

## Unitarian Universalist Teacher Development Using a small group ministry model

### Role of the Teacher

1. Mentor, guide, facilitator.
2. Representative of the congregation in companionship with youth and children on their spiritual journey.
3. Primary pastoral caregiver for children.

### Skills/personal qualities that enhance teaching

1. Personal spiritual practice and the ability to reflect on life's journey.
2. Understanding that spiritual journey is not a ladder, but rather a process.
3. Confidence to "go with the flow" and draw out the thoughts of the children.
4. Willingness to be silly, adventurous, etc, in order to encourage children to try out new experiences and ideas.
5. Classroom management skills

### Method for Developing Skills/personal Qualities

1. A once monthly small group session in a covenanted group using the small group ministry format:
  - Check-in
  - Opening story/question/reflection
  - Individual responses to the question at hand
  - Conversation about responses
  - Questions/problems/concerns about situations or children
  - Closing
2. Possible topics for reflections might include:
  - A conversation about our own wilderness journeys in preparation for a session on the Exodus
  - A conversation about balance in our lives in preparation for a session on Buddhism
  - A conversation about death in preparation for a session on death and dying.
3. Religious professional would carefully plan, prepare, and facilitate the sessions.

### Benefits to the Teacher

1. The teacher would have a chance to reflect regularly on his/her spiritual journey with other adults.
2. The teacher would have the support of others in figuring out how to handle sticky situations.
3. The teacher would feel competent to lead a class, and comfortable with sharing "processed" parts of their own journey with children.
4. The teacher's spiritual journey would become a gift to the children of the congregation.
5. The teacher's contribution would be respected as that of guide and mentor, representing the congregation in companionship with its children as they grow in faith.

### Benefits to the Congregation and the Children

1. The congregation would be seeded with many adults who have done some thoughtful spiritual work. This approach would deepen the religious life of the congregation.
2. Children would have models, mentors, and guides all the way through as they learn how to take responsibility for their own spiritual well-being and to reflect thoughtfully on their own life experiences.
3. Group wisdom would be available for help with “extra care required” children.
4. Pastoral needs of children would be attended to.
5. Children would have the chance to truly know others in the congregation and to be known.
6. Parents would have a format for sharing pieces of their own spiritual journey with their children and with other children.

### Potential Problems/Drawbacks to the SGM Approach

1. It requires time, perhaps more time than adult volunteers are willing to devote to personal spiritual growth (at least one 2-hour session per month and some regular reflection time.)
2. There is no provision in this model for a safe congregation orientation (minimum one hour) or for a basic “nuts and bolts” orientation.
3. It requires the attention and time of a religious professional to work with the teachers and to prepare and facilitate the sessions.