

The *Spiritual Living Support Groups* project began with a research group of eight long-time readers, who had been meeting weekly for a year and half, with a focus on how the Urantia movement could be more effective in *socializing the spiritual ideals of the revelation*.

The members of that group are:

Elisabeth Callahan
Gaetan Charland
Kurt Cirra
Kaye Cooper
William Cooper
Sharon Porter
Mark Wood
and myself as Chair

Many of us in this group had participated, over the past 40 years, in previous efforts to develop models for small groups, that focused on the spiritual growth of participants. Eventually our discussions converged in an attempt to combine all of the best practices of these previous efforts, into a single comprehensive training and development document, which introduces the "*Spiritual Living Support Groups Program*", or *SLSG Program*.

We are actually very excited to share that we met this past week with UUI's Curriculum Committee, and they gave us a green light to launch the *SLSG Program* this Fall on the UUI platform.

So... what do we mean by a *Spiritual Living Support Group*?

I think the best way to share the concept, is to show you all a subset of this master document that we finished just a few weeks ago.

(Share screen)

Spiritual Living Support Groups

1. What Is a *Spiritual Living Support Group*?

1.1 Description

A *Spiritual Living Support Group (SLSG)* is a small gathering of Urantia Book readers and possibly other spiritually motivated individuals (three to eight participants). Such groups meet regularly to support, encourage and inspire each other in growing their loving relationships with God and with others—the adventure of living the spiritual life in this material world.

While using The Urantia Book as their primary written source of guidance and inspiration, *SLSGs* complement study groups rather than supplant them.

SLSGs are designed, through sharing, to support the spiritual progress of their members.

Group members explore how to apply spiritual values to actual events in their lives.

Participants share their experiences, wisdom, and insights with the group.

They begin to live increasingly as a mutually supportive spiritual family.

Each group decides how to run itself. Group members develop methods and goals agreed upon by the participants.

A variety of materials and plans for facilitating *SLSG* meetings are offered later in this document.

1.2 Why a Spiritual Living Support Group?

As a natural outgrowth of their studies, many students discover an urge to share their inner spiritual lives with others. *Spiritual Living Support Groups* are very helpful for those who want to more fully understand the contents of *The Urantia Book*, in their attempts to dynamically live its teachings.

=====

1.3 Benefits of Participating in *SLSGs*

Participating in *SLSGs* is an enriching spiritual experience, in which loving relationships can grow—relationships that comfort, strengthen, and recharge each participant in a nurturing spiritual family context. They bring new spiritual energy to help participants cope with the challenges of living in our confusing, often overwhelming modern world.

=====

A *Spiritual Living Support Group* is not usually a solemn event, nor is it group therapy. It involves participants sharing their spiritual lives and supporting each other.

SLSGs help their members learn to be more loving in all circumstances, and to express that love in ways that are practical and effective, even in challenging situations. Participants encourage each other to both keep going when they fail and celebrate their successes.

2. Objectives and Goals of the Group

2.1 General Objectives

Participants are invited to:

- Develop their commitment to understanding and living the will of God.
 - Cultivate truth, beauty, goodness, and love as guiding values in the group.
 - Develop their own spiritual practice, or set of spiritual habits, that will enhance their relationship with God and their loving service to others.
 - Experience God as an active presence in the group, participating with each member in the midst of the group's interactions.
-

3. Relationships Among Group Members

3.1 Guidelines for Relating to Each Other

Group meeting rules should encourage order, acceptance, and respect for each person. There will always be differences in levels of intellectual, emotional, and spiritual maturity. It is important for participants simply to accept everyone, including themselves, just as they are at each point in their

spiritual journeys. We are all “young,” and God is engaged in a long-term, even eternal, process of “growing us up” to full spiritual maturity.

Getting to Know Each Other

There are excellent opportunities in an *SLSG* for members to better understand their fellow members, to know their motives, spiritual goals and ambitions, and even to see their areas of struggle and growth.

Participants attempt to be present in the group as fully as possible, with their doubts, fears, and failings, as well as their convictions, joys, and successes.

Being Trustworthy

Observing confidentiality is critical. Group trust depends on knowing that whatever is said will remain with the people with whom it is shared, and will not be passed on to others without explicit permission.

Learning from Within It’s good to remember that each of us has our own spiritual guides: our Thought Adjuster, Jesus’ Spirit of Truth, the Holy Spirit, and our Guardian Angels. As seekers in a spiritual context, participants attend to their own inner teachers. They learn from others, of course. But it is also important to learn from within. They increasingly pay close attention to their own reactions and responses, learning to trust and follow their highest inner urges.

In *SLSGs*, participants trust and learn from silence, which is a gift in our noisy world. After someone has spoken, they take time to reflect without immediately filling the space with words.

4. Group Formation

4.1 Choosing Members

Initially, *SLSG* initiators look for kindred spirits. Prospective members must have spiritual values and goals that align with the purpose and processes of an *SLSG* and familiarize themselves with the introductory materials before joining the group.

It is a good idea to make clear in advance, to anyone invited to participate, exactly what an *SLSG* is. Discussion groups usually prioritize analytical and critical thinking. A *Spiritual Living Support Group*, in addition, requires empathy, careful listening, understanding, sympathy, creative and cooperative problem-solving, and a willingness to share both spiritual truth and relevant personal experience.

After fully orienting all participants to the *SLSG* introductory materials, a time is set for gathering to establish the group and enjoy the first meeting. New participants are added only with unanimous agreement.

Spiritual Living Support Groups are encouraged to continue meeting regularly for as long as the meetings add value for participants.

New members are added only if all in the group agree.

Small groups with three to six members are ideal. Seven or eight participants are usually about the maximum.

5. Group Methods

5.1 Group Sovereignty

The group, as a whole, has sovereignty over itself and decides how it is run. The members develop group methods and goals, in keeping with these *SLSG* guidelines, that are agreed to by all. These can be changed by common agreement as the group develops.

A facilitator for each meeting runs the agenda, presents the topic, and keeps order.

5.2 Making a Safe Place for Everyone

When participants speak, they do so without insisting that others agree. They share stories, experiences, or thoughts intentionally and clearly, avoiding repetition and overly long expression...and then they stop. This allows the group to reflect for a while in silence. When participants relax and slow down, everyone can be heard and understood to their satisfaction.

Participants commit to listening to each other; they listen to understand the speaker, rather than being preoccupied with how they might respond. It is good to pause after each person speaks to digest what they have said, and to reflect spiritually.

5.3 Creating a Spiritual Atmosphere

SLSGs create spaces that are open and hospitable, but resource-rich and charged with expectancy. Meetings have a spiritual goal and should ideally use spiritual methods.

- *SLSGs* choose discussion topics that are spiritual rather than merely intellectual. Usually, topics are based on spiritual material from *The Urantia Book*, with other resources being brought in as appropriate.
- *SLSG* participants are Spirit-led; it is desirable to:
 - Begin and end with a few minutes of prayer, silence, or some other form of spiritual connection.
 - Relax and direct one's attention inward, focusing on feelings of gratitude and seeking to be open to the presence and inspiration of the Spirit.
 - Maintain spiritual connection during the discussion, seeking to harmonize with the values of the Spirit.
- Participants can ask to pause and spiritually reconnect periodically, especially if the atmosphere seems to have lost its spiritual savor.

5.5 Examples of Formats

One Possible 90-Minute Meeting Format

- Greetings and social time (10 minutes)
- Review and renew the group's consecration/commitment (5 minutes)
- Worship time (10 minutes)
- Study and discussion (20 minutes)
- Check in about spiritual experiences, insights, and growth (30 minutes)
- Set spiritual goals for the time between this and the next meeting (10 minutes)
- Share a closing quiet time of gratitude and worship (5 minutes).

A Second Possible 90-Minute Meeting Format

- Greetings, catching up since the last meeting (20 minutes)
 - Transition time for prayer, music, silence, and reviewing/renewing commitments (5 minutes)
 - Introduction of topic or theme, and discussion materials (10 minutes)
 - Experiment with a spiritual technique or method and share the experience with each other (50 minutes)
 - Briefly discuss plans for the next meeting, and close with a prayer of thanksgiving (5 minutes).
-

6. Group Leadership

6.1 Facilitators

The commitment of attendees will soon fade if meetings are allowed to wander for lack of planning and facilitation.

Ideally, at least one person in each newly forming group will be educated in an *SLSG* training program, to be provided on the Urantia University platform. It is a good idea to have at least two or three people trained to serve as facilitators to allow for leadership rotation in planning and conducting meetings. All participants can be supported to eventually assume the facilitator role within the meeting from time to time, even if not formally trained.

6.2 Providing a Support Person

Each newly forming *SLSG* can be offered a highly experienced, trained support person (who will not be a permanent member of the group) to initially guide the group through the startup process, answer questions, and provide support as needed.

7. Program Materials and Lessons

7.1 Identifying Topics in Harmony with Spiritual Living

The *SLSG Leadership Team*, as part of its training programs, offers guidelines, suggested materials, and topics/themes for use in group meetings. (See some possibilities below.)

1. Some Sources of Materials and Spiritual Processes

(Here are just an initial few — we plan eventually to have many “packets” of materials available for SLSGs to choose from.)

- *Adventures in Spiritual Living* materials (exercises and stories). Many activities suitable for *Spiritual Living Support Groups* are posted on two websites, <https://adventuresinspirituallyiving.com> and <https://urantia-book-spirituality.com>
- Topics or lessons from past activities that any of the group members have attended (ie. study groups, conferences, classes, etc.).
- *The Method of Centering Prayer* and *The Prayer of Consent* – and other materials by Thomas Keating, Richard Rohr and others in the contemplative literature. Often used in developing worship and prayer practices (see www.contemplativeoutreach.org).
- Urantia Book passages related to *A Way of Life in Spiritual Family Relationships* (which are posted on the www.familyofgodfellowship.org website), that explore a variety of spiritual themes, including:
 - The Spiritual Parent Child Relationship
 - Our Spiritual Sister Brother Relationships
 - The Indwelling Spirit
 - The Will of God
 - Love
 - Eternal Life
 - Faith

8. *SLSG Program – Training/Promotion on the UUI Platform*

9. *SLSG Program at a future International Conference*

10. *The Need for Spiritual Living Support Groups*

The socialization of personal spiritual experience is essential to the success of any epochal revelation. If *The Urantia Book* is to fulfill its mission, effective socialization must take place. The quality of such social sharing and support will depend on capable and dedicated leadership, as well as sincere and persistent prayer.

Many people are yearning for better ways to grow and share their spiritual lives. They are waiting hopefully for new possibilities. *SLSGs* are offered as a potentially foundational element in our efforts to socialize our spiritual aspirations. They are appropriately ambitious for our time and situation.

Spiritual Living Support Groups are a new way to encourage people in their efforts to progressively live the spiritual teachings of the Urantia revelation—to become effective living proponents of the up-stepped and transformative “religion of the Spirit.”
