



URANTIA ASSOCIATION
INTERNATIONAL



Study Group Guide



Launching, hosting, and
facilitating study of
The Urantia Book

Urantia Association International Study Group Committee has produced this guide for creating and maintaining study groups of *The Urantia Book*.

If you are so inspired, we request that a contribution be made to UAI in exchange for the use of this material.

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We wish to thank Urantia Foundation for allowing us to reproduce some of their materials about study groups. This material was produced in accordance with the licensing agreement of Urantia Association International and Urantia Foundation. Thanks also to all those who have contributed valuable materials and assistance.

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Our Charter and Bylaws are available on the website or upon request.

A SPECIAL WELCOME



*Gaétan G Charland,
President of UAI*

Dear friends of *The Urantia Book*,

This guide has been produced with loving care by people who respect the mission given to us by the revelators to create thousands of study groups. These study groups are in themselves the foundation on which the revelation can stand to accomplish its worldwide mission “...to expand cosmic consciousness and enhance spiritual perception...” in the minds of men. They can also serve to foster the emergence of leaders and teachers, for study groups are like small classrooms.

Study groups are places where spiritual brotherhood takes root and where intellectual and spiritual growth can be fostered in the participants. While study groups are autonomous, they can benefit greatly from interaction with other study groups or with the organizations supporting and nurturing them. While their autonomy is necessary to foster spiritual unity, it should always be protected from political, social or sectarian influence.

Study groups should always focus on the teachings of *The Urantia Book* and their integration in everyday life, for it is when the truth is alive within us that it becomes a most effective tool of dissemination in our family, at work and in society at large. Study groups are a reflection of their participants and the hosts who lead them in the path of spiritual and intellectual discoveries.

Study groups need a worthy goal so they can achieve their purpose of transforming the world one person at a time. Read this guide carefully and benefit from the experience of others – it should help you start or improve your own study group. “When man goes in partnership with God, great things may, and do, happen.”

Building a spiritual community... one study group at a time.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'G. Charland', written in a cursive style.

Gaétan G. Charland
President UAI

INTRODUCTION

This guide is focused on the mission of Urantia Association International: in-depth study of *The Urantia Book*, and the work of fostering effective study groups worldwide. The hearty assistance of UAI in helping to create study groups is available to all students of *The Urantia Book*. Study groups are autonomous gatherings of Urantia Book readers, not licensed, sanctioned, or controlled by any organization, though they are fostered and supported by UAI, Urantia Foundation, and The Fellowship. Study groups are meant to be free from organizational business or politics, Urantia related or otherwise.

There are no requirements for forming a study group other than the desire of a few people to share some quality time with other truth-seekers, inspired by a vast treasury of revelatory teachings. This Study Group Guide has been designed as a tool to help you start one or to improve an existing group.

Study groups are where the Urantia community takes root. Sharing how the teachings affect our personal and collective spiritual journey is vital for increasing our capacity to comprehend deity (God-consciousness) and for a greater understanding of our relation to the Father and his universal family (cosmic citizenship). Study groups are also the nucleus of service and dissemination projects — those activities where joy is shared and teamwork is forged. Friendship building activities like picnics and potlucks are typically the outgrowth of study groups, along with seminars and conferences, where teachers and leaders hone their skills. Study groups have been the origin of every social affiliate of the fraternal groups. We affirm that nearly everything of real value to the Urantia community has originated within study groups, including *The Urantia Book* itself, born of the original study group: The Forum.

For these reasons and more, study groups are truly our sacred space; they were envisioned to be sanctuaries of study focused on *The Urantia Book*, nurturing growth in spirit and friendship. With a mandate transmitted through the

Contact Commission, the revelators placed study groups at the heart of a wise strategy for spreading the truths of an epochal revelation. It is now our duty to foster many more groups and enliven the ones that may need to be freshened. Study groups are the incubators in which teachers and leaders find their formative experience and should be a welcoming place in which souls are nourished by fellowship, educated by revelation and transformed by Spirit.

Study groups can serve as both classroom *and* sanctuary when structured as a holistic ministry to all souls. New models are service oriented and integral: dynamic as to facts, intriguing as to meanings, and inspiring as to values. This approach fosters greater appreciation of revelatory details, encourages freedom of wonder, and promotes personal growth; sacred space is a learning and loving model that emphasizes spiritual enrichment. Certain factors foster the study group as sacred space: desire to serve, healthy leadership, focus on *The Urantia Book*, open door policy, no organizational politics, and an unwavering commitment to evolving maturity — mental, emotional, and spiritual. Study groups that integrate these dynamics thrive in the teachings and are attractive to new readers.

Threefold Purpose of Study Group

1. To serve as a social connective for the in-depth study of *The Urantia*

Book — to call forth and explore with others what has value for the mind, value for the heart, and value for the spirit. Group effort is essential for the exploration of a new framework of cosmic reality.

2. To serve as an introductory portal to the teachings of *The Urantia Book*. Meetings must be open so experienced readers can welcome truth seekers from all traditions and levels of spiritual understanding; the members must also be skilled in the etiquette of inter-religious dialogue.
3. To serve as a venue where the personal experience of God-consciousness is honored and encouraged. Urantia Book readers have no formal church and yet there is deep value in group worship and the family dynamics of spiritual community.

If you choose to create a study group, you will join others who have enjoyed profound satisfaction from this worthy devotion. In addition, you will discover that group study enhances and illuminates the meaning of concepts in *The Urantia Book*. Such a service commitment today bodes well for an eternal journey that begins on our humble Urantia. May our Father bless you and those who join with you in this important endeavor.

James Woodward
Chair, UAI Study Group Committee
2008–2011

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I. GROUP STUDY OF THE URANTIA REVELATION

Hosting Group Study: An Overview

Launching a *Urantia Book* study group can be easier than you may think. All that is needed is the desire to set a time and place to meet, a list of a few candidates, and the courage to invite them. While group participation is what a study group is all about, success usually comes down to one dedicated person—and that person could be *you*! This guidebook is written for those who hold such a vision in their heart.

At first, you may feel awkward sending out invitations to folks you may or may not know. But long experience has shown that most localities abound with potential or existing readers, and that the vast majority will be glad to be invited for study. Most will welcome your invitation even if they do not immediately become part of the group.

Each study group will inevitably evolve its own unique personality. The unfolding of the group identity is based on the host,

those who attend, and on your methods of study and fellowship. And remember: There are a myriad of ways to study together and to enjoy the group experience.

We'll shortly explain the steps involved in putting together your first meeting—the most crucial one of all. Plus, we'll list what we consider to be the ideal conditions for running a successful group as well as facilitating the flow of study and socializing.

After the first few meetings, it will become clearer what study and socializing techniques will fit the emerging personality of the group, and you may want to adjust accordingly.

As you grow your group over the months and years that follow, we encourage you to provide variety by occasionally changing your format or study methods. Again, allow your group to evolve in ways that suit you and your members. We provide a list of study approaches later in this guide.

We always suggest that you—as the host or organizer—make it consistently clear that your purpose is the study of *The Urantia Book*. This does not preclude the discussion of other valuable writings or ideas that may relate to the topic of discussion. However, keep your focus on the unique text of the revelation, a task that is sufficient to mightily challenge any group!

We further recommend that a group should not exceed more than ten persons on a regular basis. With more than that, it becomes difficult for everyone to get involved—and participation is the key to realizing the benefits. If the fortunate situation of over-attendance occurs, find a way for the group to split into two. Remember that one of the purposes of group study is to create more study groups and therefore more opportunities for training teachers and leaders.

In the most general sense, while it is crucial to keep your group focused on *The Urantia Book's* teachings, it is also important to provide a favorable setting

for study, and to attend to the social and spiritual needs of the individuals in the group. Among the most important elements of a successful group, these stand out:

The commitment of one or more founders to the success of the group

Consistency in meeting times and places, and a suitable environment for study

1. A critical mass of readers (usually 3 to 10) and willingness to screen new members
2. A method of study and a technique of self-governance that suits the group
3. Skillful, gentle, purposeful, and effective facilitation
4. The spiritual growth that results from deep study, sincere sharing, and group prayer
5. The love that naturally arises from association with fellow *Urantia Book* students

Why Start a Study Group?

You have probably heard that the early leaders of the Urantia movement were instructed to form thousands of study groups worldwide. The revelators made this suggestion, we believe, because they understood that a group study environment has many advantages over isolated, individualized study.

Of course, nearly everyone discovers the revelation as an individual, and first begins to study on their own. But after a time, most seek a deeper relationship with the meanings and values of the text that only can be found by sharing its study with others.

Over nearly six decades, it has become clear that study group members experience many benefits unique to the group setting:

- enhanced intellectual knowledge of the text through shared interpretations
- exponential expansion of meanings; two persons can discover far more than one alone
- social bonding, true fellowshiping, and enduring friendships
- a broadening of perspective—growth in cosmic perception
- personal spiritual growth through personal sharing, group prayer, and community worship

Whether you are a host or an attendee, study group offers numerous benefits. After attending study group a few times, most people find that they sincerely miss the experience when they cannot attend. Group study is not the only way to study the teachings—but it does seem to be the best way.

Private study of a great revelation is intrinsically rewarding, but this world needs many more study groups and the benefits they confer on humanity. And so, if you truly desire to host a group, begin where you are—but begin today!

The Spiritual Dimension of Group Study

Personality association and mutual affection is an efficient insurance against evil . . . There is positive strength in the knowledge that you

live for the welfare of others, and that these others likewise live for your welfare and advancement. Man languishes in isolation. [Paper 160:2, p. 1776:3]

Individuals who have studied alone for many years often report to us a curious thing: They feel like they are reading an *expanded version of the same book* when they begin to read with others. Group consideration of the text illuminate meanings and concepts because the group setting offers the richness of multiple points of view. The result is a balancing and correcting influence on the formation of individual opinions—not to mention the emotional and spiritual reinforcing effect of group participation.

We are clearly told in the revelation that we find God and grow spiritually not only by means of what the Father teaches us directly, but also through close association with our fellows.

Rodan of Alexandria spoke at length about the benefits of group association when he said: *Many noble human impulses die because there is no one to hear their expression. Truly, it is not good for man to be alone.* [Paper 160:2, p. 1775:7] Rodan added that, through association, men enrich their souls by pooling their respective spiritual possessions, avoiding the ever-present tendency to fall victim to distortion of vision, prejudice of viewpoint, and narrowness of judgment.

The Urantia Book tells us of our membership in a vast cosmic community, and group study provides us with a microcosm of this universal family of God.



Attending study group recharges our spiritual batteries, uplifts our intellect, and inspires us to serve and love others. Ultimately, participating in a group studying the revelation will bring each individual a greater understanding of God our Father and his ascension plan for all of us.

Study Groups and Truth Dissemination

Study groups are a vital part of the plan for disseminating the teachings of the Fifth Epochal Revelation around the world. A worldwide community of thousands of study groups would certainly change the world. That's why one of the goals of every progressive study group should be to create more groups.



Study groups also provide opportunities for the future teachers and leaders of this revelation to develop their skills in an open and forgiving atmosphere. It allows us to experiment in a friendly environment with creative and sometimes highly personal interpretations.

Study groups help us explore our beliefs through association with like-minded individuals who are

accepting of us. This is a powerful confidence builder for every kind of truth disseminator, from those who are trying to inject fresh ideas into everyday conversations, to those who aspire to become apostles to the planet of the Fifth Epochal Revelation.

II. HOW TO START A STUDY GROUP

Making The Decision to Host a Study Group

It takes great personal determination to host a study group; real success requires an ongoing commitment of time and effort. True, convening a meeting may consume only a couple of hours of your time. But you must make a continuing personal commitment to “holding the space” for those few hours, and you must do so even when the attendance is small—and especially during times where there can be minor or even major problems in the group process. If the group is to survive, your dedication over months and even years is essential.

We know from long observation that some study groups flounder while others thrive. Experience seems to prove that successful groups are those that have a host (or a few co-hosts) who provide the consistency of regular meetings backed by patience, understanding, love, and genuine effort.

If you are considering hosting a study group, we suggest you consult this beginning checklist just below. Note that a more extensive checklist is provided in Addendum A.

1. Are you willing to make study group a priority in your life for the coming months and years?
2. Do you have the dedication required to nurture a new social entity that will include people you don't know?
3. Are you willing to devote one evening per week to convening your group?
4. Are you in a position to facilitate the meeting or to delegate that duty to someone else who has the required skills and commitment?
5. Are you able to be flexible with the unfolding of the group process, eventually allowing the study group to develop its own self-governance?
6. If you have a family and if the group is to meet in your home, will your family members

participate in the meetings? If not, are they willing to tolerate the presence of the group without disruption or experience feelings of inconvenience or neglect?

Hopefully your family will be supportive of your efforts. If not, then it is best to host the group outside of your home or team with another motivated person who can fulfill the role of host. (The topic of the study environment is addressed in Section III.) And even if you don't actually host the group and directly manage its logistics, bear in mind that the role of facilitator of study also affords you a chance to serve. Note that numerous tips for facilitators can be found later in this guide.

As founder of your group, everyone will look to you as their leader. This means, for example, that if the group gets stuck on a decision, you should at first offer alternatives or simply make that decision. Later, after some form of group governance gets underway, you can relax and let the group as

a whole manage its affairs.

Finally, always remember to pray for guidance and be open to receive spiritual assistance. We recommend that the first thing you do after deciding to host a group is to prayerfully give your decision over to the spiritual influences in and around you. Remember that we are surrounded and indwelt by spirit helpers who will assist you if you are open to their guidance. When man goes in partnership with God, great things may, and do, happen.

[Paper 132:7, p.1467:5]

Finding Interested People

Your first task as a new host will be to find potential members, screen them, and then bring all the folks on your list together for an initial meeting to organize the study group. Of all possible methods of recruitment, direct personal contact usually proves best for inviting people to join your group.

Here is a summary of tried and true methods for recruitment:

1. Invite your closest associates

Your family, personal friends, and acquaintances that are interested in the book should be invited. These people will normally be the core of your study group.

2. Utilize databases of official organizations

Urantia Foundation, UAI, and other Urantia Book organizations maintain databases of readers who have given permission for other readers to contact them.

(Please see Addendum B.)

3. Experiment with local advertising

Small display advertisements in local daily or weekly newspapers, listings in locally oriented websites, or flyers in local bookstores or spiritual centers can draw additional people.

Here are more tips for finding potential members of your group:

“Truth in advertising”

Always make sure prospects are fully aware of the revelation before inviting them to visit the group. You don’t want to have a new attendee—or the rest of the group—become uncomfortable because a new person has not received proper orientation.

Keep the focus on the revelation

As we have stated, always make it clear to potential members that your group studies *The Urantia Book* and only *The Urantia Book*.

Safety first

Always keep the safety of the group foremost in mind before adding new people. Be careful not to give out your residential address until you are comfortable with a person.

Meet and screen prospects

Screen potential new members that you do not personally know before they are invited to attend a study group session. Request that they first meet you in a public place or at an informal gathering away from study

group. Be cordial, of course, but do not hesitate to ask direct questions about their beliefs and ideas about The Urantia Book. Remember that one important role of the host is to protect the integrity of the group. You do not want to assume the best and then discover the worst after a poorly screened stranger starts attending your group. And, while it is true that the teachings of the revelation are meant for all humankind, it is unwise to add someone who is incompatible with the chemistry of your group.

Watch for personal agendas

Many folks have fervent personal agendas in regard to religion, spirituality, or politics. Most are indeed fine people with good intentions; and yet, understand that a desire to reach an “unenlightened” audience may lurk beneath a pleasant exterior. In the lore of the Urantia movement are many stories about how such members have turned out to be disruptive to a study group. A skilled facilitator may assist them in the practice of leaving their “issue” at the door, allowing them to be a contributing member to the group.

Convening Your Meeting

Once you have a list of potential members, we suggest you invite everyone on your list to convene for the purpose of creating a local study group. Here are some recommended steps:

Pray for success

Consider asking for heavenly support in this effort. Request



that students of the revelation be guided to your new group and that the organizational meeting is effective.

Create and send your invitation

Find a suitable space and set a time and date to meet, and send out a postcard and/or email containing details of the meeting plus your contact information.

Confirm with everyone

An email or a telephone call reminder a few days before the meeting reinforces the importance of the event. Also,

confirm all meeting arrangements a day or two in advance so that last minute problems are less likely.

Run a purposeful meeting

Arrive early so that you may greet everyone. Start promptly. After introducing yourself, make suggestions about where, when, and how often to meet. Offer your recommendations for the method of study. The meeting will go better if you provide leadership in the form of a basic plan; but be sure to allow your plan to be molded to fit the needs of the majority of the group. Allow each

person ample time to introduce themselves, and then open the floor for ideas and input on what would appeal to everyone.

Close after specific commitments are made

A group decision depends upon many contingencies, but make sure you come up with some definite arrangement. Before folks leave, make certain everyone knows the time, date, place, and what will be studied at the first meeting. Follow up with a reminder a few days before your inaugural study meeting.

III. HOSTING AND FACILITATING

Elements of a Successful Study Group

Hopefully, your new study group will turn out to be an enjoyable and edifying experience for everyone. To achieve this happy result, we suggest that hosts seek for a balance between socializing and study that is appropriate for their participants. In addition, it's crucial that you provide the group with comfortable facilities, a reasonable schedule for the meetings, and a variety of learning styles and activities.

Let's look a little more closely at these and other essentials of success:

Be committed and consistent

As we stated earlier, it takes the dependability and consistency of one or a few stalwarts to maintain a group's vitality. Without this committed core it is especially hard to weather transitions such as periods when the attendance falls off or when difficulties arise for any reason.

Above all, cultivate a core group of participants who are committed to meeting at a regular time and place. One group in the state of Indiana in the U.S. shows what can

happen: this study group has held their meeting at the same place and the same time every week for 36 years—now that's dedication!

Especially for those who haven't been able to attend for several months, a reliable schedule and location is a must. These members need to count on not having to guess, calculate, or take the trouble to call you to verify the meeting time and place.

Some groups rotate among the homes of the members. Although this approach spreads the responsibility of hosting and allows for a growth experiences on the part of these additional hosts, it also brings other problems. While rotating meetings may seem to reduce the workload for you as the anchor host, that isn't necessarily true; it can generate more work and confusion for members.

Meet weekly

Experience shows that, if possible, meetings should be held each week; it is hard to maintain momentum when meetings occur less often. Monthly meeting dates and complicated meeting schedules such as "the first and third Tuesday of each month"

can be difficult to schedule or remember. And yet, while such schedules may be more difficult to maintain, they are certainly better than no study group at all.

Be contactable

Make sure everyone knows how to contact the host (or a co-host) and that this contact person is easily reached. By the same token, ensure that the host or someone in the group knows how to quickly communicate with everyone in case of a last minute cancellation.

Provide for an optimal study environment

A comfortable and suitable meeting place is another essential. Here are some useful tips:

- **Most meetings are held in a host's home; but home meetings can pose a few problems.** For example, the comfort and convenience of the host and of a few people may be offset by the lack of seating or adequate lighting, lack of parking or of street lighting, or by the preference of some to not meet in such an intimate setting. That said, it is a truism that holding meetings in a home may provide greater warmth,

comfort, and friendliness.

- **Face-to-face study can be optimal; when participants can see each other, this promotes discussion and interaction.** Consider having your group meet around a dining table in a home or a boardroom table in a public place, but be sure that the seating doesn't become too crowded.
- **Meetings in public rooms in libraries, community centers, or church facilities can be good choices, especially for more serious study.** Homes confer the benefit of a more informal and friendly feeling, but public facilities may give participants the beneficial feeling of a classroom atmosphere. Nearly everyone can accept meeting in public places, as such facilities are often more centrally located and feature good parking. As host, one big advantage for you in holding your group's study outside your home is that there is less danger of introducing a stranger into your home, as well as less general disruption for your family. If you decide to work in a public place, be sure to ask if there is any cost involved, what rules may apply, and how often you may meet. Find out if refreshments are allowed in the room. Also, ask whether there may be other meetings nearby that may disturb the worshipful periods of your meeting.

Introduce variety

Varying your study method occasionally enhances learning. Remember that there are several forms of learning: Some people learn by reading aloud, some by listening, some through

Social Elements of Group Success

Groups are successful because the members enjoy each other's company. If no time is allowed for socializing, some may feel the group is too rigid and boring. Yet, if too much time is spent socializing, some will feel their time is wasted. To provide for appropriate social time, many groups meet for a meal before a meeting or hold a potluck dinner once a month. Socialization is good for the soul, and frequent interaction improves group camaraderie. Further, group life and community building can be a key feature of the emotional, educational, and spiritual growth of readers over time. But remember to keep social time and study time largely separate

Balance social time and study

But strive for balance: If the host doesn't provide for a little social interaction even during the meeting, people may get bored; but if the facilitator doesn't steer the meeting away from tangents and excessive social communication, members may see little value in attending. The study group host needs to develop a feel for what the group wants during any particular meeting. Keep an eye on everyone's body language and actions during the meeting.

Avoid "group therapy"

While groups can be a place for people to reveal their innermost self and find emotional support, a study group should not turn into a therapy session for any member. This will discourage individuals who just want to focus on the book. Personal sharing is helpful when connected to the topic of study, but overmuch emphasis on revealing intimate thoughts and emotions for its own sake is unwise.

Hold celebrations

Having celebrations together for holidays, potluck dinners, and other social functions are vital to developing trust in one another and genuine community. Many groups hold sacramental meals on Christian holidays.

discussion, others by seeing or doing. (A listing of methods of study follows this section.)

Choose facilitators and rotate them

Everyone who is willing should be allowed to facilitate; those who are unwilling might be gently encouraged as they may have leadership potential and just need some practice with a friendly

group. Rotating your facilitators is another way to provide more variety. It also has the side benefit of giving more folks a chance to lead, an experience that may give them confidence to start their own group some day.

Provide refreshments

Of course, refreshments are always welcome in any group. Small refreshments may simply be

Fostering Group Governance

Always keep regular participants involved with your study group's process, and never dictate the rules or be inflexible. As host, you are there to catalyze human growth, not "manage for results."

Make group decisions

Once you have a cohesive group, let the assembly as a whole decide how to study, what to study, as well as where and when to study. Toward that end, take a moment every few meetings to ask for opinions and ideas to see if the group is happy or if they wish to do things differently. In making decisions, the majority should rule, although some groups strive for consensus. Never allow one person to impose their will on the group—especially you.

Allow for a group purpose

A study group can decide as a group to have one or several purposes. For example, a group can be committed to fostering spiritual growth of the members, to purely intellectual study of the teachings, or to spreading the teachings to the larger community by growing membership and spinning off new study groups—or combinations of these or other goals.

Pray together—if the group agrees

Group prayer is a topic that will come up early in the development of a group. Some groups open with a prayer or end with a prayer, either silent or spoken; some do not have a group prayer. Whatever the case, prayer should always be a group decision.

placed on a table or they can be served before or after the meeting, or during a break. Refreshments served during the meeting sometimes can be distracting. Always make sure that drinking water is available for those dry throats from reading aloud.

Avoid controversy

As individuals, members will belong to political, economic, civic, or religious groups of their own choosing. While it is good and wise for individuals to participate in outside groups, restrain discussion of topics that can be divisive. Conserve your group's

energies for the important mental and spiritual challenges revealed in *The Urantia Book*.

Keep the meeting to a reasonable length

Most groups have found that a good meeting length is two hours. If you meet on a weekday evening, pick a starting time which is late enough to enable after-work attendance but early enough to insure a reasonable ending time. The host or sponsor should not feel embarrassed to indicate when everyone should leave, so that no one will inadvertently overstay his or her welcome.

Keep to a reasonable pace of reading

Groups will often set the goal of reading one paper per meeting. This gives focus to the group and helps keep things moving. But don't allow the goal of finishing the assigned paper take precedence over the quality of study and zestful interaction. If you don't finish a paper you can always do so during the next meeting.

Keep it interactive

Encourage all members to participate in the discussions and group activities. The best way to do this is to establish a non-confrontational atmosphere where people are not afraid to speak out. We cover this issue in more detail in an upcoming section.

Effective Facilitation of Study Groups

The true teacher maintains his intellectual integrity by ever remaining a learner. [Paper 130:3, p. 1433:2]

The facilitator of a group has different tasks than a host, and need not be the same person. Facilitators have the joy and privilege of leading the group on a twin path of truth discovery and self-discovery. As group facilitator, it is not your place to teach or lecture, but it is your job to guide the group and whet their hunger for higher truth – to discover a deeper understanding of the revelation—even as you join with the host in supporting the group in healthy socialization.

Propositions for Study Group Facilitators

1. Direct your attention to group process as well as to the content of the discussions.
2. Blend discussion with question and answer sessions.
3. Redirect back to the text when a discussion becomes a debate.
4. Emphasize a specific point at the beginning of the meeting. Give the group something to dig for in their study; it may pique their interest and focus their attention.
5. Encourage the discovery of truth and how that truth can be put into action in a person's daily life.
6. Keep the meeting moving so that the group can end on time and yet cover a satisfying amount of subject material.
7. Remember that the best facilitator is often the one who says the least.

Prep ahead of time

Read and review the material ahead of time; consider questions for the group relative to the reading that, if needed, will encourage reflective thinking and discussion. If and when the group seems to need direction, it's usually best to return to the Paper. But always be prepared to offer personal insights or brief comments that may stimulate the sharing of others' experiences.

Stay on topic

Do your best to keep the group on topic without being too rigid. When the discussion takes off in an unrelated direction, the focus of the group goes with it. Worse, tangential discussions can easily become the cause of disagreements or even division; they tend to become speculative and lack specific reference to the text of the revelation. The facilitator must constantly make value judgments about when to curtail off topic discussion. Nonetheless, side discussions are natural and if it's an interesting tangent, consider setting an unseen timer and let it flow for a couple of minutes before tactfully returning to the reading. Always keep in mind that a group benefits from and actually appreciates a friendly but firm facilitator.

Lead especially with questions

Learn the art of asking carefully phrased and stimulating questions. Specific questions from a facilitator will produce specific answers rather than vague generalities. Prepare a list of one or two questions for each section ahead of time.

Stay in the background

Refrain from expressing your own opinion or interpretation, as this may impede new readers in their effort to formulate their own interpretation. In a situation that seems appropriate to express a certain opinion or interpretation, or if someone in the group asks, always preface your comments with a disclaimer such as: "It has been my personal experience..."

Wrap up a discussion when needed

Wrap up a particular discussion that is dwindling in significance by briefly summarizing its import or by acknowledging the contributions just made by others. Remember, it's always appropriate to cheerfully say, "Let's continue the reading."

Support appropriate personal sharing

Encourage members to share personal experiences related to the topic being discussed, but try to maintain relevance. Don't allow anyone to dominate the meeting with a narration of their life story and/or turn the meeting into a therapy session. You might ask if others if they have had similar experiences or simply say, "Let's continue the reading."

Keep it moving

If someone gets longwinded, you can count on the fact that others in the group will be inwardly hoping that the facilitator will intervene to get the meeting moving again. Again, a gentle firmness is an admirable quality in the pursuit of revelatory insights.

Encourage participation

Watch all the member's actions. If you are observant, you will quickly learn when someone wishes to say something but is too shy to step into the conversation. As facilitator, break into the discussion and ask if anyone has any comments or directly offer that person a chance to speak.

Use educational tools

Always have a computer open to a search program for *The Urantia Book*. Copies of the Concordance

and Concordex are also useful as are many secondary study works. Tools such as chalkboard, dry erase boards, overhead projectors, or flip charts can be used to list important points of discussion. These are not necessary but use them occasionally if they are available.

Be time sensitive

Always start on time and end on time. The facilitator is responsible for keeping an eye on the clock so that things don't run over—no matter how well the discussion is going. Study groups in homes could become burdensome for hosts if meetings run too long or members stay too long after the meeting. A study group is also a social function so allow a half an hour for the group to break up. This usually ensures that nobody is rushed out the door and that anyone with unfinished thoughts or questions has a chance to address them after the formal meeting. It's also a good time to develop warmer friendships.

Nurture genuine study

For the learning process of a group to be effective, everyone needs to be physically and mentally comfortable. The group needs to sense that the facilitator is quietly in charge and is protecting them from distractions. And, don't try to study more than the group can absorb; often it is better to end a meeting early if the members get overloaded from a difficult subject. Keep your study period organized, focused, relevant, participatory, and enjoyable.

Group Study Methods

The suggestions that follow are offered as a possible starting

point; don't let them limit your creativity. Your group can and will evolve methods of study and fellowship that suit your members. Indeed, there are as many ways to conduct the study session as there are groups.

Here are a few additional pointers to keep in mind as you peruse the list of study methods just below:

1. The host may need to make the initial decisions, but once a group gets established, everyone should ratify the method of study. Support that decision by making members aware of the many methods presented in this section of the guidebook.
2. Favor study methods that provide for some degree of participation by each member. Participation engages the student, inspires regular attendance, and better prepares members to someday lead their own study group.
3. Just as each of us has different needs, study groups should differentiate themselves to meet the needs of a group.
4. It may be desirable to have multiple groups in your area that function differently to meet those needs.
5. In general, study groups that remain focused on a study of the universal teachings of *The Urantia Book* are more attractive to new readers from all walks of life.

Sequential reading

This is the most common method of study. The group reads through *The Urantia Book* together, from beginning to end sequentially. You might try covering one paper per meeting, with members taking

turns reading a page or section at a time. Some groups have one person do all the reading or even play an audio version of the book and stop and start as you discuss. Be sure to allow frequent intervals for questions or discussion. New groups may find it easier to select less difficult papers or groups of papers and simply read through them. A popular option is to reserve some time and turn to Part IV to end the reading with a spiritually uplifting selection.

Topical reading

These groups choose a topic at the end of each meeting to be discussed in the next meeting. Members study that topic before the next meeting. The group then takes turns reading parts of *The Urantia Book* that they have found related to that topic. Some groups favor combining sequential reading with an occasional topical reading to provide variety.

Reading with inclusive response

This method gets everyone involved in the discussion. Even timid persons are assured of getting their chance to speak. With this method, each person is given a turn to speak about the material just read until everyone has spoken once. This is a good way to conduct a study group when people may not know each other well.

Formal discussion

In this approach, a facilitator presents a question to the members of the group based on the reading; members consider specific answers to the questions.

Using Study Aids

It is always helpful to have study aids close at hand, such as these well-known tools of study:

1. Key word index of *The Urantia Book*
2. *Urantia Book Concordance*
3. A recent edition of Webster's dictionary
4. A computer for searching *The Urantia Book* on CD-ROM or a search version at a website
5. Audio versions of the book
6. A pronunciation guide
7. The Bible

Numerous such study aids are offered for free or minimal cost from Urantia Foundation, and the UAI can also assist you in finding those most suitable for your group. Study aids and secondary works may assist in the understanding of concepts from *The Urantia Book*, but the revelation should remain the primary source of teaching.

Lecture with reading and discussion

The lecture format usually designates one (or several persons) who presents ideas about a topic combined with specific readings; the lecturer then facilitates a discussion or a question and answer session. This more formal style of meeting can be used to help members develop their techniques for presenting topics to Urantia conferences or outside organizations, but does not provide the participatory approach that is favored.

Quotation study

In this method, a leader reads a sequence of quotes and facilitates group discussion of each quote, or perhaps of a set of quotes related to a topic.

Question & answer

This method invites everyone in the group to bring a question to be discussed. The group works through questions one at a time in an ad hoc fashion. This works best if you have on hand an index or concordance of *The Urantia Book*, or a computer with the ability to search the text.

“Lectio divina”

This Latin term refers to silent, contemplative group reading, or to prayerful reading aloud that permits time for meditation as each member engages in a personal encounter with a sacred text. Such a reading of an assigned portion or topic can at your option be followed by facilitated discussion. Use this method to invoke the Spirit of Truth who will assist each participant in seeking deeper meanings and values in their personal interpretations.

The informal study group

This approach, more suitable for advanced groups, allows free discussion of topics and how *The Urantia Book* relates to them. A topic may be designated ahead of time, or could be allowed to emerge after the group assembles. Informal groups tend to require strong facilitation so they stay focused on *The Urantia Book* and avoid unrelated tangents.

Dramatic reenactment

Reenactment of dramatic events in the book can make

the teachings come to life. For example, you might relive the last supper by having each person enact a character (and one person act as the narrator) as you follow the depiction of this event in *The Urantia Book*.

Audio-visual

Video, powerpoint, or other forms of A/V presentation are always enjoyable. The show is then followed by a group discussion.

Games and crafts

Various forms of materials may be added to any of the above methods. These can include trivia quizzes, board games, matching games, multiple choice questions, fill-in-the-blank statements, or crossword puzzles.

Anatomy of a Sequential Reading Group

After a few minutes of greeting and social time, the host calls the meeting to order and reminds attendees to silence their mobile devices before leading the group in a short prayer of thanksgiving or silent worship to prepare hearts and minds for in-depth study. Transitioning into the meeting, he or she introduces the facilitator who begins with a very short overview of the evening's designated paper. The facilitator reads the introductory portion of the paper. Beginning with the person on his right, the facilitator asks for a reading of the first section, explaining that each person reading should stop after each section, and directing that questions or ▶▶

comments should be held until the end of each section. After each reading, the facilitator opens the floor, requesting a hand raise to speak. At times, he or she may gently encourage new readers to ask questions. When no one has further questions or comments on a section just read, the facilitator then asks the next person to read the subsequent section, and so on. When the time to end the meeting is near, the facilitator concludes the discussions and briefly summarizes the meeting. The host then invites everyone to close with a minute or two of silence. After closing this prayer, the host makes certain that everyone knows the time and place of the next meeting and what will be studied. More social time follows for about 15-30 minutes.

A Personal Philosophy of Facilitation

Facilitating study group is the sacred work of directing the encounter of your brothers and sisters with epochal revelation. As such, facilitators should inspire each person to wholeheartedly engage in this encounter. They must always do this with the spirit of an educator.

Facilitators recognize that we are all at different points in our journey and this can lead us to varied interpretations—and further, that this phenomenon is both beautiful and good. Let the group discussion bloom and become fragrant.

Facilitators provide an environment in which everyone

is respectful of those with whom they disagree. Nobody likes to be proven wrong in public, but they can learn from other viewpoints when they are expressed in a loving and non-confrontational manner.

There are no official interpretations of *The Urantia Book*. The text speaks for itself, and our understanding of the teachings can be broadened by many unique viewpoints.

All members should certainly be allowed to offer differing opinions, but again, never should they be permitted to assert that another student is wrong. The Spirit of Truth, not fellow study group members, is in charge of inwardly determining in each participant what is true and what is not. Study is more productive if each person does not feel the need to defend a particular viewpoint but simply offers it to the group for consideration.

A good way to involve new readers, or shy or quiet members, is for the facilitator to show an obvious desire to hear what they have to say. Encourage them to speak by asking a simple question or by gently inviting them to give their opinion. Positive praise and reinforcement serves to encourage group participation by all.

Discussions should include consideration of the intellectual facts of what was read, the sharing of personal interpretations of the text's meanings and values, and inspiration for each member to live the truths recognized in each reading.

Attracting New Members

Some groups are open to new members and some are not—either approach is the prerogative of you as the host, and of your group's members. For example, some groups are actually family units that prefer to study together as a family; other groups may be involved in more advanced study and prefer maintaining a certain common level of understanding; still others have established a goal such as reading all of Part IV together, and will become open to new members only after completing such a common experience of study.

Sometimes a regular member of the group may ask if they can bring a friend or family member who is curious about the book. Folks who wish to observe a meeting should always be welcome as long as they are not disruptive. Procedures for incorporating them are discussed below.

If your study group is open to welcoming new members or new readers, the basic requirements for membership are simply an interest in *The Urantia Book* and a sincere desire to know and serve God. Still, as a group you may wish to set some standards for introducing new members. We have earlier discussed the necessity of careful screening of prospective members who are not known to anyone in the group.

New members may provide a breath of fresh air and a surge of enthusiasm that can invigorate a mature group, intellectually and socially. Long-time members are sometimes uncomfortable with new members simply because

their new ideas are not in accord with the old ones. Making a visitor or new member feel welcomed and valued may invade the comfort zone of the group, but this will cause growth for everyone.

An important element of any study group meeting is the love that is shared among those in attendance and extended to visitors and new members. Membership growth comes from loving relationships with those around us. Never hesitate to invite someone that seems interested. The act is yours; the consequences God's. Not everyone who is invited will come but unless an invitation is extended nobody will ever come.

Prayer, Worship, and Song

The Urantia Book informs us that: *Jesus taught the twelve always to pray in secret; to go off by themselves amidst the quiet surroundings of nature or to go in their rooms and shut the doors when they engaged in prayer.* [Paper 144:3, p. 1620:3]

However, in discussing the social repercussions of prayer, the Chief of Midwayers writes:

Prayer need not always be individual. Group or congregational praying is very effective in that it is highly socializing in its repercussions. When a group engages in community prayer for moral enhancement and spiritual uplift, such devotions are reactive upon the individuals composing the group; they are all made better because of participation. [Paper 91:5, p. 998:5]

Decide as a group about new members

Before any potential new member that is not known to anyone in the group is invited to join, we suggest that the group meet the new person and then later discuss whether to invite the person to join the group. Or, this task may be delegated to the host or to some other experienced group member who can return with a recommendation. Another approach is to allow the new person to attend as an observer for a specific number of meetings. However this is done, at some point the group as a whole needs to decide if the new member will be invited to become a regular member of the group. Obviously this can be a delicate situation; but the integrity and security of the group is of primary importance. So if the new member does not seem to fit in, politely and courteously say so. In this situation, the group may offer to help them start their own study group.

These two perspectives on prayer leave it open for your group members to find their own way of functioning. It would seem okay to pray or not to pray based on the group's decision.

Group prayer, in whatever form that is comfortable for the group, can greatly contribute to a sense of spiritual unity. But, group prayer is not for everyone. It is wise not to impose it upon group members who are not comfortable with it.

Some groups establish a circle, with each person praying in turn. In some groups, the facilitator will either conduct the prayer or pray first and then indicate that anyone else who wishes to say something may do so. After a period of silence to begin a meeting, the facilitator may conclude the moment with a short prayer aloud or by reading a prayer such as the Believer's Prayer from page 1620 of *The Urantia Book*.

If you are fortunate enough to have someone in your group that is musically inclined, the inclusion

of spiritual songs in the meeting can be very enjoyable. Nearly everyone enjoys music especially when performed by one of the group members. But not everyone is comfortable singing aloud around other people so be careful when considering sing-a-long sessions for the group. There is no doubt that music will add another welcome dimension to any study group.

While your religion is a matter of personal experience, it is most important that you should be exposed to the knowledge of a vast number of other religious experiences (the diverse interpretations of other and diverse mortals) to the end that you may prevent your religious life from becoming egocentric—circumscribed, selfish, and unsocial. [Paper 103:1, p. 1130:2]

INTERLUDE: A STUDY GROUP EXPERIENCE

The Story of Jesus Lighthouse Study Group of Fort Worth, Texas

by Rick Warren, 1993-2000 Host

Twelve people came to my first study group meeting! I live in a big metro area where there are scores of readers, so attendance wasn't a problem. But at first it was a little awkward because I knew only half of those who came. Some were there solely because their spouses are readers.

I was fortunate to have a good reader friend at my side. Suzanne was the first sincere reader I met after having found the book six years earlier. She had read *The Urantia Book* about as long as I had and also wanted to meet with others over this awesome revelation. So before long, Suzanne and I began talking about forming a study group.

Getting started

I had the basics: a quiet comfortable place (my living/dining room) and a regular time slot available. I had given it

much thought and finally decided to have our meeting one workday evening every two weeks, which fit in very well with everyone concerned. A weekly meeting seemed too much strain on my household, so I choose the bi-weekly schedule. That's one of the beauties of hosting study groups: They can be designed any way the host wishes; the frequency and method of study are left entirely to the host.

We experimented with switching nights a couple of times to adjust to the human schedules and such. But we finally settled on Thursday night, from 7:30 to 9:30.

From the outset, the only iron-clad rule I embraced was to maintain the focus on the text itself, not on individuals, not on peripheral matters, and especially not on politics.

Initial lessons

The awkwardness was gone by the second meeting, and so was about half the group. Only seven showed at this next meeting. Happily, I quickly came

to realize that more than seven or eight people at a meeting creates a social dynamic that can inhibit the less assertive members. Plus, it becomes more of a production than an intimate study session.

Over the seven-year period of my study group, the number of attendees varied from three to twenty two. Again, the size of a study group very much affects the ebb and flow of each participant's open engagement. The host naturally wants to make all feel involved, and if not involved, at least valued and respected. Still, large study groups are not to be avoided per se. They just require a different attitude, greater attention, and more planning. And sometimes the best solution may be to split into two or three smaller groups.

The group life unfolds

We followed the long established pattern of taking turns reading, as we gathered in a circle around a table. And *everyone* took a turn even though there was no rule requiring participation.

We experimented with asking members to read a whole section, whether it was a few paragraphs or two pages. But that sometimes exhausted the poor reader, so we switched to a paragraph or two, mostly at the reader's discretion.

Readings were always interspersed or interrupted with discussions arising out of the text. Interruptions were tolerated if not encouraged. Discussing the text as it is being read is the real heart of the meeting. Herein lies the true value and fruit of study groups. Encourage this in your study group and it will succeed and prosper, if goodness is also present.

I always insisted on keeping the focus on the text.

Occasionally and inevitably the group's focus drifted off the text. I found that the level of harmony always dropped in direct proportion to the extent of the drift. For example, I distinctly recall this happening just before the 2000 election in the U.S. when a spontaneous political argument broke out. It felt awful. But harmony again prevailed when attention was returned to study.

Learning to deal with disruption

In our years together there was only one really troublesome issue—one that at first created much consternation and diversion from study. It was a problem that took considerable time to discover the remedy for: How was I to deal with members who habitually talked about themselves and issues unrelated to the group's focus? I was discovering that

resentment can easily grow when the same person or persons dominates the meeting with off-topic issues. If such talk continues, some members will simply drop out. And, you may never know why. Too many distracting side conversations can have other deleterious effects as well. If the study group is seen as a social gathering or chatfest more than a venue for the study of this unique, vivifying revelation, then interest will flag.

Eventually a method arose for handling study group members who constantly took the focus off the text. I asked Suzanne—who has an infectious laugh and is a naturally loved-by-all kind of person—to act as “sergeant-at-arms.” I never announced her as such, but we agreed beforehand to work together in this way to keep the meeting from being hijacked by well-intentioned but intrinsically talkative members. And we pledged to try to do it without hurting anyone's feelings. Looking back on it, I recognize we were able to accomplish this only because the group's greatest desire was to study this amazing revelation we hold in common. They came to study with others who also had come to study.

The group took to Suzanne's good-natured ribbing and it instantly became a joke. So much so that before long, all Suzanne had to say when the meeting began to drift off text was, “Shut up and read.” Big laughs would attend her commands and no one felt shamed; in fact, they often apologized for leading us astray. We were left with a more

jovial atmosphere of sincere study and learning.

Realizing the benefits of group study—and socializing

Meeting once every two weeks as we did, it took years to read the book from cover to cover and discuss all that came up during our readings. In the process, we found that there is simply no substitute for group study if you want to fully appreciate and integrate the teaching of this, the most profound book ever written. In my opinion the revelation can't be fully absorbed without at least once reading it through with a group that recognizes The Urantia Papers for what they are: a revelation to a benighted world from those who care for and attend to us on high.

We usually read about a paper per meeting, around ten pages. But sometimes we read just five pages; other times it was fifteen or more. It all depended on the ratio of discussion-to-reading that took place. It should be noted that some people would gladly come half an hour early to socialize and converse. Some would happily stay half an hour after, all depending on what the host permits. I welcomed this overlap of the meetings as time to strengthen friendships, and it had the added advantage of allowing members time to talk about unrelated matters so the study sessions might keep closer to the real focus of the meeting—studying the text.

Finally came our last meeting. I decided to put an end to my role



as a host. We gathered in a circle, talked over our past, celebrated our achievement, and toasted to each other. Then, after conferring with other members, our group broke into two new groups, one for each side of the city. Suzanne became host to one of them. To this day they are both still active. Both are places for new and old readers to intermingle and live out the ancient axiom: You have learned a thing when you have taught it to another.”

Lessons learned

Successful study groups are not difficult if one knows how to deal with the few pitfalls. Indeed, they can be very gratifying.

On the other hand, not all study group experiences are good ones. A few years ago, another friend who decided to host found a very contentious and somewhat alarming person at her first meeting. Her study group died then and there. She hasn’t opened her home again. That’s why it pays to screen people. Of course, screening requires good people skills and therefore such a task should be delegated to a sagacious reader.

Overall, my study group experience was most rewarding, and essential to growing in the teachings. But caution is a must, ever observing the Master’s admonition: be you gentle and wise.

About all I furnished was a regular, quiet place with a determined focus on the book. Except for ice water, cookies, and coffee, that’s all it takes. Members often brought what they liked to snack and sip on. Having a big dictionary on hand helped too.

It was a relaxed and informal meeting that always gave us the same feeling one gets from attending a Urantia conference. Maybe there exists an Angel of the Study Groups that imparts the glow that seems always to characterize such gatherings under Jesus’ light.

IV. ADVANCED ISSUES OF STUDY GROUPS

Dealing With Disruptors

Heading off those with personal agendas

People with personal agendas usually have a passion for them that can be difficult to deal with. As host, try to discover such agendas before inviting the person to join the group. However, people with personal agendas are often very good at hiding them until they find an audience. Occasionally a person may try to dominate a meeting by turning the discussion to some personal agenda or pet issue. The facilitator may overcome this problem by:

1. Directing the discussion to another person by asking if someone who has not yet spoken wishes to make any comments about the meetings topic of discussion. If that doesn't work, politely suggest that we stay on the topic for the meeting and not get sidetracked.
2. Privately encourage the other members not to engage in the discussion of that person's agenda during or after the meeting. If nobody takes up

the challenge, often a person will lose interest and may leave the group or learn to be more gracious.

3. Offer to meet with the person after the meeting to provide the time for discussion of a pet issue. After respectfully listening to the person, politely request that this issue not be discussed during study group as you don't want to deflect the group from its main purpose of studying *The Urantia Book*. Explain that everyone comes for that purpose and it's essential to maintain it. If this person has a close friend in the group, ask the friend to talk to them about keeping to the topic of the meeting.

If all else fails, the host has the responsibility to take the disruptive person aside privately, and tactfully explain that the purpose of the group is to study *The Urantia Book* and that by introducing his personal agenda, he is disrupting the study of the others in the group. Directly ask this person not to bring the subject up again during the study period. It is important that the

moderator be patient and tolerant, but the host must also keep the interests of the group foremost in mind or the disruptive person will drive the others away. The group expects the host to function in this manner and to take action when needed. Do not feel badly for it or apologize for doing what needs to be done.

Working with the psychologically needy

Some persons will seek to join any group or cause in order to just belong to something. They have psychological needs that require a group setting to satisfy. Their presence will cause the group meetings to feel like therapy sessions. Certainly group members can at important times act as support for a member during a tough time but the difference here is that this type of person enjoys the attention and pity of the other members, never seeking to "get over it." Sometimes the psychologically needy will seek being recognized as a teacher or superior spiritually accomplished person. A psychologically needy person will drive the group apart as some will tire of the person's

problems and others may express pity and an overly active tolerance for them.

Managing those with negative habits

Being disruptive could also include someone who habitually arrives late for no apparent reason. One solution for this is to encourage members to arrive a little early so that the meeting can begin on time. (As we've stated, always start and end on time.) In addition, do not restart the meeting for those arriving late. This will remove their incentive to arrive on time in the future.

Sometimes personal habits can be disruptive. Someone loudly chewing ice from their drink, ignoring personal hygiene, attending with an obvious illness, and of course the ubiquitous cell phone or pager all can be forms of disruption. Seek the advice and consensus of the group when trying to deal with such situations. Sometimes light-heartedly poking fun at the offender may get the point across without creating hard feelings. Other times a direct approach may be necessary. If so, always do this in private. Remember this person is your brother or sister, so deal with them in a loving but firm manner when necessary.

Handling Controversy

As we have emphasized, avoid controversial issues, especially in new groups. A group with a more established relationship among its members may tread lightly into such areas but even then caution is suggested. For example,

someone may ask what *The Urantia Book* says about abortion. That is a legitimate question and yet it may cause discord. As long as the discussion is focused on book passages it may be a good discussion. However, should the talk turn political or adversarial, the host or facilitator should step in and conclude the discussion or divert the group to another subject.

The Urantia Book Internet School has a useful rule: "Interact with other students and teachers according to the spirit of the teachings of *The Urantia Book* by being respectful of differing levels of comprehension, diversity of perspective, and varied communication skills of fellow readers." Perhaps repeating this rule occasionally at the beginning of a meeting would help prevent potential controversy. Overall, it is better to look for areas of agreement in any group discourse, but never force a consensus in interpretation.

Creating Spiritual Unity

The search for God is the most important goal of any study group; and spiritual unity often results from the group's shared experience of this grand pursuit, conferring many benefits on members. Indeed, as the spiritual unity of the group strengthens, love among the group members grows. Other aspects of study group spiritual unity include the following:

1. If a group gets too large, it is more difficult to develop the close relationships that facilitate deep sharing. We've

already pointed out that such a group should split into two.

2. Membership stability allows familiarity and friendships to grow. A group of core members committed to attending every meeting will serve to unify the group. Familiarity with one another brings closeness and trust.
3. Consider coming up with a name for your group. A name will give the group a sense of identity.
4. Promote the idea that you and your group are part of a growing community of study groups around the world. Recognizing that you are part of this larger whole is inspiring, and will serve to increase your spiritual unity.
5. Do what you can to manifest genuine group governance. Toward this end, invite everyone to get involved in some aspect of hosting, planning, leading, or facilitating the group. Help those who tend to be "wallflowers" to know that they are valued members regardless of their level of participation. Lead the group in recognizing and investigating important issues in its process, and hold sessions of fair and formal group decision-making.

Let us endeavor to build a sense of unity among all readers of *The Urantia Book*. The midwayers speak to this goal when they say: *But in this brotherhood of Jesus there is no place for sectarian rivalry, group bitterness, nor assertions of moral superiority and spiritual infallibility.* [Paper 195:10, p. 2085:6]

Maintaining Attendance

Maintaining regular attendance is the proof of a successful group. The obvious key to maintaining attendance is to have a study group that people want to attend. Therefore, keeping the meetings interesting and providing a variety of learning methods is vital to keeping people coming to study group. Making people feel important to the group gives them a purpose for returning because without them something will be missing from the group. Inviting them to actively participate in the functioning of the group usually does this, which is one reason why it is important to rotate the role of facilitator, and another reason for making sure that everyone contributes to the discussions. Group chemistry is a difficult thing to predict but if the host will normally set the tone for meetings in a loving casual atmosphere where people feel comfortable, the chemistry will metabolize. No matter what else is going on in your life, put all that aside during the study period. As host, always be warm, friendly, and cheerful.

Other activities that maintain interest could include these ideas:

Invite outside speakers

1. Host joint meetings with other study groups
2. Celebrate Jesus' birthday or other religious holidays
3. Hold weekend social events
4. Engage in local community service projects (see more on this below)

5. Call regular members who miss a meeting to check on them and to let them know they were missed
6. Work together as a group in dissemination projects such as library placement of *The Urantia Book*, adopting a study group in another country, or UAI prison outreach

The commitment of part-time attendees can be improved by giving them a material sense of purpose to go along with the spiritual purpose of study group. This often is done by projects that benefit others in the community where they can see and feel direct results of their efforts.

Finally, every person is a vital part of the group and needs to be recognized and acknowledged as such from time to time. Be genuinely interested in the needs of group members. Folks always enjoy being around and sharing their lives with people who love them.

And when men see you so love them, and when they behold how fervently you serve them, they will perceive that you have become faith-fellows of the kingdom of heaven, and they will follow after the Spirit of Truth which they see in your lives, to the finding of eternal salvation. [Paper 191:6, p. 2044:3]

Engaging in Service Projects

Healthy study groups are those that grow outward through some sort of service or outreach. The old corporate adage of “grow or die” is also true for study groups. Your group may not die if it does not grow in some way—but certainly it will stagnate. Here are additional ideas for service projects:

1. Prison ministry has been established by the UAI and needs volunteers in all communities.
2. *The Urantia Book* Internet School facilitators of classes. Perhaps your group could team-teach a course, with each lesson being the topic of your study group meeting.
3. Engage in projects that to get books into the spiritually hungry hands around the world.
4. Host and conduct local or regional conferences, retreats, or picnics.
5. Volunteer as a group at homeless shelters, hospitals, or for local emergency agencies.

Groups that are focused inward may tend to fade away while groups that seek to extend themselves out into the community around them tend to grow and flourish.

One of the most important lessons to be learned during your mortal career is teamwork. [Paper 28:5, p 312:1]

POSTSCRIPT: BUILDING A WORLDWIDE STUDY GROUP COMMUNITY

We cannot create thousands of study groups on Urantia without creating one study group at a time. Each new group will take on a life of its own only if a loving and caring hand nurtures it. That said, we also invite you to help build a network of study groups around the world. This network is neither formal nor restrictive; it endeavors to provide an open doorway of meaningful communication among groups and also individual readers in search of groups. Here are some important steps toward that goal:

1. Register with the Study Group Portal (see Addendum below). Urantia Association International maintains this database, but membership in UAI is not required to become listed. We are here to serve all groups and all readers of the book.
2. If you are open to new members, bear in mind that we can help them find you. Sometimes travelers contact us to find a study group in an area where they are vacationing or



Indonesia



Colombia



Australia

3. visiting. We often assist them in finding a study group they can attend. You may contact us at anytime for assistance in finding new readers in your area or for any information you may need.
3. Once you have a study group established, we would appreciate receiving updated information about your group at least once a year. We would enjoy sharing news of any kind about your group (along with photos) with others in our newsletters.
4. Many countries have UAI national organizations and local organizations – check for one in your area. Such organizations may serve as a resource for

guest speakers, gatherings of readers, help with difficult concepts from the book, or any other assistance you may need. Again, membership in the UAI, while welcomed, is not required for us to assist you in having a successful study group.

We heartily welcome you to *The Urantia Book* Study Group community and look forward to sharing this experience together.

Caio Donega
UAI Study Group Committee
559 W. Diversey Parkway #351
Chicago, IL 60614-7640
studygroupchair.uai@gmail.com

ADDENDUM A: CHECKLIST FOR LAUNCHING YOUR FIRST MEETING

- Evaluate the time required to host a study group. Do you have one evening a week?
- Discuss forming a study group with your family and other readers in your area.
- Make a deep personal commitment to host a study group.
- Prayerfully turn this decision over to the spiritual influences in and around you.
- Compile a list of names of potential study group members that you know.
- Contact Urantia Foundation for names of local readers you don't know.
- Contact the UAI for names of readers and other study groups in your area or region.
- If there are other nearby study groups, alert them about your intentions.
- Meet in person ahead of time with potential group members you don't know.
- Finalize your invitation list. Plan an organizational meeting. Set a suitable time and location.
- Mail or email invitations to all the prospects on your list.
- A few days after they receive the invitation, follow up with an email or telephone call.
- A short time before the meeting, confirm all arrangements for the meeting place and time.
- Get there early so you can greet everyone as they arrive.
- Bring refreshments if possible.
- Start on time. Introduce yourself and state the purpose of the meeting.
- Present your thoughts and then ask for suggestions and ideas from your guests.
- Decide with the group where to meet, the time of the meeting, and how often to meet.
- Decide your method of study initially, knowing this may change as the group evolves.
- Make sure everyone knows the time, date, and place of the inaugural meeting.
- If possible, send a message a few days before the inaugural meeting to remind everyone.
- Develop a rough plan for this meeting; study the paper to be covered; be prepared.
- As host, always be first to arrive. Start on time.
- Act as the facilitator of the first meeting; realize that people will look to you to lead.
- If the discussion gets sidetracked, pull it back into focus on the paper being read.
- Don't let someone dominate the meeting.
- Keep things moving, but allow time for discussion. Encourage questions and sharing.
- Make sure everyone knows the time, date, place, and topic of the next meeting.

ADDENDUM B: CONTACT LIST FOR STUDY GROUP ASSISTANCE

UAI STUDY GROUP COMMITTEE

Caio Donega

UAI Study Group Committee

559 W. Diversey Parkway #351

Chicago, IL 60614, USA

studygroupchair.uai@gmail.com

URANTIA ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONAL (UAI)

URANTIA ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONAL

559 West Diversey Parkway #351

Chicago, IL 60614, USA

Phone 773-572-1180

Fax 773-572-1181

Rick Lyon, Executive Administrator

uaicentraloffice@urantia-uai.org

URANTIA FOUNDATION

533 Diversey Parkway

Chicago, IL 60614, USA

urantia@urantia.org

Call 1-800-URANTIA in the U.S (international callers: 1-773-525-3319)

ADDENDUM C: JOINING UAI'S STUDY GROUP DATABASE

If you are the host or organizer of a study group in your communities, and you would like to be listed in UAI's global database of study groups that is operated in cooperation with the Study Group Portal (a internet initiative of the three leading Urantia movement organizations), please go online to submit your information at this link:

www.studygroupportal.org

Or, you mail fill out the following hard-copy form and mail it to:

URANTIA ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONAL

Study Group Committee

559 West Diversey Parkway #351

Chicago, IL 60614 USA

Phone 773-572-1180

Fax 773-572-1181

Rick Lyon, Executive Administrator

uaicentraloffice@urantia-uai.org

Please circle the appropriate answer to the following questions:

- | | | |
|---|-----|----|
| 1. I / we currently host a Urantia Book study group. | Yes | No |
| 2. Is your group open to new members or visitors? | Yes | No |
| 3. Can we assure readers that your study group will focus only on study of <i>The Urantia Book</i> ? | Yes | No |
| 4. May we share your contact information with others only for the purpose of attending your Urantia Book study group? | Yes | No |

Name of host or organizer:

Name of study group (if applicable):

Address:

City: State: Country:

Zip: Phone: E-Mail:

Signature: Date:

Meeting schedule:

Method of study:

Additional comments:

ADDENDUM D: NEWSLETTER ARTICLE SUBMISSION FORM

Any host or organizer of a study group is encouraged to submit news about your group and/or photos to UAI at this link:

studygroupchair.uai@gmail.com

Or, you mail fill out the following hard-copy form (along with photos of you have them) and mail to:

UAI Study Group Committee

559 West Diversey Parkway #351

Chicago, IL 60614 USA

Phone: 773-572-1180

Fax: 773-572-1181

Email: studygroupchair.uai@gmail.com

Name of study group:

Address:

Email address: Telephone:

News from your group:

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