

August 24th, 2018

Sustainable Communities Affinity Group Meeting Report

The Sustainable Communities Affinity Group affirmed at the 2017 General Assembly called an open meeting of interested Grail Members to discuss sustainable community in the Grail and to reflect on decision-making processes in the Grail. Fourteen of us met in person and electronically in Tidings at Grailville Saturday and Sunday August 11th and 12th.

In the beginning we asked ourselves “Why did you come to this meeting?”

Some answers were:

- This is my home, this is my family and I love my family
- I made a commitment to the Grail
- To be with a group dedicated to collaborating – to have a glimmer of hope
- Things have been dreadfully wrong
- Community in the Grail is so important to me
- Loss of the experience of belonging in the Grail
- I don’t want to lose touch with people I care about
- To follow through with my commitment from the GA2017 with this affinity group

In planning for this meeting, one of the Members offered a Nancy Sylvester approach to healing and working through issues. We all agreed to commit the first morning session to the “Five Whys” Process Guide (a process with which many may be familiar). (Ref: iccdinstitute.org.)

Using this process, designed to help us go ever deeper into how we feel about an issue, the planning team suggested that we respond to the statement: “When I reflect on the Grailville land-sale process I feel . . . “

Following are some of the emotions elicited from members of the group:

Deep sorrow and grief; sadness, betrayal; frustration; anger; stymied; “ambushed,” left out, defeated; disempowered; conflicted; distraught; often hopeless, trust eroded; helpless, violated and I have not left the Grail but feel the Grail has left me.

As a result of this deep sharing we delved into the causes of these emotions and their implications. A number of issues and questions arose that we would like to share with you and from which the group chose to focus on for the remainder of the weekend.

The group prioritized three urgent concerns:

- **The split in the U.S. Grail around decision-making processes.**
- **The need for a broad-based process of discernment in decision-making.**
- **Cornwall future**

THE SPLIT IN THE US GRAIL &

NEED FOR A BROAD BASED PROCESS OF DISCERNMENT IN DECISION MAKING.

The broad ranging discussion raised the following **elements that we deem essential to a sustainable U.S. Grail Community** and where we have encountered problems or gaps in the way we operate. We used an acronym familiar at the United Nations, CART, to frame our discussion and conclusions:

C—Communication

A—Accountability

R—Representative

T—Transparency

These are considered cardinal characteristics for a viable organization or movement.

Not all of the following are exactly associated with the above CART but this framework was helpful to getting us started.

- **We recognize that there is much hurt** in Grail women today caused by what has happened internally in the Grail.
- **A need to be compassionate** and reach out to one another to bridge the differences.
- **Respect for all Members:** Respect for all Members in their abilities, their gifts and contributions. For example: In Native American “Council of Elders” the accumulated wisdom and experience of the elders of the tribe is acknowledged and respected, where the energy of the younger members is fed by the knowledge of their elders.
- **Recognize the unique authority and wisdom of the grassroots Grail Membership.**
- **Choice for a community model approach over a corporate model.**
There is a split in the U.S. Grail between a “corporate model” approach to our structure/decision-making/existence and a “community model” approach that needs to be resolved. Management must serve mission, not the other way around. Leadership’s role is also to build the community and support mission-driven work.
- **Shared common values:** recognition of the value of our Grail culture that includes spirituality and community with an integration of the arts, music, spirit, care for the earth including sustainable food production and education—the wholeness of life expressed in empowering women for systemic change.
- **While we recognize that financial sustainability and operational efficiency** is critical to all organizations, **Council seems to prioritize efficiency and finances above mission and vision.** We believe these must be in service of mission and vision. Financial solvency and operational efficiency that destroy the heart of the group will not build a sustainable community. The fiduciary responsibility needs to be balanced with mission and vision as expressed in member’s work and projects
- **There is the appearance** that Council is focused on a management role, not a leadership role which generates ideas on actualizing our mission and vision.
- **The empowerment of women is essential to a viable Grail.** Some of us feel that we have been disempowered with the Grailville land sales process.
- **We need to re-emphasize** that the US Grail is part of the International Grail and to look to that source for guidance in making some organizational decisions. (see Addendum)

- **Recognition of the earth and particularly our small part of it (the land at Grailville and Cornwall)** as sacred and how connectedness to land heals people and enriches the future for all.
- **It is of great importance to have a physical “place” to come together to gather, practice/do/live community together; to be “at home” together;** a way to express “Grail ownership” (create an ambiance of culture, ensure a conduit for action/mission), places to know ourselves as Grail; also for public visibility
- **Encourage the engagement of all members** together as ‘stakeholders’ to the fullest extent in dialogue on major decisions.
- **Rebuild trust** within our movement
- **A renewed clarity of vision and shared, agreed-upon mission** – a deep process to determine this, recognizing that there may be major divergences discovered in this process.
- **Good Communication is a necessity. There must be broad-based consultation and Face to Face Dialogue** prior to decision-making and any major decision.
- **Meetings with more of an open-ended agenda** so views and questions that are not part of a script can emerge.
- **Recognize that the listserv is not adequate** for in-depth discussion, not allowing for nuanced exchange, not everyone is included
- **Agreed upon** way for conflict resolution
- **Encourage subsidiarity** in decision-making. (See addendum)

(Subsidiarity is an organizing principle that matters ought to be handled by the smallest, lowest or least centralized competent authority. In religious leadership this means that higher superiors allow local or lower superiors to decide matters within their area of jurisdiction and do not interfere unless it is referred to them. This prevents micro-management which is demoralizing for lower officials and is a waste of energy for the higher superiors. Further: The Oxford English Dictionary defines subsidiarity as the idea that a central authority should have a subsidiary function, performing only those tasks which cannot be performed effectively at a more immediate or local level.)

- **Revisit our voting criteria**—currently there is no difference between longstanding Members and their experience/understanding of issues/wisdom, and new Members with little knowledge of the issues at hand.
- **Honoring, respecting, trusting** and supporting community-building efforts/activities within the Grail and with partners
- **Honoring diversity in cultural**, spiritual and religious expression, so as not to miss enrichment opportunities
- **We realize that the Grail has been lost or divided in some countries** and we need to look closely at our own situation and determine if this path is the one before us.
- **Governance based on a modified consensus model** (see Addendum)
- **Better define Council’s authority/role** and means for effective consultation of the Membership
- **Recognize that presently Council** is mostly although not entirely “elected” but appears to have taken on more authority than the movement originally expected.
- **We need to embrace the possibility of amending our Grail administrative structure.** Looking at for example: sociocracy, dynamic governance, the principal of subsidiarity, regional representation, including some non-Grail Members on the Council.

- **Our Bylaws need to include the opportunity for Members to initiate actions or call to referendum actions taken by the administration.** Any bylaws changes must be agreed to by a 2/3 majority of the Members.
- **We recommend that communication about finances** needs to be in more ways than formal statements of profit and loss and balance sheets or graphs and charts—for example more financial detail and use of narrative statements that provide the bases for the assumptions and projections.

CORNWALL

We discussed our feeling of urgency in the Cornwall situation and have written the ATTACHED letter to Council members and the Membership:

The attached letter regarding Cornwall was sent out separately to Council on 8/14/8 and Membership on 8/15/18. We want to call attention to it again here, as it was an urgent part of our weekend discussion. Please forgive the repetition if you have already read it.

In conclusion we must say, even though it grieves us, that we are unhappy with the state of the U.S. Grail as it is at present. In our hearts we hold close many wonderful things about the Grail, but day to day we find it harder and harder to feel those precious things in practice. Our tolerance is stretched to the breaking point. We feel that a real split in the U.S. Grail exists and we ask that it be recognized and faced. We think that the US Grail seems to be floundering with no mission or vision leadership and although we say we are being legally/fiscally responsible, our elimination of visible mission in the U.S. means that we seriously risk losing our non-profit status.

In closing we ask our Membership and Council to reflect deeply on what is expressed here and forge together a new pathway before any further votes are taken or major decisions are made. Otherwise decisions of the Council will not necessarily be representative of Grail Membership.

Respectfully and with resolve,
Sustainable Communities Affinity Group meeting, August 11-12, 2018

ADDENDUM:

From the IC Manual found on the US Grail website in the Member dashboard in International Documents under More Grail Documents. These are important principles to be included in Grail exercise of authority – beyond the specific situations noted.

IC Manual – pg 53 -- Finance section: **3 Subsidiarity** By this we mean that we should first look for resources in our own situation. Only when this is not possible or feasible for Grail development, financial assistance should be asked from outside. It also means that it is the responsibility of national or international leaders to support Grail activities and to provide assistance when resources needed for the implementation of commonly agreed upon goals are lacking.

IC Manual – pp 43-44 – Intl Council section: (As described for use at IC meetings, general principles can be derived for other settings.)

4.4 Consensus

4.4.1 Consensus Defined

4.4.1.1 CONSENSUS is different from regular “democracy” because it avoids the situation of a large minority that is unhappy with the majority decision.

4.4.2 The Quaker Way

4.4.2.1 Maybe in some Grail countries, a type of consensus is already the usual way of making decisions in their culture. The following ideas are inspired by the methods of the Society of Friends (Quakers).

4.4.2.2 This approach works when all members of a group follow certain “rules.”

4.4.2.2.1 See each meeting as part of our work to build the Kingdom, an opportunity to deal with one another in a spirit of Christian love, respect and sisterhood.

4.4.2.2.2 Begin with a prayerful silence, calling on the Holy Spirit to be with us.

4.4.2.2.3 Stop for prayerful silence when conflicts arise. 4.4.2.2.4 Come to the meeting with an active, seeking attitude, not with minds already set upon a particular outcome. On the other hand, no one should be expected to hide a strong conviction or be silent for the sake of easy agreement. We can all trust that the Spirit is working among us.

4.4.2.2.5 When an issue has been discussed, someone (or a team) is asked to put into words “the sense of the group” on that issue.

4.4.2.2.6 If this wording is not satisfactory to all members, a new version is made.

4.4.2.2.7 If someone still can’t accept this new expression of the ideas, she says so and either:

- agrees to go along with the group for the sake of harmony; or,
- announces her disagreement and then peacefully withdraws from the decision making process; or,
- explains that her conscience won’t allow her to agree with the group.

4.4.2.2.8 If this happens, the facilitator declares that the matter will be left open until a later time. In between, the people will pray and discuss together.

4.4.2.2.9 Nothing is settled until all can be at peace about the decision. Grail International Council Manual 2015 44 05/20/2015 Rev

4.4.2.2.10 The Third Way: When a group cannot peacefully decide between two choices, people look for a “Third Way.” Quakers believe there is always another solution available to those who trust in the Spirit. Often this solution is better than the first idea that everyone was struggling with.

