

5. Working group activities

The main purpose of the substantive working groups is to foster higher levels of human civilization, but these praiseworthy impulses will not produce any significant results unless members and associates find practical ways to serve individuals and groups in society. They will have to achieve this entirely by attraction, for no one will be obliged to seek their assistance or advice.

The working groups will serve fellow human beings from the same spiritual perspectives as the master seraphim. In other words, they will provide types of assistance and service that are entirely independent of the religious views and personal convictions of those they serve. The rest of the chapter describes this work in greater depth, but here is a brief summary:

- **INFORMATION ACTIVITIES** will be a working group's most prominent connection to society and also the main entry point for casual visitors to its website. Each working group will assemble and disseminate information about methods and approaches for promoting growth and development that individuals and groups are pursuing. To a lesser degree a working group will also gather information about key events in the corresponding professions and disciplines, but innovation and new ideas should be its main focus.
- **NETWORKING AND PROBLEM SOLVING** embrace a range of methods that will serve individuals and groups in society by helping them pursue their own goals. For example, bulletin boards and computer forums will enable individuals and groups to put forward comments, questions, and requests related to a wide range of issues.
- **PRIVATE DIALOGUE** will be a working group's most difficult and most challenging activity. Those who are creative and innovative need opportunities to discuss their ideas, especially with persons they respect and may admire. In seeking to encourage and inspire individuals and groups who are interested in designing, promoting, or pursuing their own initiatives or reforms, members and associates will draw on their personal experience and will pay close attention to the circumstances of their time and place.
- **MEETINGS AND FORUMS** would enable individuals and groups to exchange ideas on a specific topic. A working group may wish to host or sponsor such an event from time to time, depending on its overall workload and the personal and financial resources that may be available.
- **PUBLICATIONS** could include periodicals or books on specific topics that the working group covers. A working group will consider and appraise these possibilities in the context of other demands on its time and energy.
- **NURTURING POTENTIAL INTEREST IN THE REVELATION** will be an indirect benefit, the outcome of personal cooperation and natural curiosity. Information about the revelation must always be readily available to those who show an interest, and members and associates must handle all such inquiries with sensitivity and skill.

a. Information activities

A working group's information activities will be its most prominent connection to society. These activities will also be the main entry point for casual visitors to a working group's website — people who are curious about the working group or who wish to pursue a particular topic for their own reasons. Thus the website's information pages should be particularly attractive and appealing, so that visitors will have a positive first impression.

ASSEMBLING INFORMATION. Each substantive working group will assemble information about efforts that individuals and groups in the corresponding fields are carrying out in order to promote progressive growth and development. To a degree, a substantive working group will also be compelled to assemble information about key events in the corresponding professions and disciplines, even though they are not directly related to proposing or promoting reforms.

Working group participants will draw on information they read in journals and newspapers, but material they can find on the Internet may often be better suited to their needs. Some of the working group's contacts may be willing to forward selected information from certain source material, or to steer working group participants toward ideas and initiatives that they know about. Regular contacts — for example, people who have registered with the working group in order to receive periodic bulletins — may also be useful sources of comment and insight.

SORTING, EDITING, AND ANALYZING THE MATERIAL. The substantive working groups will probably subdivide the fields they cover into relatively compact categories, so they can prepare tailored newsletters and bulletins that are attuned to the interests of particular individuals and groups. This will make significant demands on their experience, discretion, judgment, and editorial skill, but summarizing and analyzing events and trends will require even more time and effort. Going this second and third mile will make an important and perhaps essential contribution to the working group's reputation as a fair-minded, even-handed, and insightful resource for those who seek to promote growth and development.

The working groups should do their best to verify the accuracy of the information they share and should strive to be balanced and fair by including a representative sample of responsible views. There is a fine line between analysis and advocacy, and the substantive working groups will have to walk it with care and caution.

A working group must ensure that the bulletins and other articles that appear on its website do not amount to guidance or recommendations addressed to the public. A working group must not issue pronouncements appraising specific ideas and innovations, nor statements declaring that particular proposals should be supported or opposed. Instead, working group

participants should provide advice and counsel only in private and only upon request. If a working group were to become a public advocate of a particular proposal, it would lose the reputation for impartiality and balance that will make it a respected and influential resource for everyone who is active in the corresponding fields.

PROVIDING INFORMATION TO REGULAR CONTACTS AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC. Openness and transparency will attract public interest and help a working group earn stature and respect. Therefore a working group should make its newsletters, bulletins, and other information readily available on its website. Individuals and groups who wish to receive specific newsletters or bulletins by E-mail would register and thereby become regular contacts. A working group should not charge for its newsletters or bulletins, but should consider subscribers as potential donors and seek contributions from time to time.

Some contacts may request tailored information or analysis of topics that particularly interest them. A working group would be wise to honor such requests, within the limits of expertise and resources that may be available.

RESOURCES AND ADMINISTRATION. Each substantive working group will need capable writers and editors. It will also need computer equipment, access to the Internet, and persons who are skilled in website design and operation. A single server would suffice to host the websites of all ten substantive working groups, so it would be appropriate and logical for working group 1 to provide such support to the entire regional association.

Each working group should designate one member as the information coordinator and another member as his or her deputy. They will be responsible for managing and directing information activities, in part by developing priorities for the ongoing work of assembling, editing, analyzing, and disseminating information.

Even though a working group may have associates who are willing to assume much of the responsibility, the coordinator and deputy will probably need discretionary authority to assign specific tasks to individual members and associates.

b. Networking and problem solving

Networking and problem solving will be an intermediate phase of assistance to individuals and groups. Some contacts who benefit from networking or problem solving may eventually seek private dialogue as well, but in any case these services will give them a personal stake in the working group. That may suffice to make them supporters and contributors.

- Bulletin boards and computer forums would enable contacts to put forward comments, questions, and requests related to a wide range of issues.
- In addition, contacts may be able to obtain introductions and recommendations by seeking the help of working group members or associates. (Such personal information could enable them to connect with others in society who wish to explore an idea or cooperate on a project.)

QUALITY CONTROL AND CULTIVATING CONTACTS. Since the identity and reputation of a working group will be closely associated with its website, the working group must ensure that everything on it meets the highest standards of integrity. In principle, working group members or associates will have to monitor and approve submissions from individuals and groups. In practice, it may be appropriate to relax this requirement for certain types of information that comes from trusted contacts who have registered with the working group and who are well known to it.

“Getting to know you” will be part of the process. Individual or groups who would like to benefit from the working group’s services will be required to identify themselves and give grounds for believing that such requests — and the persons or groups who make them — are sincere and legitimate.

A working group should cultivate contacts that use its networking services. One key reason is to make sure that they are satisfied, while noting and considering their suggestions for improvement. It is at least equally important that the working group nurture personal relationships, so that many frequent contacts will become supporters and contributors.

ADMINISTERING SERVICES. Although networking and problem solving will take less energy and resources than information activities, they will nonetheless make considerable demands on a working group’s experience, discretion, and judgment. These functions will also require substantial skill and sensitivity in dealing with people.

Each working group should designate an experienced member as its coordinator for networking and problem solving. The deputy coordinator might also be a member, but in some cases a senior associate may be able to carry out these responsibilities.

c. Private dialogue

The working groups will stimulate and encourage an extended process of small improvements, on the understanding that the long-range transformation of human society will be evolutionary and gradual, not revolutionary or sudden. Each working group will have to pay close attention to the circumstances of its time and place, practices that currently prevail in the region where it operates, and the nature of the initiative or reform that an individual or group is contemplating or pursuing. To do justice to this full range of factors, members and associates will have to draw on their own personal experience.

Private dialogue will be a working group's most difficult and most challenging activity. As in many other aspects of human life, private dialogue will require patience, discretion, judgment, and abundant good will.

Counsel is consultation, not command. Members who advise others must not treat the revelation as an anthology of current recipes, for the ideals it proclaims apply to an entire millennium. Passages from *The Urantia Book* are not the exclusive source of constructive ideas, nor an authoritative guide to the lengthy path of human progress. After all, the revelators do not tell us how any segment of mankind should move forward at any given moment.

For all these reasons — and for many others that may be equally important — a member or an associate must never portray an excerpt from the revelation as an instruction that would bind any individual or group, nor as an artifact of spiritual authority. To the contrary, members who provide private advice and counsel should seek to radiate the spirit of the teachings in ways that seldom if ever call attention to specific words.

THE ROLE OF ADVICE AND COUNSEL. Individuals and groups that seek to design, promote, and pursue initiatives and reforms embodying their highest aspirations and ideals are resilient explorers of “The Inner Life,” the psychological context that a Solitary Messenger describes on pages 1219-1221 of *The Urantia Book* [111:4]:

The advances of true civilization are all born in this inner world of mankind. It is only the inner life that is truly creative. Civilization can hardly progress when the majority of the youth of any generation devote their interests and energies to the materialistic pursuits of the sensory or outer world. ...

Only in the higher levels of the superconscious mind as it impinges upon the spirit realm of human experience can you find those higher concepts in association with effective master patterns which will contribute to the building of a better and more enduring civilization. Personality is inherently creative, but it thus functions only in the inner life of the individual. [1220:2,4 / 111:4.3,5]

The psychology of individuals and groups who are creative and innovative includes a substantial need to discuss their ideas with others, especially persons they respect and may admire. As a working group gains stature from experience and acquires a well-deserved reputation as a source of useful information and of benevolent, disinterested, and even-handed counsel, it will become increasingly influential.

OVERTONES AND RELATIONSHIPS. To understand private dialogue, we must bear in mind that the substantive working groups are a Spirit-like endeavor based on practical ministry and altruistic service. Since the substantive working groups are not Father-like, they do not resemble working group 1 and do not seek to coordinate or manage the efforts of those they serve. Since the substantive working groups are not Son-like either, they do not resemble working group 12 and do not promote or reinforce spiritual values as their main method of serving others.

The work of the twelve corps of master seraphim is their spiritual inspiration and model. The ten substantive working groups seek to foster higher levels of human civilization by focusing on practical ways to stimulate progressive growth and development.

Private counsel requires discretion and mutual respect. Anyone who receives advice has a right to expect that members and associates will respect the privacy of these discussions, at least until he or she advances specific ideas in public. Even thereafter, the working group should continue to protect the content of private dialogue unless the person who benefited from it discloses its content to others or explicitly releases the working group from the requirement for privacy.

Dilemmas may arise from time to time, for not all initiatives are progressive and wise. It will never be appropriate for a member or an associate to help an individual or group act in ways that conflict with the spirit of the revelation or with ethical principles that the working group endorses and proclaims. A member or an associate who has doubts or concerns along these lines should seek guidance from the dialogue coordinator or from someone else in the working group who is responsible for reviewing such questions.

DEVELOPING AND CULTIVATING CONTACTS. Dialogue is a personal relationship and will usually be the result of a series of exchanges over time. Both sides must acquire confidence. The individual or group concerned must come to respect the working group and attach importance to the benevolent and evenhanded counsel that members can provide. In addition, members and associates must come to understand the individual or group who is active in society — partly in order to provide effective service, but also to be confident that the underlying intentions are serious and sincere.

The working group will need to ensure that a member who counsels an individual or group has an appropriate background. On a periodic and recurring basis, the coordinator, deputy coordinator, or another senior member who is not the primary point of contact should get in touch with every individual and group who participates in private dialogue. The main purpose will be to find out whether these discussions are constructive and helpful, but the member who inquires should also ask whether the working group could assist in other ways.

The coordinator will want to ensure that all those who receive advice and counsel have a warm and favorable regard for the working group and its mission. Since dialogue requires considerable effort and resources, all individuals and groups who receive such services should be considered as supporters and potential donors. It will seldom be wise to request contributions during regular follow up, but the working group should not hesitate to seek funds at other times.

RESOURCES AND ADMINISTRATION. The coordinator and deputy coordinator for dialogue should be senior members of the working group who have demonstrated their ability and dedication. If possible, their personal experience and professional background should be substantially different, so the two of them can operate as a team that embodies broad understanding of many fields that the working group addresses.

Since insightful and wise counsel will blend commitment to the revelation and personal experience in one or more fields, a member of the working group must be in charge of dialogue with each individual or group who is active in society. Associates can and should contribute to dialogue to the best of their ability, but mainly in supportive roles.

d. Meetings and forums

From time to time a working group may wish to sponsor or host a meeting or forum on a specific topic. Given the energy and effort that this would require, most working groups will approach such decisions individually. In part, they will wish to consider the following questions:

1. How would sponsoring or hosting such an event benefit the working group and its mission of idealistic service? Would the event tend to increase interest in the working group's efforts?
2. Could the event help individuals and groups in society develop productive ideas or otherwise contribute to forward movement?

3. Do the working group's members and associates believe that the individual(s) and/or group(s) who would be their partner(s) are thoughtful, responsible, and serious, even though organizations and institutions that are well established in the field might not welcome the innovative ideas that the event may examine or promote?
4. What share of the effort and expense would the working group assume? What share would outside individual(s) or group(s) assume?
5. Does the amount of time, energy, and effort that the event would require make sense in the context of other priorities of the working group (e.g., information activities, private dialogue)?
6. If other work of the working group is likely to be delayed or diminished while members and associates are arranging for the meeting, is this potential disadvantage less important than the meeting's benefits?

From time to time, working groups that have the same responsibilities in different regions may wish to sponsor a public meeting or forum on topic(s) of mutual interest. In addition, they may wish to exchange ideas and insights about the best ways to promote progressive growth and development by holding meetings that are solely for participants in the Global Endeavor.

RESOURCES AND ADMINISTRATION. The ten substantive working groups have diverse needs and concerns, so it is difficult to predict how each one will appraise the value of meetings and forums as a contribution to its mission. On balance, a working group that has been operating for a long time and that has many members and associates is more likely to be attracted to the idea of sponsoring or hosting an event. In contrast, a working group that has limited personal and financial resources is more likely to conclude that it should mainly emphasize other activities and should seldom host or sponsor a meeting or forum.

Since responsibilities associated with meetings and forums will probably be occasional rather than regular, most working groups will prefer to appoint a coordinator, a deputy coordinator, and their staff on an ad hoc basis.

e. Publications

A working group may wish to publish periodicals, books, or both. A periodical would represent a significant ongoing commitment, whereas a book probably would not (*e.g.*, a collection of essays by individuals active in society). In evaluating such options, a working group will wish to consider the following questions:

1. How would publishing the periodical or book benefit the working group and its mission of idealistic service? Would the publication tend to increase interest in the working group's efforts?
2. What share of the expense could the working group expect to recoup through sales?
3. Would the working group be required to pay recurring royalties or other fees to the author(s), or would the text belong to the working group and be available for subsequent reprinting entirely at the working group's discretion?
4. Are there persuasive reasons to believe that the publication will spark increased interest in possible initiatives or reforms that may stimulate progressive growth and development?
5. Would publishing the material in printed form have substantial advantages? Alternately, would the ideas be just as influential if the working group were to make them available as an E-book or in a document that readers could download? Should the working group publish the text in more than one format?
6. Does the amount of time, energy, and effort that the publication would require make sense in the context of other priorities of the working group?

Several working groups in the same region may find it advantageous to pool their efforts in regard to certain mechanical aspects (*e.g.*, publication design, layout, and formatting). On occasion, working groups that have the same responsibilities in different regions may wish to collaborate on a particular book (*e.g.*, in order to compare current trends or analyze methods and approaches that proved productive). Even if they decide not to market the book to the public at large, they should make it available to all other participants in the Global Endeavor.

RESOURCES AND ADMINISTRATION. “Print-on-demand” methods would enable a working group to publish a book with a very limited investment. Further, a working group may be able to recoup most or even all of its expenses by obtaining donations designated for a specific purpose. Therefore it is reasonable to believe that publishing a book may be an attractive option for a working group long before it has the personal and financial resources that might lead it to launch a periodical.

f. Nurturing potential interest

As noted at the beginning of the chapter, members and associates serve and assist fellow human beings from the same spiritual perspectives as the master seraphim. The assistance they provide is entirely independent of the religious views and philosophic convictions of those they serve. Members and associates are *living* the revelation, not preaching it. Their work reflects counsel that Jesus gave to his apostles and evangelists:

In all that you do, become not one-sided and overspecialized. ...

Let me emphatically state this eternal truth: If you, by truth co-ordination, learn to exemplify in your lives this beautiful wholeness of righteousness, your fellow men will then seek after you that they may gain what you have so acquired. The measure wherewith truth seekers are drawn to you represents the measure of your truth endowment, your righteousness. [*The Midwayer Commission, 1726:1-2 / 155:1.4-5*]

Members and associates shall not evangelize those they serve, nor seek to impose their own views or values. Therefore their roles and responsibilities are dramatically different from those of the apostles and evangelists. Nonetheless, as members and associates learn to exemplify the “beautiful wholeness of righteousness,” truth seekers will be drawn to them. Dissemination of the teachings will be an indirect benefit, the outcome of personal cooperation and natural curiosity.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION. Although information about the working group’s responsibilities should be far more prominent on its website, there should also be quiet and understated references to the revelation and to material that explains key elements. All such pages and links should appear as optional background, so that anyone who visits the website will understand that the working group’s main task is to promote progressive growth and development in the fields it addresses.

The regional associations should develop explanatory material that members and associates can provide to anyone who asks. In addition, each working group may wish to assemble passages that relate to its fields of responsibility, so it can make these insights available.

ANSWERS IN CONTEXT. Traditional images of Moses sometimes depict him descending from Mt. Sinai with engraved stone tablets wedged under his arms. It will never be appropriate for a member or an associate to wield *The Urantia Book* in ways that are even remotely similar, for the psychological overtones would be intensely counterproductive. For the same reason, written material about *The Urantia Book* or its contents should never be distributed to contacts unless they show interest or make inquiries. When members or associates refer to the revelation, they should do so in cautious, tactful, and understated ways.

During private dialogue a contact may ask about the values or beliefs that inspired a specific remark, or that seemed to be associated with a particular line of reasoning. In most cases it will be wiser for the member or associate to start with a general reply, seeking to explain the ideas in terms of broad principles and concepts that stand on their own merits. If the contact continues to probe, at some point it will be appropriate for the member or associate to state that certain thoughts came from the revelation, or perhaps developed insights it contains. Depending on the questioner's reactions, the member or associate could provide additional information, but such situations must be handled with sensitivity and skill. It would be unwise for a member or an associate to inundate a contact with facts or interpretations that significantly exceed his or her desires.

Since these situations will arise quite often, working group 12 should develop material that describes appropriate ways for members and associates to handle them. Further, this topic should be a prominent feature of the periodic and recurring training that members and associates receive.

DIRECT INQUIRIES. Some inquiries will be considerably more direct. At one time or another, many contacts will ask: "Why are you people doing this? What do you get out of it?" Simple questions like these could be the gateway to quite a discussion, but it would still be wise for members and associates to lead off with short answers — not long or complex replies that could overwhelm the contact.

The working groups provide assistance and service from spirit-like motives. Since this will be the context for any initial inquiry, members and associates may wish to emphasize aspects of the revelation that relate to ministry and service.

For example, they could point out that the Father does not sit idly on some golden throne in the clouds, watching with ironic amusement while his children on earth assault each other and commit other absurdities and crimes. To the contrary, God actively fosters all wholesome aspects of human life. On his behalf and based on his plan, angels and other spiritual beings and influences minister to us as individuals and as members of society. In part they seek to encourage us to develop better ways of living and act on our highest ideals, so we can cooperate with insight and wisdom and do our utmost to promote human growth and development on our planet Urantia.