

# Foundation Leadership Forum 2 — Study Groups and Education

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**Date:** 2026-04-25 **Duration:** approximately 2 hours 42 minutes **Chair (study groups segment):** Joyce Anderson **Chair (education segment):** Elisabeth Callahan

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## Overview

The second forum of the Leadership Roundtable combined two themes: study groups (chaired by Joyce Anderson) and education (chaired by Elisabeth Callahan). The forum opened with a delayed presentation from the previous session by Alejandra Rodriguez, then proceeded through a panel on study groups, two complementary presentations on study-group methodology, a video presentation on a unified vision of the Urantia education ecosystem, and panels from each of the four organisations active in Urantia education.

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## Presenters and Panellists

### Study groups segment (panel chaired by Joyce Anderson):

- **Joyce Anderson** — chair, study group panel
- **Royce Russel** — panel member, longtime reader, attends five study groups per week
- **Rick Warren** — panel member, retired, attends approximately ten study groups per week, undertaking a tour of all English-speaking groups
- **Marvin Gawryn** — panel member; presenting on Spiritual Living Support Groups
- **Gaétan Charland** — panel member; presenting on Weaving Revelation
- **Alejandra Rodriguez** — opening presentation (overflow from Forum 1)

**Education segment (presented by a 14-person education team chaired by Elisabeth Callahan):**

- **Elisabeth Callahan** — chair; representing UUI
- **Pre McGee** — Education Chair, UAI
- **Joanne Strobel** — Executive Director, UBIS
- **Geoff Theiss** — Executive Director, UB Fellowship (yielded his presentation slot to Alejandra Rodriguez at the start of the session)
- **Geoff Taylor** — UUI board, contribution on educational challenges
- **Susan Myers** — UUI advisor; presenting Francine Fortin's story
- **Ari Horn** — Director of Administration, UUI
- **Jeff Taylor** — contribution; UUI

The video presentation was produced by **Roy Healey** and **Jay Han**.

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## Topics Presented

### **Latin America to Dubai — leadership and culture in Spanish-speaking communities (Alejandra Rodriguez)**

Rodriguez presented insights from work she has been doing on digital platforms for Spanish-speaking countries. She stated that of the eighteen Spanish-speaking countries, the Fellowship currently has leaders in thirteen. She raised three observations:

1. As a country becomes more "spiritually awakened," local leadership challenges tend to emerge, because leaders develop differing approaches.
2. Current leaders, given their age profile, would benefit substantially from AI support if their organisations provide infrastructure to use it well.
3. Vocabulary differs between Spain and Latin America; readers in Spain use more religious vocabulary, while Latin American readers vary.

She framed her contribution as a "shared mission" of supporting growth across diverse leadership styles, and noted that international communities (such as the Catholic community she has been participating in in Dubai) can support local growth elsewhere.

## **Why study groups, and what they mean to people (Joyce Anderson with the panel)**

Anderson framed the study-groups discussion around a goal: to grow from the current ~550 study groups to 1000 by 2040 — requiring approximately 32 to 33 new study groups per year. She reported 17 new study groups in the first quarter of 2026.

Panel members described what study groups have meant to them. Royce Russel addressed the role of personality in study-group facilitation, emphasising the "KISS" principle (keep it simple), the value of a facilitator with attractive personality and good knowledge of the book, and the goal of "spreading more light than heat." Rick Warren described study groups as his primary social connection in retirement and recommended the Foundation's study-group directory as a central resource.

## **Best practices and lessons learned (Joyce Anderson)**

Anderson presented best practices for sustaining attendance in study groups: focus on the book; have a strong facilitator and a backup; introduce new attendees with a quick round of introductions; engage all attendees while not forcing participation; start and end on time; maintain a consistent schedule (e.g. for a two-hour study: 28 minutes sharing, 2 minutes prayer, 88 minutes study and discussion, 2 minutes wrap-up); use raised hands for virtual groups; have a backup link in case of scheduling conflicts; confirm next session at end and send email reminders.

She and the panel addressed lessons learned: how to move discussions along; the avoidance of partisan political discussions; the facilitator's responsibilities for muting or removing disruptive attendees in virtual settings; how to redirect when channelling claims arise (referring to specific Urantia Book passages — Paper 112, Section 3, Paragraph 7, or Paper 100, Section 5).

Royce Russel said his pet peeve in facilitation is when a facilitator recounts answers received from their own thought adjuster as authoritative.

The panel preferences on study-group format were canvassed: Rick Warren ("I like them all"), Royce Russel (topical when well-prepared), Marvin Gawryn (topical with structured provocative questions), Gaétan Charland (practical, applicable to lived experience).

## **Weaving Revelation (Gaétan Charland)**

Charland framed study groups as the basic structural unit on which the spread of the revelation depends ("study groups are not threatening to that kind of regimes" — referring to home-grown

communities of practice that can flourish where larger formal organisations cannot). He shared an analogy of a single log versus logs together: a single log catches fire briefly but cannot sustain its flame alone.

He identified five training schools currently operating: UBIS, UUI, the UUI Teacher Education Programme (TEP), Suggestive in Progressive (a Francophone programme operating in Africa), the UAI study-group leaders' "First Leader" course, and a school in Brazil. He raised an open question: "all those that have been trained as those courses... are they today hosts of study groups? What are they doing when they have learned?"

He critiqued the existing study-group directory as outdated and presented a mockup of an integrated study-group portal which would aggregate facilitator courses, resource library, monthly newsletter, and tools for finding local groups, with the visual and tonal posture aimed at younger users.

He outlined the five pillars of his Sower of Seeds programme: dissemination (reaching seekers), study and personal growth, education and leadership development, community and fellowship, and service to the world.

## Spiritual Living Support Groups (Marvin Gawryn)

Gawryn introduced the Spiritual Living Support Groups (SLSG) programme, which he and a leadership team of eight (Elisabeth Callahan, Gaétan Charland, Kurt Sera, Kay Cooper, Bill Cooper, Sharon Porter, Mark Wood, and Gawryn as chair) have been developing. He stated that the UUI curriculum committee had recently given the green light to launch the SLSG programme on the UUI platform in autumn 2026.

He distinguished SLSGs from study groups: where study groups prioritise analytical and critical thinking on the book, SLSGs are focused on the spiritual growth of participants. They use the Urantia Book as primary written source but emphasise empathy, careful listening, sympathy, creative and cooperative problem-solving, and willingness to share personal experience. Group sizes are three to six members (seven or eight maximum). The programme draws on four prior precedents in the UB community.

In Q&A, **Sue Seccombe** raised a cautionary comment about coordination across the community, citing Angie Thurston's "Progress Project" as a similar earlier initiative. She framed the comment as illustrative of broader redundancy in community efforts.

## Audience survey on educational priorities (Elisabeth Callahan)

Callahan led a "waterfall cascade" survey of what attendees identified as most needed in Urantia Book education. Items submitted into the chat (visible on screen) included: effective exegesis (Brad Gardner); spiritual embodiment education (Marvin Gawryn); outward-facing reach to non-readers globally (Collins Lomo); patience and humility (Mark Wood); tailoring education to where individuals are; a central place / website for all study aids and research resources (Royce Russel); integration of the teachings with application to real life (Susan Ryan, on Tom Allen's idea).

## Vision and the four organisations (Elisabeth Callahan with the education team)

Callahan introduced a working vision statement that the four organisations had agreed to support:

*"Our educational organisations exist to nurture the spiritual transformation of individuals — grounded in truth, alive in worship, and beneficial in loving service — whose lives can become the seeds of an uplifted world civilisation."*

She presented a model in which truth, worship, and service mutually reinforce one another, framing the absence of any one as a degenerate form of the other two (truth without worship as "dry theology"; worship without service as "spiritual indulgence"; service without truth as "missing the mark").

She identified four challenges: overlapping efforts among the organisations; rapid transformation in the global educational landscape; insufficient connectivity between front-door outreach and progressive education; and the creative tension between unity of purpose and diversity of programmes.

## A video model of Urantia education as a three-ring ecosystem (produced by Roy Healey and Jay Han)

The video presented a model of Urantia education as three concentric rings:

- **Outer ring (Information and Discovery):** first contact via websites, YouTube, podcasts, social media, AI assistants, articles, documentary films
- **Middle ring (Formation):** Urantia Foundation, UBIS, UB Fellowship, UAI, the Center for Unity, and study groups; where seekers become readers and join community
- **Inner ring (Spiritual Formation):** UUI; advanced scholarship, integrative study, teacher training, and ministry preparation

The video framed study, worship, and loving service as three pillars that "deepen the others." It noted demographic data: that personal commitments to faith among young adults rose 12 percentage points in four years, and that commitment to Jesus among Gen Z men jumped 15 percentage points between 2019 and 2025. It described the future of the Urantia revelation's spread as occurring through a network of "transformed lives."

## UAI education (Pre McGee)

McGee presented UAI's educational mission. She named four pillars drawn from the teachings: education is transformation; education must be suited to the capacity of the student; education continues throughout a lifetime; and the publication mandate places the book early in the world for the training of leaders and teachers. She presented next-twenty-years analysis of a transforming spiritual landscape — Africa as new spiritual centre of gravity; Asia's diversity; secularisation in Europe and Oceania; the rise of "post-institutional" spirituality; literacy challenges (nearly 800 million adults globally cannot read); youth-driven innovation; pluralism and polarisation; and the imperative to evolve from a book-centred to a people-centred, experiential, intercultural, digitally fluent community.

## UBIS education (Joanne Strobel)

Strobel presented UBIS's twenty-six-year track record (78 consecutive trimesters of courses) and pedagogy: small groups of 10–18 individuals meeting online for 6, 8, or 10 weeks, with the revelators acknowledged as the true teachers and trained volunteers facilitating. She framed UBIS's approach

as peer-to-peer without hierarchy or interpretation. Students often become facilitators, and facilitators sometimes become staff. She said the school has served as a vehicle for training future leaders.

## UUI education (Elisabeth Callahan)

Callahan presented UUI as an independent unaffiliated nonprofit serving the whole Urantia community at no cost, supported by volunteer faculty. She noted UUI was a pioneer of online education using Zoom from 2014. The curriculum is organised around three modes: study, worship, and service. She mentioned the Teacher Education Programme as a cross-organisational effort developed alongside representatives from the major Urantia organisations, and noted UUI's sponsorship of the Bower Tree early childhood education project. She named long-term goals including becoming a full university (years away), exploring AI to enhance online education, and building an endowment fund.

## Stories of transformed lives

- **Brazilian Urantia School (Pre McGee)**: a fully online distance-learning programme of the Brazilian Urantia Association, with 768 registered students, weekly two-hour Zoom classes since 2019, and over 200 recorded classes archived. Course content is delivered in Portuguese.
- **Erica Webster (Joanne Strobel)**: a Mexican-born US-based UBIS student living in Oklahoma. She joined Spanish-language UBIS classes when Olga Lopez began offering them in 2013, became a facilitator in 2014, and now leads the Spanish branch of UBIS.
- **Francine Fortin (Susan Myers)**: a Quebec-based reader given the Urantia Book by Lynn St. Pierre in 2004. She participated in UAI Quebec courses, joined UUI Cafe study groups in 2021, completed the UUI Teacher Education Programme (TEP) beta curriculum, and led morning worship sessions at the 2025 international gathering. She died in November 2025 of cancer.

## Major challenges (the four organisations)

- **Pre McGee (UAI)** — demographic and structural challenges across the next twenty years (see "UAI education" above).
- **Geoff Taylor (UUI)** — patience, tact, tolerance, and readiness as the major challenges; framed in terms of preparing for an eventual large-scale viral expansion of the revelation.

- **Geoff Theiss (UB Fellowship)** — capacity challenges of a small organisation in a rapidly changing environment, with attention to a generational transition in active community membership.
- **Joanne Strobel (UBIS)** — three challenges: (1) student attention spans and the pull toward passive learning; (2) keeping work processes from crowding out the focus on quality reflective study; (3) managing growth and expansion while maintaining quality control across cultural and linguistic diversification.

## Successes

- **UAI's urantiathons (Pre McGee)** — global online gatherings of 12–24 hours, initiated by Jeannie Vasquez during the early pandemic, since expanded into youth-led, language-specific, and regionally focused events.
- **The UB Fellowship's "digital front door" video series (Geoff Theiss)** — a set of ten short professionally produced videos addressing questions like "Who is God?", deployed via Google Ads to bring searchers into the educational ecosystem; also produced in Spanish.
- **UUI Cafe and worship sessions, Korean new-reader courses, Sunday worship and homecoming gatherings, prison-ministry letter from Jordan at High Desert State Prison in Nevada (Ari Horn / Marvin Gawryn).**

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## Questions Raised

- **Brad Gardner** asked Marvin Gawryn whether the SLSG programme had been pilot-tested. Gawryn responded that the leadership team has accumulated experience over 40 years of related programmes; the formal SLSG model itself is new.
- **Lisa Crawford** asked whether the eight-person SLSG team intended to model the approach themselves and then teach others. Gawryn confirmed.
- **Douglas Burns** asked about the level of facilitator rigour required for SLSGs given that participants share at a deeper personal level (e.g. handling grief). Gawryn responded that facilitator training includes recognising one's limits and that the group as a whole holds the responsibility.

- **Sue Seccombe** asked whether the SLSG initiative had connection to Angie Thurston's earlier Progress Project. Gawryn confirmed it is one of four precedents drawn upon, and Seccombe used the moment to flag broader redundancy concerns across community programmes.
  - **Sue Seccombe** asked at end whether the study-group directory team had been included in the Roundtable. The answer was that they had not (Bill Beasley, Jackie, Philip Marriott — Marriott is being elected UAI treasurer at a parallel meeting and will be replaced as study-group chair).
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## Notable Quotes (verbatim)

- **Royce Russel** on facilitation: *"Spread more light than heat."*
- **Mo Siegel** on his commitment: *"I'm going to be a dog with a bone in my mouth. So we as a group need to get together. We need to do this right."*
- **Mo Siegel** on Gaétan Charland's portal idea: *"I asked chat while we were talking, where can we buy software. Gaétan, I thought had a really extraordinarily smart idea — make a study group portal that is interesting, and it's going to cost a little money, but it's really a great idea."*
- **Susan Myers** in the closing prayer: *"We are bound and we are determined... bound to our Father, our creators, all in love. Bound to one another, mind to mind, heart to heart, hand in hand, stronger together."*
- **Mo Siegel** at session close: *"This for me is the most rewarding meeting I have been to with Urantia Book readers in three decades. It's so encouraging to see the diversity of effort and the successes that people are having."*
- **Sue Seccombe** in the cautionary moment on coordination: *"We get very splintered with a lot of good ideas and a lot of people working on their own version of the good idea that's been done almost the same way, somewhere else."*
- **Elisabeth Callahan** on the working vision statement: *"Truth without worship becomes dry theology, and worship without service can become spiritual indulgence, and service without truth misses the mark. So altogether, they describe what a spiritually transformed life actually looks like in practice."*
- **Marvin Gawryn** on the project's scope: *"Such groups create spaces that are open and hospitable, but resource-rich and charged with expectancy."*