
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 as a mutually supportive spiritual family.

Groups typically meet for 90 to 120 minutes weekly or every other week. However, each group can decide their own schedule.

The 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 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.

God has designed us to learn from others and grow in association with our fellows:

- We learn and grow as others serve us and teach us through example and sharing of their stories.
- We learn as we serve others. Increasing service is our destiny—an essential and thrilling part of eternal life.
- We can create loving self-accountability around personal spiritual goals.
- As we share our vulnerability, we develop our trust in God and in our spiritual sisters and brothers.
- We can share our love in service to others with the group, while remembering that we are there to support each other, not to persuade or “fix” anyone.
- We can learn to relate to apparent failures as positive learning experiences.

1.3 Benefits of Participating in the Group

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. It is a celebration of their spiritual lives with their loving brothers and sisters in God's family. It is enjoyable, as well as deeply meaningful.

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. Their friends in the group encourage them to both keep going when they fail and celebrate their successes.

Participating in a *Spiritual Living Support Group* provides an opportunity for each participant to socialize their religion.

99:6.2 *"There is a real purpose in the socialization of religion. It is the purpose of group religious activities:*

to dramatize the loyalties of religion;

to magnify the lures of truth, beauty, and goodness;

to foster the attractions of supreme values;

to enhance the service of unselfish fellowship;

to glorify the potentials of family life;

to promote religious education;

to provide wise counsel and spiritual guidance;

and to encourage group worship.

And all live religions encourage human friendship, conserve morality, promote neighborhood welfare, and facilitate the spread of the essential gospel of their respective messages of eternal salvation."

2. Objectives and Goals of the Group

2.1 General Objectives

The primary objective of the group is for members to support each other in living their spiritual lives.

Participants are also 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.

2.2 Specific Meeting Goals

The Urantia Book recommends that religionists develop habits of thinking and acting that contribute to their spiritual growth. Each of these habits serves as an example of a specific attitude or behavior a group might want to adopt as its goal for a meeting or a series of meetings.

100:1.8 Religious habits of thinking and acting are contributory to the economy of spiritual growth. One can develop religious predispositions toward favorable reaction to spiritual stimuli, a sort of conditioned spiritual reflex. Habits which favor religious growth embrace cultivated sensitivity to divine values,

*recognition of religious living in others,
reflective meditation on cosmic meanings,
worshipful problem solving,
sharing one's spiritual life with one's fellows,
avoidance of selfishness,
refusal to presume on divine mercy,
living as in the presence of God.*

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. *SLSG* participants honor the integrity of the individual and build relational trust by being trustworthy.

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. They benefit because their respect and empathy grow. Such understandings are steps to loving each other.

It is helpful to give and receive warm welcome. People learn best in hospitable spaces; they support each other's learning by giving and receiving hospitality.

It helps to be present in the group as fully as possible, with one's doubts, fears, and failings, as well as one's convictions, joys, and successes.

Trusting Others

It's good to remember that each of us has our own spiritual guides: our Thought Adjuster, the Spirit of Truth, the Holy Spirit, and our Guardian Angels.

Having faith in fellow group members is important, expecting them to choose the higher way or ideal—if not immediately, then eventually. *SLSG* participants resist temptations to solve the problems of others in the group. They have faith in the ability, wisdom, and spiritual resources of their fellow participants to solve their own problems. What is shared can be a resource for each of them to apply according to their own judgment.

It is much more fruitful to allow participants to explore solutions with the group. Everyone grows and learns in the process. The group member who brought up the problem is left free to make their own choices—and they end up feeling more capable and prepared for life. *A Spiritual Living Support Group* enables participants to *share their lives among a family of friends*.

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—whether in a small *SLSG* group or in

a larger *SLSG*-related training circle—and will not be passed on to others without explicit permission.

It is important to avoid fixing, rescuing, or correcting. Advice is offered only when it is clearly requested. This is one of the more difficult guidelines, but it is vital—so that the group can provide a context in which each participant can “grow their own soul.”

Listening. It is helpful for participants to:

- Listen with love and a sincere desire to understand.
- Look for good motives.
- Watch for attitudes and values we recognize and share.
- Appreciate the similarities among us, as well as the uniqueness of each person.

These are choices members make about their approach to other people which foster loving attitudes and encourage sound friendships.

Speaking. It is helpful for participants to:

- Attempt to speak their truth in ways that respect other people’s truth. Participants try not to interpret, correct, or rebut what others say. They try to speak using “I” statements (“my experience, my sense of things is, I see it as...”). They trust people to choose what is useful for themselves.
- Attempt to respond to others with honest, open questions.
- Ask themselves, if feeling judgmental or defensive, “I wonder what brought them to this belief?” “I wonder what they’re feeling right now?” “I wonder what my reaction teaches me about myself?” Setting aside

- judgment, participants attempt to listen more deeply to others, to themselves and to the leadings of the Spirit.
- Speak one at a time while others listen respectfully. Participants take care to avoid overly long monologues that take up the group's precious meeting time. Critiques, crosstalk, or interruptions are discouraged. If group members tend to interrupt or talk while someone is speaking in an in-person meeting, a "talking stone" can be used to indicate who has the right to speak, until that person finishes and passes the stone to the next speaker. In a virtual meeting, it is helpful for participants to "raise hands" electronically, establishing a sequence for the facilitator to call upon.

Learning from Within

As seekers in a spiritual context, participants attend to their own inner teacher. 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.

They know that it is possible to leave the group meeting with whatever it was they needed when they arrived, and that the seeds planted there can keep growing in the days ahead.

(Thank you to Parker Palmer's work on Circles of Trust as the inspiration for many of these guidelines. They suggest how to best participate in SLSG meetings, and they can also be adapted as guidelines in workplaces, schools, communities, and other groups)

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 important to be selective, to choose carefully who is invited to the group. It is much easier to invite selectively than to purge the group of a disruptive member who diminishes the quality of the meetings for others.

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.

4.2 Establishing the Group

It may be helpful to set a time frame for the group—six months, a year, or longer—along with a meeting schedule.

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

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

4.3 Group Values

Truth, beauty, goodness, and love are guiding values of *Spiritual Living Support Groups*.

It is essential to make the group a safe place where people can reveal themselves and take chances they may not ordinarily take in sharing their experiences, ideals, and values. The basic attitudes of everyone in the group need to include gentleness, respect, trust, and patience.

In addition, group solidarity is enhanced by loyalty, fairness, tolerance, and love.

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.

These *SLSG* guidelines provide a basis for common group expectations, including order and respect for each person. If participants do not respect the agreed-upon guidelines, the group may expel disruptive members.

To resolve problems, the group can use the "Grievance Process" that Jesus suggested. (See description in the supplement that accompanies this document.)

5.2 Making a Safe Place for Everyone

Ideally, participants avoid fixing, advising, rescuing, or correcting one another, giving no advice unless asked for. They appreciate what members have shared and ask honest, open questions that allow participants to share more fully.

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 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.

Members agree to honor strict confidentiality on what is shared in the group.

It is possible, especially with a new participant, that the facilitator or other experienced group members, may need to intervene politely if the person slips into criticism, defensiveness, attempting to solve another person's problem, advocacy, telling another what to do, interrupting, or monopolizing the group's time.

SLSGs maintain an atmosphere that is loving and supportive.

- Participants make a point of being loving with each other. They treat each other with gentleness, courtesy, appreciation, and respect; they maintain a safe place.
- In an *SLSG*, members share and process together, rather than negotiate solutions, criticize choices, or insist on agreement.
- Participants respect the work they are engaged in—arrive on time, focus on the subject, and support the rules the group has agreed to follow.
- It is important to ensure that each person has an opportunity to participate. Participants share their thoughts succinctly and then stop. They take turns and attempt to relate graciously.
- Members respect and value each person's input. They consider each other's ideas seriously, often building or expanding on them as if they were their own. They explore together—not needing to correct one another or engage in disagreements. They share their personal perspectives, knowing that each person's experience can be enlightening. *SLSGs* create something new and good together.

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 reconnect with the Spirit periodically, and especially if the atmosphere seems to have lost its spiritual savor.

5.4 Meeting the Needs of Members

The group should feel free to engage in various modes of spiritual connection at any time if desired (prayer, worship, music, silence, guided meditations, dance/movement, poetry, etc.), to meet a variety of contemplative needs and to accomplish a "communion of souls."

If participants experience any problem during the meetings that cannot be effectively resolved immediately in the group,

they should feel free to consult with the group's facilitator to address their concern and if needed, use the suggested "Grievance Process". Groups may also consult the *SLSG Leadership Team* (see below) regarding problems they are unable to resolve on their own.

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

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.

The facilitator runs the agenda and keeps order. All members of the group share responsibility to help the facilitator accomplish these tasks.

Some activities are easy to lead. Other activities may require planning and skilled leadership. It is desirable to fit the program demands to the facilitator's training and experience.

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 formation process, answer questions, and provide support as needed.

Such a guide can also occasionally participate, as needed, to help improve the group's process and keep it on track.

7. Program Materials and Lessons

7.1 Identifying Topics in Harmony with Spiritual Living

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

SLSGs may choose any other available materials to work with, based on their consensus preferences.

For a support group to function effectively, members need time to share their experiences of living, raise questions, and explore answers together. The focus is on specific, practical matters of everyday life, such as:

- learning the basics of what constitutes love
- learning to love, even in the face of hostility or indifference
- exploring values that develop character and one's soul
- coping with adversity and overcoming obstacles in life
- managing conflict over significant issues
- reaching out to help others as you pass by
- deciding to restrain yourself for the benefit of others
- trying to understand how to bring spiritual beliefs and solutions into daily life—situations at work, in one's family and with friends, and in everyday encounters in a variety of situations

- living as in the presence of God.

2. Some Sources of Materials and Spiritual Processes

- *Adventures in Spiritual Living* materials (exercises and stories). Many activities suitable for *Spiritual Living Support Groups* are posted on two websites, <https://adventuresinspiritualiving.com> and <https://urantia-book-spirituality.com>
 - Topics or lessons from past activities (Urantia Book study groups, conferences, classes, etc.) that any of the group members have attended.
 - *The Method of Centering Prayer* and *The Prayer of Consent* – materials by Thomas Keating. Often used in developing worship and prayer practices (see www.contemplativeoutreach.org).
 - Personal sharing/discussion on Urantia Book passages related to *A Way of Life in Spiritual Family Relationships* (posted on www.familyofgodfellowship.org). Exploration/application of such spiritual themes as:
 - 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

The *SLSG Leadership Team* provides a number of services in support of the *Spiritual Living Support Group Program*:

- Working collaboratively with UUI admin to introduce and run the *SLSG Program* on the UUI platform, and promote the program through UUI's email lists.
 - Developing and running a comprehensive program, initially for training facilitators and then orienting participants, as well as ongoing monthly support events for established *SLSGs*.
 - Exploring the possibilities for collaborative promotion of the program with the major Urantia movement organizations (Foundation, Fellowship, UAI) as well as other smaller service organizations.
-

9. *SLSG Program* at a Urantia Conference

- Development of a proposed multi-day immersive *SLSG* program at a future Urantia conference.
 - Follow up towards the end of that conference with a presentation on the full *SLSG Program* that is available on the UUI platform. For any conference attendees interested in longer-term involvement with a *Spiritual Living Support Group*, it would introduce the process of training facilitators/participants in the model, supporting initial group formation, and assigning interested participants, if requested.
-

10. The Need for *Spiritual Living Support Groups*

Effective Socialization of Religion Is Necessary

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 socialization will depend on capable and dedicated leadership, as well as sincere and persistent prayer—seeking spiritual guidance and inspiration.

Many people are yearning for better ways to grow and share their spiritual lives. They are waiting hopefully for new possibilities. *Spiritual Living Support Groups* 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 promising new way to encourage and support 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.”

The SLSG Leadership Team

Elisabeth Callahan

Gaetan Charland

Kurt Cirra

Kaye Cooper

William Cooper

Marvin Gawryn (Chair)

Sharon Porter

Mark Wood