

## Small Group Ministry Pilot Program

### Goals of Small Group Ministry at Northwoods:

- deepen relationships between members of the Northwoods community
- invite participants into a more authentic experience of their own lives
- offers the opportunity to be vulnerable and held by loving companions on the journey
- explore the connections in our lives: to each other, to spirit, to creativity, to joy

This will be a pilot project, a test run. It will take place in March through May. When Rev. Ellen returns in the fall, we will continue with a rollout for the entire congregation, after tweaking as necessary. Here are the parameters of the pilot program:

- Each pilot group will have approximately eight members. We will try to group the members geographically whenever possible, and plan to set up most of the groups this way in the fall.
- Each group will meet twice a month. When the full program rolls out, there will be options for meeting more or less often, but for the pilot, we'd like to control as many variables as possible.
- Each session will need a host and a facilitator, chosen from the group. The host will provide the meeting space (ideally in their home) and the facilitator will guide the group, help shape the conversation and help keep an eye on the time. We'd like as many people in the group as possible to take a turn doing both of these things, but if for some reason you are unable or unwilling to either host or facilitate, we trust you will work out an arrangement within your group.
- On March 9, from 1-3 pm in the sanctuary, there will be an orientation workshop for all pilot participants that will allow the groups time to get to know each other, discuss their group covenant for how they are going to be together, and get some practice using our small group model.
- While there may be room for more variation in the fall, for the pilot program we are asking everyone to stick to the specifics of the model we are using so that we can evaluate its effectiveness across all the groups. This model is adapted from Parker Palmer's Clearness Committees, which you can read about here: [www.couragerenewal.org/parker/writings/clearness-committee](http://www.couragerenewal.org/parker/writings/clearness-committee).
- There will be a midpoint evaluation sent via an emailed form halfway through the pilot, and an in-person feedback session upon its completion.

Here is the basic format for the small group gathering:

1. *Fellowship Time*: Time for having a snack or a cup of coffee, catching up, etc. (no more than 30 minutes)
2. *Centering*: Light a chalice, followed by a few deep breaths or a time of silence (5-10 minutes)
3. *Meditation*: I will send out a meditation (a short reading or poem) that is tied to the month's theme to be shared in each group. First, it will be read by that week's facilitator, followed by a moment of quiet to think on what the reading brought up for you. Then, a second reading of the meditation. (10-15 minutes)
4. *Heart Talk*: Begin by taking another couple of minutes in silent contemplation. (Some sessions may have wondering questions included to supplement your discussion.) Then the group shares, one at a time, what is on their hearts at this time, what they are struggling with or asking of themselves, or what in the meditation spoke to them the most. Each person will have three or four minutes into which they may speak (or hold silence) as they wish without interruption. Others should not speak during this time, unless invited to ask open, honest questions by the group member speaking. (30-45min)
5. *Contemplation*: After all have spoken, if there is time, sit together in silence and wait for observations to occur: connections between people's experiences, ways of living together, thoughts about their experience of the meditation or monthly theme or how it might relate to what is happening in individual lives. (30-45 min)
6. *Closing*: Extinguishing the chalice. Before leaving, establish that all are agreed on the next meeting date, and choose a host and facilitator for the meeting.