

# Community

## *Beginning and Organizing Effective Study Groups*



**THE URANTIA BOOK  
FELLOWSHIP**  
Cultivating The Spirit of Religion

# Community

## *Beginning and Organizing Effective Study Groups*

*"The security of a religious group depends on spiritual unity, not on theological uniformity." P. 103:5.12 (p. 1135.2)*

Successful *Urantia Book* study groups provide the foundation for new insights, spiritual sharing, and community building. Since the publication of *The Urantia Book*, readers and organizers have considered study groups to be essential for fuller comprehension of the book. As readers sincerely study the book, they will better understand it, and that will reveal new levels of spiritual living and cosmic citizenship to strive for, both individually and collectively.

Participation in a *Urantia Book* study group can serve to enhance personal spiritual growth, permit in-depth study of *The Urantia Book* with others, and bring readers together for fellowship and service.

Although these associations have been traditionally called "study groups," and group study of *The Urantia Book* is the primary feature, it is not the only one. The sharing of religious experiences and concerns as well as enjoying fellowship are often equally important functions.



On a personal basis, the importance of *Urantia Book* study groups derives from our need to better understand the teachings of *The Urantia Book* and to share our spiritual experience, friendship, encouragement, and reinforcement through association with fellow readers. Participation in a *Urantia Book* study group can serve to enhance personal spiritual growth, permit in-depth study of *The Urantia Book* with others, and bring readers together for fellowship and service.

*"The true teacher maintains his intellectual integrity by ever remaining a learner." P.130:3.7 (p. 1433.2)*

There may also be a Supreme purpose in study group activity: *"Man can discover the Father in his heart, but he will have to search for the Supreme in the hearts of other men ..."* P. 117:6.23 (p. 1290.9)

In the larger picture, each study group is a building block to expanding the influence of the Fifth Epochal Revelation to our world. The efforts of each study group member are multiplied by association with others, and cooperation among study groups will help us to serve our Master more powerfully in the revelation of God to Urantia. The strength of our individual study groups, as well as the quality of interaction among their members, will determine the strength and vitality of our worldwide reader and believer community.

*"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." P. 160:2.9 (p. 1776.3)*

The strength of our individual study groups, as well as the quality of interaction among their members, will determine the strength, vitality, and extent of our worldwide reader and believer community.

## Suggestions for Running Successful Study Groups

Although each group will evolve methods of study and fellowship which suit its members, the following ideas and suggestions represent a compilation of ways in which many successful groups conduct their study group activities.

### Commitment

The primary requirement for a successful group is that there be at least one dedicated person who serves as a sponsor and who takes responsibility for planning or hosting the meeting. Other group members may not be expected to have an equal level of commitment; however, if the group is to survive, at least a few members must be highly dedicated. A study group sponsor does not have to be an expert *Urantia Book* student. There is no certification available, much less required. All that is needed is a love for people and a belief in the importance of *The Urantia Book* and in the values of group study.



### Finding Interested People

A study group does not need to be large to be a fulfilling experience. Jesus said, "...where two or three believers are gathered together, there am I in the midst of them." P. 159:1.3 (p. 1762.5) Once two or three readers make the commitment to a consistent study of the revelation, the important thing is not how many, but rather their dedication to meet. Nevertheless, here are some techniques for finding new readers that have been tried and are recommended:

- Placing small advertisements in a local newspaper, college or library bulletin boards
- Giving copies of *The Urantia Book* to libraries with study group contact information inserted in the book
- Offering an introductory session and inviting new readers to come, including friends of current readers
- Finding new readers and advertising introduction meetings on meetup.com
- Introducing the book to friends and acquaintances and inviting them to the study group
- Using ideas and materials available at "Outreach Resources" on the Fellowship's website ([www.urantiabook.org](http://www.urantiabook.org)) One must click on "Reader Resources" for the dropdown menu



### Consistency

At least two or three people should commit to attending virtually every meeting. Founding members must agree that regular attendance is a top priority.

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If readers attend a few times and find no one there, they may lose interest. It is also important that the meetings be held at a consistent time so that people may plan their schedules accordingly. Publishing a reminder notice is useful, particularly if meetings are rotated to different locations. Many groups hold meetings weekly to maintain momentum, although some groups meet bi-weekly and a few successful groups convene less often.

“One hour of teaching will not wholly change the beliefs of a lifetime, and so Jesus found it necessary to reiterate his message, to tell again and again that which he wished them to understand...” P. 166:4.12 (p. 1831.3)

## Location



It is very important that the study group meetings be held in a pleasant and accessible location. Many study group members have found that holding meetings in someone's home provides greater warmth and camaraderie. Others have found a public location to be conducive to serious study and to alleviate hosting responsibilities. In either case, there should be a large room available with ample lighting and enough chairs set apart from unrelated activities. It is important to make certain that everyone in the study group can see one another.

## Length

Since the primary purpose of the group is the study and discussion of *The Urantia Book*, it is helpful to establish some definite practices about the use of the group's time. Some groups find that gathering a half hour before the study begins encourages socialization and a sense of community. This practice will also facilitate a prompt beginning to the study meeting as well as providing time to welcome any new attendees.

Most groups have found that a good meeting length is two hours. If the group meets on a weekday evening, it is advisable to pick a starting time that 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 it is time for everyone to leave.

## Refreshments



Serving beverages such as coffee or tea often contributes to a relaxed, congenial atmosphere. Many people also like to serve light refreshments such as fruit, cheese or cookies, during a break or after the meeting, to encourage socializing. If this is the group's custom, it is preferable to rotate the responsibility for bringing refreshments among members, since most enjoy the opportunity to be of service to other group members.

Founding members must agree that regular attendance is a top priority.

## Group Prayer and Worship

If the members of the group wish to pray and worship together, there are many ways to meet their varying needs. One may choose to encourage experimentation in conducting group prayer and worship to respond to individual concerns and to be tolerant of the many varieties of personal religious expression. Many groups open and close with a short period of silence or a prayer for God's guidance to remind them of their spiritual purpose. When phrased in terms that reflect faith and love, such a prayer can greatly contribute to a group's sense of spiritual unity.

*The Urantia Book* tells us regarding personal prayer that "Jesus was particularly averse to praying in public" P. 144:3.13 (p. 1620.11) and that he "...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." P. 144.3.14 (p. 1620.12)

There are many ways to organize group prayer and worship to meet the varying needs of different groups.

However, in discussing the social repercussions of prayer, the book says, "...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." P. 91:5.2 (p. 998.5)

These two aspects of prayer leave ample room for group members to seek to understand these practices better and to follow their own preferences. There are many ways to organize group prayer and worship to meet the varying needs of different groups.

"...communion ... is the prelude to true worship -- the practice of the presence of God which eventuates in the emergence of the brotherhood of man." P. 103:4.1 (p. 1133.1)

## Study Format

Most groups have chosen one of two basic ways to study *The Urantia Book*: paper by paper or topically. Beginning groups may find it easier to select a paper or group of papers and simply read through them. If it is agreed that a paper be read in preparation for the study meeting, the group can give priority to honoring that commitment. The moderator should carefully review the material ahead of time and devise questions that will encourage reflective thinking on the points selected for discussion. Encouragement of alternate viewpoints is essential, for there are no official interpretations of *The Urantia Book*; the text speaks for itself, and understanding of the teachings can be broadened by many unique viewpoints. One easy way to plan a topical study is to use the *Concordex*, the *Concordance*, the *Key Word Index*, the index included in *The Urantia Book* Uversa Press edition, or the table of contents of *The Urantia Book*, each of which gives subject references.



By picking a topic (e.g., faith, prayer, liberty, Adam and Eve, home life) and researching the citations listed, a group can select those it wishes to use. Planning lessons or discussions can be productive and stimulating; planning should be shared among group members.

The Fellowship website contains a growing collection of papers written by readers on a variety of topics. These can easily be used for study groups. They can be found under "Reader Resources."

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After a prayer for guidance (if the group so chooses), the moderator might begin with a short introduction of the subject and then read the introductory portion of the paper that has been chosen to study. Most readers find it important to discuss the material to uncover the deeper dimensions of meaning offered by differing viewpoints. Some groups encourage interruptions for questions or comments at any point; others prefer that questions be held until the end of each section. In either case, most readers have found it important to discuss the material of each section. When no one has further questions or comments, the moderator should ask another person to read the next section, and so on. Everyone who wants to read aloud should be given the opportunity.

## New Readers

When a new reader attends, the group can encourage the new reader to learn about *The Urantia Book* in a relaxed and friendly setting, especially a group which places a premium on open-mindedness, commitment, fellowship, and a willingness to share personal religious experience with others.



Some study group members unintentionally make visitors self-conscious by being overly solicitous. If attentive, group members will learn when to change the program for the sake of a new reader, when to stop and explain a new term, and when to encourage a new reader to simply listen and work to understand. Most new readers do not want to disrupt a group or to be the center of attention. Generally, the new reader just wants to observe. Warmth and friendliness are the best ways to make new people feel comfortable.

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It also is a good idea to keep extra copies of *The Urantia Book* on hand so that visitors will have one to use during the meeting. In certain situations, name tags may be helpful.

## Rotation of Moderator

Almost all long-lived groups arrange for the moderator's duties to be rotated among the members. This brings everyone into the process as an actual or potential leader; in addition, it increases the diversity and enjoyment of group study. Groups may either tire of the same person over and over, or they may become overly dependent. Within the basic guidelines which the group adopts, the moderator should have reasonable latitude in his or her choice of subject and approach, provided that the meeting centers on material contained in or relevant to *The Urantia Book*.

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## Group Participation



Anyone can read *The Urantia Book* alone; the task of the study group moderator is to encourage as many members as possible to contribute their thoughts so that all members grow by expressing their own views and hearing those of others. The normal role of the moderator is as a leader, not as a teacher. If at all possible, it is best to avoid direct criticism of the views of others. Explicit criticism can cause a member to remain silent for an extended period or even to leave the group. If the group is fairly large (say, more than six participants), or if it consists of people who do not know each other very well, it is probably better for the moderator to concentrate on facilitating the discussion.

The moderator should encourage all members to be straightforward in their comments and to speak from

the heart as well as from the mind. Members should be encouraged to listen carefully to comments by others.

It is helpful to encourage a few moments of reflection after someone speaks. Classroom teachers can vouch for the fact that completely spontaneous comments favor the quick and the forceful and will encourage an unbalanced discussion. The ideal moderator encourages everyone to participate but never forces anyone to speak, and he or she always focuses the discussion on the agreed topic while allowing the group the freedom to explore relevant concepts in depth.

Members should be encouraged to listen carefully to comments by others.

A good technique to involve reticent or quiet members is to show an obvious desire to hear what they have to say. Asking a simple question or inviting a statement of opinion can encourage them to speak.

Because many *Urantia Book* topics seem fundamentally intellectual, at times the moderator may wish to direct the discussion along lines that encourage the sharing of personal spiritual experience, which is a major benefit of attending a study group. Such questions reveal the effects of truth in our personal lives and thus deal in feelings as well as facts.

## Promoting Discussion

There are specific techniques which can be used to promote discussion. Some include:

- Expansion: Asking someone to elaborate on or more fully explain a previous comment
- Clarification: Asking for a comment to be restated in a different way
- Justification: Asking someone to identify material in *The Urantia Book* which seems to support his or her views
- Broadened Understanding: Asking someone else to comment on the previous remark

After a selection has been read aloud, the moderator can stimulate discussion by asking a thought-provoking question, something a little more specific than "What do you think about the last section we read?" If possible, the moderator should prepare a list of questions ahead of time. Questions uncover facts, explore relationships of facts to truths, and enhance the understanding of the impact of these truths.

Questions uncover facts, explore relationships of facts to truths, and enhance our understanding of the impact of these truths on our lives.

A factual question might be "How many Ancients of Days are there?" An analytical question might be "Why are the Ancients of Days both administrators and judges? Doesn't that violate the principle of the separation of powers into executive, legislative, and judicial realms?"



Even in beginning groups, shared input can lead to questions which in turn stimulate deeper study and understanding. The moderator should encourage readers to contribute their thoughts. Insights of new readers can be just as interesting and valuable as those of people who have been reading *The Urantia Book* for years. Group discussion and interaction can often help overcome problems in comprehending selections from *The Urantia Book*.

The moderator should not be limited to asking questions; sometimes it is more appropriate for the moderator to summarize the discussion and recognize the contributions of others.

## Moving Along

Anyone can read *The Urantia Book* at home in private; what study group meetings offer is interesting, give-and-take discussion. Often the discussion is focused and purposeful rather than aimless or meandering. It is often wise to bring discussion to a close after a particular topic has been addressed for more than ten minutes. This keeps the discussion from digressing too far.

There is real value in deeper, reflective thinking as well as the discussion of particularly challenging statements.

Reading a section out loud sets the tone and mood of the discussion that follows: experience indicates that it is unwise to seek to "save time" by omitting the step of reading aloud. It is likewise inadvisable to attempt to "do" a specific number of sections per meeting. It is better to have a satisfying discussion of a small number of sections than to rush through many more. There is real value in deeper, reflective thinking as well as the discussion of particularly challenging statements.



## Getting Sidetracked

*Urantia Book* study groups generally focus their study on *The Urantia Book*. Short selections of related reference material sometimes contributes to a discussion, but those who wish to study some other book intensively should form their own separate group. Most groups have found that study seems most productive if each person does not feel it necessary to defend a particular viewpoint but simply offers it to the group for consideration.

If an answer or comment is obviously incorrect, a good moderator's technique is to ask the speaker how the passage read supports the view presented. (This is better and more tactful than a direct refutation.) If a question is raised that is not relevant to the subject at hand, the moderator could say that it does not fit in at that point and offer to discuss it after the end of the meeting with anyone who may be interested.

## Disruptions

Occasionally a disruptive person may try to dominate a meeting by turning the discussion toward a pet cause or by parading his or her knowledge of *The Urantia Book*. The moderator can overcome this problem by asking if someone who has not yet spoken wishes to make any comments. The moderator might also offer to meet with the person at another time to provide the time for discussion of a pet cause.

If all else fails, the host or sponsor has the responsibility to everyone else present to take the disruptive person aside privately and tactfully explain that the sharing of ideas and study will be most productive if all participants are considerate of other group members. It is important that the moderator be patient and even long-suffering; however, the host or sponsor must maintain reasonable order for the group's sake, or the disruptive person will drive many others away.

## Dissension

The meeting should cultivate a spirit of tolerance and respect for differing opinions. This can be challenging when difficult or controversial subjects are discussed. The objective study of these kinds of subjects is often enhanced if readers take time privately to broadly study the subject matter before engaging in group discussion. Especially on subjects which are highly controversial in contemporary society, it is generally easier to avoid such topics in newly formed study groups and with new readers. If dissension does arise, the moderator can remind the group that everyone is trying to serve the same Creator and that none of us has a monopoly on truth, thus giving value and perspective to differences of opinion which may arise. As a general practice, the moderator should encourage the group to look for commonalities and themes in what has been read but not try to force a consensus in interpretation.

*"...love one another even as I have loved you. And by this will all men know that you are my disciples if you thus love one another." P. 180:1.1 (p. 1944.4)*

## Spiritual Unity

The search for God is what is important; we need not always agree on the details of how we go about it. Most feel that to be consistent with the teachings, *Urantia Book* study groups should value diversity of opinion. We find spiritual unity in our mutual love of God, not in intellectual uniformity. Nothing is more important than for us to be as one spiritually.

*"...when did I teach you that you should all see alike?" P. 141:5.1 (p. 1591.6)*



## Maintaining Attendance and Building Enthusiasm

To maintain good attendance and keep morale high, it is often useful to involve everyone in meaningful group activities. Many active study groups maintain interest by participating in diverse activities, such as:

- hosting joint meetings with other study groups
- inviting outside speakers
- preparing presentations for retreats or conferences
- participating in book fairs and expos
- forming a group choir
- celebrating Jesus' birthday on August 21
- holding social events
- engaging in service as a group with such projects as library placement
- inviting traveling readers to join their groups
- visiting other groups while traveling



It is important to insure that each active member has a meaningful voice in the direction of the group's activities. The morale and commitment of marginal attendees can generally be improved if mutual encouragement and value is given to the performance of useful tasks on a voluntary basis. When regular members miss a meeting, someone might be assigned to call them and let them know they were missed. Group members seem naturally interested in calling or visiting other members who are sick or bereaved.

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## Service Ministry



Service by a study group's members can be a great aid to individual and group growth. Service projects provide a special opportunity for group planning as well as stressing unity of purposes and goals. Study groups can benefit by paying attention to service ministry. Inward-directed groups tend to wither, while outward-directed groups seem to flourish.

*"One of the most important lessons to be learned during your mortal career is teamwork." P. 28:5.14 (p. 312.1)*

One appealing service ministry for *Urantia Book* study groups is to share *The Urantia Book* with others so that they can benefit from the same liberating revelation of our Father which we have ourselves enjoyed. Another is to support the fellowship experience of new readers and readers in need. Membership growth comes from loving service contact, not wishful thinking. If a study group has few attendees, it is possible that its members have not been active in reaching out and inviting new people to attend. Not everyone who is invited will come, of course, but unless an invitation is extended, no one will ever know.

“If we expect to get the most from our association with *The Urantia Book*, and if we want to be effective at bringing new people to ‘*That which the world needs most to know...*’ P. 193:0.4 (p. 2052.4), then we must nurture and grow the community of readers in which we find ourselves.

“And the creation of community has value beyond the ambitions of evangelism and growth; building intimacy and trust serves the present members of the Urantia movement by focusing on experiences which contain the greatest survival value – human relationships.” (from “Local Urantia Communities: Seeds of a New Order of Human Society,” by Steve McIntosh)

“...we must nurture and grow the community of readers in which we find ourselves.”

Steve McIntosh



## Study Group Directory

An online Study Group Directory is maintained by *The Urantia Book* Fellowship. Once a study group is functioning on a regular basis, the host may ask to have it listed in the directory. North American study groups can be accessed at [www.urantiabook.org/study-groups-list](http://www.urantiabook.org/study-groups-list).

## Study Group Resources

*The Urantia Book* Fellowship website ([www.urantiabook.org](http://www.urantiabook.org)) has a multitude of study group resources.

- 1) One can click on “Study” on the horizontal menu for major topical studies.
- 2) One can click on “Reader Resources” for a dropdown menu, which includes a Topical Index, Readers Archive, Bible Cross-Reference, Urantia websites, and Outreach Resources.



# Community



*These Chicago area readers of the Urantia Papers gathered for this photograph during the summer of 1934. This group read the unpublished revelation each Sunday from the 1920s to the 1950s. Their legacy continues today with an expanded community of readers from all over the world.*

A service of  
***The Urantia Book Fellowship***