



Finding Faith and Fellowship in Small Groups

By: Bruce Pokarney

Cathy Durst and her husband, Geoff, recently moved to suburban Minneapolis to be closer to their daughter's family, but not before contributing greatly to Bethlehem since joining 14 years ago. Geoff was a confirmation mentor. Cathy served on numerous teams and is a past Secretary/Treasurer of the congregation. But perhaps Cathy's most valued achievement was helping to create



Tuesday Ladies—one of several small groups that welcome, worship, teach, and sometimes serve as part of the church's ministry. Cathy, an original member of Tuesday Ladies in the winter of 2013, recognized early the value of small groups that meet regularly, but don't require regular attendance.

“Small groups provide the opportunity for that strong sense of belonging,” she says. “Not every group is for every person. You might have to try a few before you find your place. As far as Tuesday Ladies, I've invited women to come and see if it's a fit. No Bible study background is required and, along with the learning and sharing, I guarantee a good laugh or three. It is a diverse group of women that gather, and that makes it all the better. I've learned something every single week!”

While the group has discussion leaders that facilitate conversation, the teaching and learning are done by everyone who attends. Cathy's faith helped her create and maintain a group that truly values asking questions.

“I have always been part of faith communities that allow me to wonder and question,” says Cathy. “Alice Wegehaupt was part of our Tuesday Ladies until her death at age 98. She taught us so much, but the thing I remember most about her was that she said she still had so much to learn. I think that we all have so much to learn—it is my favorite part of this journey of faith.”

Rather than using a traditional Bible study format, Tuesday Ladies routinely focuses on a specific book that provokes thought and conversation through the lens of faith. Some of the books are written by well-known Christian authors such as C.S. Lewis and Adam Hamilton. But the studies can sometimes take an interesting turn when featured books include titles such as *A Cosmic*



Adventure Through Faith and Science by Dr. Paul Wallace or *Think Indigenous: Native American Spirituality for a Modern World* by Doug Good Feather.

Even if those who participate might not have been able to complete the suggested reading in between meetings, they usually don't feel left out when the discussion begins. Conversations are not necessarily limited to the book.

"Some of the most memorable evenings are probably when someone might share a special moment in their life, whether joyful or even tragic," says Cathy. "This group is definitely a safe zone where we can share such things and support and pray for each other through whatever is happening in our lives. I treasure that friendship and that we are comfortable enough to share with each other some of our deepest joys and sorrows."

Since that first meeting in 2013, Tuesday Ladies has completed 64 book studies. The names and faces have varied over the years, but up to two dozen women participate on any given Tuesday evening when the group meets in the Fireside Room.

"As in any gathering, there are those that easily speak and contribute and those that are the quiet listeners," says Cathy. "I have been most touched by those quiet listeners that have shared how important Tuesday evenings are for them. They might not say much, but they very much contribute to the cohesiveness of Tuesday Ladies."

Bethlehem's small groups play an increasingly important role in the vitality and growth of the church. A Tuesday Men group has been meeting for more than 20 years. A new Younger Men Group is being launched this fall. As with Tuesday Ladies, all small groups require nothing more than a desire to learn and share with one another—a true opportunity for friendship and fellowship.

For more information about Bethlehem's small groups, visit <https://www.bethlehemaberdeen.org/teach/adult-small-groups>

Thank you for being a vital part of Bethlehem and for your support. With your partnership and the power of the Holy Spirit, Bethlehem is touching lives each and every day – connecting us with God, one another, and our mission in the world.



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