in members' homes as being a model for future offerings. Quite a few expressed dismay over cliquishness at SFBC and spoke of how hard it can be to know others and be known, even after many years of attendance. BIPOC members spoke of how hard it is to belong and to feel welcome and known in this white majority community, especially given the levels of ignorance about white supremacy and systemic racism, and the frequency of acts of racial insensitivity and aggression. Many members also talked about the need for greater help with or more opportunities for putting faith into action. Some (especially parents of school-age children) talked of feeling disconnected because of "everything" happening on Sunday morning when they routinely have other demands on their time. Many spoke of the difficulty in attracting new members. A significant number called out the need for better services to seniors. The Long Range Planning final report challenged us to be DIFFERENT, BOLD AND BETTER. We believe the SFBC Small Group Ministry as we have defined it below will do just that and could address many of the expressed needs described above in new ways.

WHAT WILL THE SMALL GROUP MINISTRY LOOK LIKE?

The SFBC Small Group Ministry (SGM) will be a grass-roots, organic ministry stemming from the expressed needs and desires of members. It will be complementary to Worship Ministry -- carrying on where Sunday morning leaves off -- offering the opportunity for us to "be church" to one another seven days a week. It will extend the reach of Worship Ministry by offering further options for engagement, spiritual growth and service throughout the week. It will be integral to the whole, serving as an inviting point of entry for newcomers and a touchstone for members. Small group settings will offer an opportunity to meet the needs of people for whom a more traditional church experience or schedule may not be a good fit. They will also provide a greater sense of belonging, and they are an ideal venue for practicing radical inclusivity.

This ministry will provide an array of spiritual growth and development options to meet the needs of our theologically diverse community, as well as offering expanded options for education, support, relational development, social engagement, and opportunities for putting faith into action - for *living our mission and values*. Some of our friends and neighbors who feel uncomfortable coming to a Baptist church service might feel less daunted about joining a small group studying racism in the justice system or one sharing a contemplative practice together or volunteering together at a food bank.

In the beginning this ministry will primarily serve current members and friends, though once it is well established and integrated, we envision it as having the capacity for targeted outreach to our neighbors. Participation in groups will be optional, but members will be guided and encouraged to participate according to their needs and wishes. We believe the quality and variety of groups offered will attract participation. We envision members feeling comfortable inviting non-member friends to participate in small groups, and those new people may, over time, feel themselves to be a part of the larger church community.

The Small Group Ministry will assist pastoral staff as trained facilitators identify the pastoral care needs of participants (health or mental health issues, prayer needs, end of life concerns, joyous

occasions, etc.) and share this information with the pastoral team with the permission of the member(s) involved. Finally, through larger gatherings (including Worship), the Small Group Ministry will connect group members to the whole -- strengthening individuals, the larger Beloved Community, and the church as an institution.

WHAT IS A "SMALL GROUP?"

Small groups are designed to be temporary (though some may have long lives). While pastors may choose to facilitate some small groups, most will be facilitated by trained lay leaders accountable to staff. Groups which are permanent ministries of the church with dedicated staff (such as Choir, Children's Sunday School and Youth Group) do not fall under the umbrella of Small Group Ministry. On the other hand, some of the existing ministries such as Adult Learning, Friendship Circle, Men's Group, and loosely organized groups of church volunteers (such as ushers and greeters) will be a part of this ministry and will benefit from the training and support available. Small groups may be offered at the church building, in members' homes, in coffee shops or other gathering places, online, or wherever the desires of members and the needs of our neighbors call us.

HOW WILL THE SMALL GROUP MINISTRY HELP SFBC BECOME DIFFERENT, BOLD AND BETTER?

Without the pastoral and lay leadership of recent years, SFBC would not be ready for what we believe to be a bold move to carry us even more deeply into our commitment to be a community of faith who follows the Way of Jesus, who loves and cares for our neighbors, who refuses to be exclusive and who fervently does justice, loves kindness and walks humbly with our God. For this we are grateful. Given this foundation, we believe that the SGM will move SFBC forward in different, bold and better ways -- deepening our commitment to our mission and values and strengthening interpersonal connections and personal faith in the process.

HOW WE WILL BE DIFFERENT

- ✧ The structure of our ministry will expand such that, as a complementary partner with Worship, the Small Group Ministry will take the inspiration and call offered in the large setting of the Worship service, and carry it on throughout the week in multiple small settings where group leaders and participants will meet to be present to one another, be spiritually fed, cared for, and challenged to continue to grow spiritually and to practice the Way of Jesus beyond the walls of the church.
- ✧ Because the Small Group Ministry will operate within an antiracist framework, we hope BIPOC members will find increased welcome and majority members will increase their skills in addressing racism both personal and systemic.
- ✧ Newcomers will find what for many may be a less daunting entry point for initial engagement with SFBC. They will have the potential to develop relationships with others early on and feel a part of the whole much more quickly as a result.
- ✧ Members and friends who live outside the greater Seattle area will have increased venues for online engagement in a way that allows "my church" to mean something new and exciting, something without architectural or geographical boundaries. The COVID-19 pandemic has taught us that this is possible in ways we never could have imagined.

HOW WE WILL BE BOLD

- ✧ Making such a change takes vision and commitment on the part of the whole congregation.
- ✧ This could be a step toward further decentralizing our structure -- moving toward a more horizontal style of leadership, which is fitting given our Baptist heritage. Members will be ministering to one another on a regular basis.
- ✧ We will be emboldening more lay leaders, who reflect the makeup of the congregation, under an umbrella of strong training, support and guidance.
- ✧ The church will become more fully relational in style.
- ✧ SFBC's commitment to antiracism will move beyond philosophical discussion, and into behavioral norms as small group leaders and participants continue to learn and to practice radical inclusivity in new ways. Groups taking work out into the larger community will receive targeted training on cultural and antiracism sensitivity in social justice work.
- ✧ We believe that the SGM will, over the course of the first few years, move SFBC from a more Traditional Model to a fully Transitional one (to use Dr. Julie Gorman's paradigm) -- a bold step forward.

HOW WE WILL BE BETTER

- ✧ We will create venues where members and newcomers alike will feel more welcomed, heard, included and known for who they are, and will feel a sense of belonging to a larger spiritual community.
- ✧ We will build on our desire and value to be present to one another and to our neighbors.
- ✧ We will have a multitude of options for spiritual and personal growth, potentially meeting the needs of a broad diversity of theological viewpoints.
- ✧ We will find ample venues for living the faith -- putting SFBC's mission and values into action.
- ✧ This ministry will "mix it up" more -- helping us to be more radically inclusive by coming to know each other beyond those who look like us or think like us or who have been at the church as long as we have or sit within three pews of us on Sunday morning.
- ✧ We will address personal and systemic racism and other issues of exclusion on multiple levels ... offering educational groups geared toward members and friends in varying places on the spectrum of understanding, fostering venues for coming to know and respect one another, and making available opportunities for social justice action to address racism, gender discrimination, homo- and transphobia, ageism and other forms of oppression.
- ✧ Younger members and young families who find the largely Sunday-focused schedule problematic will find expanded options for engagement.
- ✧ Our oldest seniors and others who find themselves isolated may benefit from faith-in-action groups devoted to extending care where it is needed in the congregation.
- ✧ We will nurture new lay leadership.
- ✧ We will support and strengthen SFBC's anti-racism commitment by centering the value and understanding of anti-racism in all groups and by enabling anti-racism efforts to flourish in small groups dedicated to that purpose.
- ✧ We will provide professional level antiracism training to current and future group leaders so that they might recognize racially aggressive words and behaviors and know how to successfully intervene as we all commit to growing into new ways of being.
- ✧ We will enrich the community through the inclusion of new voices.
- ✧ The SGM will help us to grow more fully into our mission and, over time, to look more like the community we serve.
- ✧ We will build on SFBC's rich history by providing increased opportunities for serving our neighbors and the larger community.

NEEDED MANAGEMENT AND SUPPORT FROM THE CHURCH

In his article "5 Keys to Thriving Black Church Small Groups," John C. Richards, Jr. lists as the first key that pastors and church leadership must be "all in" for the ministry to be successful. We envision one pastor focusing on the Small Group Ministry as one of their top three priorities. This pastor will work to ensure that a sense of welcome, belonging and radical inclusivity is fostered in the small groups and will also ensure a sense of community between and among the small groups -- connecting them to the larger church community. This will include a focus on keeping the SGM in the forefront of the church's attention, including during worship (for instance, by commissioning new group leaders). This pastor will keep other pastors informed about group opportunities so they might appropriately guide members. They will inform the rest of the pastoral staff about pastoral care needs which arise in the group settings. They will also provide oversight of the Small Group Ministry administration (including supervision of the Administrative Coordinator) but will not be involved in the day-to-day details.

An Administrative Coordinator will carry out the day-to-day operations including recruitment, training and support of leaders, scheduling, technical support, space and supply needs, communications, publicity and liaison with pastoral staff. Both the pastor and the administrator will be strong champions for this ministry, working enthusiastically to fully ensure its success. They may also be supported by seminary intern(s) or a Companis volunteer. The Administrator will report directly to the pastor responsible for the SGM while any other staff will report to the Administrator.

An Advisory Group made up of members reflecting the congregation (in race, gender, age, etc) will work with the Administrator to ensure that the ministry is meeting all aspects of its mission and that groups are adhering to operating norms. Specifically, this body will be responsible for monitoring norms related to inclusivity (antiracism, anti-oppression). They will also work with the administrator to identify continuing leadership training needs and gaps in group content. In addition, they will be responsible for ensuring that a resolution process is utilized effectively as needed. Prior to the implementation of the SGM, the Advisory Group will be responsible for working out the details of its operation.

Budgetary needs will include part-time salary, possible stipend(s) and consulting fees, supplies and special events.

Any new or renovated church facilities should be designed to be conducive to small group work, including warm, well-lit rooms, flexibility in room layouts, comfortable seating and up-to-date technologies. We anticipate small groups will take place in multiple settings, not just at the church.

GROUP LEADERSHIP

All SFBC small groups will be supported and facilitated by a Group Leader. This individual will be responsible for working with SGM administrative staff to create a group plan and schedule. Depending on the type of group, the Leader may be responsible for agendas and facilitation of meetings, and in all cases will work to ensure the satisfaction of members and to center the SFBC mission and values. Leaders will regularly communicate identified pastoral care needs to the pastoral staff and will consult with administrative staff if problems arise. A more detailed job description for these leaders will be developed as the Small Group Ministry is launched.

Some small groups may be led by a member of the pastoral team, if they so desire. For other groups, however, the intent is to develop the leadership and facilitation skills of the SFBC lay community. The Task Force believes there is a great deal of potential facilitation talent among our community members, and that this talent should be expanded upon. We envision this leadership fully representing the makeup of the congregation - theologically, racially, by gender, age, etc. We view this as one of the most positive – and exciting – elements of the small group ministry.

All lay Group Leaders including those leading existing groups, will participate in a comprehensive training program. Pastoral Group Leaders will be invited to participate as well. This training will be facilitated by professionals (from within the church where available and by outside consultants as needed), and the Advisory Group which will include BIPOC member(s) will review all training materials and participate in one training cycle. Training will include but will not be limited to group dynamics, leadership in areas of cultural, ethnic and racial sensitivity, dealing with problematic behaviors, and identifying needs. Recognizing that no one training, whether four hours or four weeks can be sufficient to meet the needs of this ministry, ongoing continued trainings will be held two to three times a year. The Group Leaders will work under the guidance of the SGM Administrative Coordinator and pastor. It is anticipated that, with the exception of the pastors, all Group Leaders will serve in a voluntary capacity. These facilitators will meet together on a regular basis to share experiences, engage in creative problem solving, and generally offer support and encouragement to each other.

Group Leaders will be introduced to the congregation as they begin their responsibilities, and their work will be fully affirmed and commissioned by the church.

COMMITMENTS & NORMS FOR THE SMALL GROUP MINISTRY (AND ALL GROUPS)

- ✧ All groups will directly relate to the SFBC Mission and at least one of SFBC's Values.
- ✧ All small groups will abide by a set of operational norms (some norms will be common to all groups such as a commitment to equal opportunity for participation of all members, while other norms will be developed by particular groups to maximize their success). At the outset of this ministry, universal group norms will be developed by the SGM Advisory Group (which will include the SGM Administrative Coordinator and Pastoral Liaison) in collaboration with the Antiracism Task Force and/or a professional consultant.
- ✧ The ministry and all small groups will operate through a lens of anti-racism/anti-oppression, and group operating norms will reflect this commitment. Some groups will form specifically to study or take action related to antiracism. Leadership training will include antiracist skill training provided by a professional skilled in this area, and ongoing training will be provided as required. A resolution process will be developed by the SGM Advisory Group in consultation with a skilled antiracism/anti-oppression professional, and this process will be utilized in a timely manner for unresolved issues related to race/oppression in any group. The Antiracism Task Force or its successor body will be consulted as these processes are developed.
- ✧ The SGM ministry will work to "right-size" the number of groups at any given point in time, aiming to provide the needed variety and depth while taking care not to drain resources or overwhelm the congregation.
- ✧ Any member of the congregation can suggest an idea for a small group. Those who wish to start a group will need to go through an approval process.

SAMPLES OF SOME KINDS OF GROUPS THAT MIGHT BE OFFERED

PLEASE NOTE: WE ARE NOT SUGGESTING THAT THESE ARE THE GROUPS WHICH WILL BE OFFERED. Ideas for groups will arise from the congregation. We just want to give you an idea of the TYPES of groups which COULD be offered if desired. The possibilities are literally endless, so use your imagination to expand this list. Remember that the ministry will start out small and slowly. The number of groups offered at any given time will vary and will depend on need, interest, and availability of trained leadership and resources.

(Note that groups preceded by an *asterisk are already in existence.)

Some Ideas for Spiritual Growth and Development Groups:

- ✧ *Bible Study & *Prayer Group
- ✧ Broader Spiritualities
- ✧ Faith Heritage
- ✧ Practicing Sabbath
- ✧ Latin American Christianity
- ✧ Contemplative Practice
- ✧ Your idea for a group _____

Some Ideas for Support Groups

- ✧ *BIPOC Members and Friends & *Men's Group
- ✧ Grief Support
- ✧ Former Catholics Support Group
- ✧ Transgender and Non-Binary Members Support Group
- ✧ Parents of School Age Children Support Group
- ✧ International Members Support Group
- ✧ 4th Quarter: A Group for those 75 and older
- ✧ Your idea for a group _____

Some Ideas for Issue-Focused and Action Groups

- ✧ *Brave Space, *Friendship Circle & *First Hill Interfaith Climate Action Group
- ✧ Study Group: Racism in the U.S. Criminal Justice System
- ✧ Churchgoers (A group that visits services of other faith communities)
- ✧ Immigrant Rights Activists
- ✧ Good Trouble (A group that "shows up" in the community when a presence is needed)
- ✧ Tendering (a group of members who visit people in the hospital, send cards, make phone calls to those in need, take communion to homebound folks, etc.)
- ✧ Your idea for a group _____

Some Ideas for Connection and Social Groups

- ✧ *Place at the Table
- ✧ Family Movie Night
- ✧ SFBC Knits!
- ✧ South King County Members and Friends
- ✧ Theater-Goers
- ✧ Your idea for a group _____

¹Chapter 19 of *Introducing Christian Education: Foundations for the 21st Century*, Ed. Michael J. Anthony, pp 176-84

APPENDIX: A PARTIAL LIST OF RESOURCES/RESEARCH RELATED TO BEST PRACTICES IN CHURCH SMALL GROUP MINISTRIES

- 1) "5 Keys to Thriving Black Church Small Groups" by John C. Richards Jr. (blog)
- 2) *Beyond Charity: The Call to Christian Community Development* by John M. Perkins
- 3) *Congregations: Their Power to Form and Transform*, edited by C. Ellis Nelson: "Using Church Images for Commitment, Conflict, and Renewal" by Carl S. Dudley (pp. 89-113) and "Belonging: A Sacramental Approach to Inclusion and Depth of Commitment" by Robert L. Browning (pp. 166-192)
- 4) *Educational Ministry in the Logic of the Spirit*. Chapter 7: "Koinonia and Societal Transformation" by James Loder.
- 5) *Facilitating Groups* by Jenny Rogers
- 6) *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* by Edwin L. Friedman
- 7) *How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems* by Peter L. Steinke
- 8) Interviews of ministerial peers about small group ministry practices in their churches by Rev. Anita Peebles
- 9) *Introducing Christian Education: Foundations for the 21st Century* Edited by Michael J. Anthony. Baker Academic, 2001. Chapter 19 "Small Groups in the Local Church" by Julie Gorman, pp.176-184
- 10) *Letting Go: Transforming Congregations for Ministry* by Roy D. Phillips. The Alban Institute, 1999. Pages 3-25.
- 11) *Prepare Your Church for the Future* by Carl F. George
- 12) *Radical Renewal: The Problem of Wineskins Today* by Howard A. Snyder. Chapter 12 "The Small Group as Basic Structure"
- 13) *Small Groups in the Church: A Handbook for Creating Community* by Thomas G. Kirkpatrick, The Alban Institute.
- 14) *Urban Faith*, November 2009 "Are Small Groups a White Thing?" Ed. Staff