

## 2008 GRAIL GENERAL ASSEMBLY

**IT'S A GOOD MOMENT IN TIME!**



*Tree Planting Ceremony, Closing Ritual*

JUNE 23 TO 29, 2008  
GRAILVILLE  
LOVELAND, OHIO

# 2008 GRAIL GENERAL ASSEMBLY

## IT'S A GOOD MOMENT IN TIME!

COUNCIL MEMBERS: Judith Blackburn, Meg Bruck, Theresa Czerwinski, Bonnie Hendricks, Cherie Holman, Marian Schwab, Maureen Tate, Beth Wasmer

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GA REPORT: Carol White, writer; Bonnie Hendricks, editor

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**Please! Do not read further until you've read this...**

### Introductory Note

GA 2008 was unlike any previous GA. (Well, of course, you may be saying, every one is unique and different from the others before it, just like we are.) But no, this one was really truly different!

In the past, though they may also have served other purposes (such as community-building) our General Assemblies existed primarily to **make decisions** for the Grail in the United States. Preparations involved the submission and preliminary discussion of proposals. The GA itself had to examine, consider, negotiate about and finally vote on those proposals. And at the end of a GA, we had a new set of plans to be carried out in the following years.

But this one was different in several ways:

1. The only “proposal” we had was a “Scenario”. (Dictionary definition: *scenario* = “an imagined sequence of future events”.) Our own was arrived at over many months of work, first by the National Grail Council, then by the membership at large responding to five possible scenarios, and finally by the Council’s reworking of all those responses into a single version, to be further considered and refined at the GA.
2. The emphasis at this GA was not on business-like discussion, possible counter-proposals, negotiation of compromises, etc. This time our main focus was on the *process* of looking clear-eyed at our current realities, considering our vision and mission in light of our limitations as individuals and as a group, and then further refining the scenario for a realistic future.
3. Finally, this GA did not vote on a definitive plan, but gave detailed recommendations back to the Council, entrusting them with the task of formulating the scenario we will all vote on in the fall, and (hopefully) build upon in the coming years.

A report of a GA which is primarily concerned with political interactions and decision-making outcomes is necessarily as objective and factual as possible. But, I asked myself (as I read through pages and pages – and pages and pages – of notes, transcriptions of flipcharts and so on) how do you present a report of a complex and extended *process*?

It so happens that I am beginning to write on the opening day of the Olympics, and it occurred to me that, for the next two weeks, reporters from all over the world will be doing their utmost to describe not only the results of the competitions, but also indeed the “process” – the atmosphere, the mood, the sights and sounds, the interactions of people – everything that can be put into words about what is *happening* in Beijing. So I’ve decided to try to be a “reporter” of our GA in the journalistic sense, to tell you not only *what* happened but *how* it happened.

I hope that those who were there will recognize this story, and I hope that those who were not will be able to get a sense of what went on. A crowd of brave women put heart and soul into this process, and the story deserves to be told.

— Carol White

## **Sunday 6/22/08 and Monday 6/23/08**

Arrivals, arrivals, arrivals – from all directions, by planes, buses and cars. Greetings and immediate accommodation by the wonderfully efficient Grailville staff and back-stagers. All pre-registered special needs met – a real Operation Clockwork.

### **Monday 6/23/08, from 4.30 PM**

The reception and supper have a bittersweet tinge: the great sweetness, of course, is the meeting of old friends – embracing, sharing news, promising more sharing over meals and in the Bistro. The trace of sadness hangs around a fact that will become a major concern of this GA: there are so very few of us here who are under age 50....

At 7.30 we gather in the Oratory for the official Opening of the GA. Fran Frazier presides over the ritual. The choir sings and Fran begins by lighting candles, one honoring the present moment, one the past, and one the future, with a prayer asking blessing on all these times in our Grail life.

The National Leadership Team (Bonnie Hendricks, Maureen Tate, Beth Wasmer) offer introductory comments – how we got to this moment, the work we'll be doing together during the Assembly, and where we hope to be by Sunday morning. Among the key points are:

A look back – the U.S. Grail has at various times established committees, consultations, co-directorships, directorships, Connection Teams, Link Teams, Quads, task forces, networks and other imaginative configurations. We did our utmost with what we had at each period, and it's good to affirm all that has been because we traveled the best roads we could find to get to this place. Of course, while the Grail was moving and changing, the world was moving and changing around us.

Now it's time again to look realistically and responsibly at our leadership resources and plan a way to go forward, making honest and well-informed decisions to enable us to continue the U.S. Grail. The present Council has experienced a confusing tangle of responsibilities, rights, restrictions and accountabilities. And we believe we have looked harder at our realities than perhaps ever has been done before.

The GA Packet represents the Council's best thinking – including what we have heard from members – regarding what the Grail needs to go further at this time. We ask you to join us now in this hard work as we need our community wisdom to help us see the way forward. The work of the GA is not about implementation and details – that will come later. For now we need to be looking from about 2,000 feet up, seeing the *big picture*.

We will delve into difficult questions: What will help the Grail to thrive and grow? How do we streamline decision-making? What will energize us? attract women of all ages? attract younger women? What is the role of members in decision-making? Can the structure be redefined to broaden the pool of women able to provide leadership? Is there sufficient commitment to make a financial investment in our future? How should we prioritize resources of both money and people? And deeper yet: What is our work? What is the Grail and whom does it serve?

Maureen Gallagher assisted us in designing a process for our scenario work and she will help directly with facilitation this week. The Scenario is not a constitution or even a formal document; it simply outlines the framework, the concepts that we want to focus on this week. And our great hope is that by the end of the week we will have broad agreement on directions

for the future and what it will take to get there, that we will know there is a commitment – a **realistic** commitment – to grow the Grail.

A libation ceremony reminds us of “Grail women and thousands of unnamed women” who have lived heroically, suffered greatly, given life and healing to the world. After each group is named, water is poured into a Grail cup. Finally the cup is passed around and all drink from it.

Fran offers a reflection on the tree as our metaphor for the Grail this week and directs our attention to the small living tree that stands before the altar.

**Why were there clowns?**

At this point in the ritual, the choir sings this version of “Send in the Clowns”:

Isn't it fine  
That we're all here?  
Grail sisters gathered around  
From far and near –  
Despite ups and downs.

We're going to work,  
Our future to set,  
Praying and struggling and  
searching  
So we won't regret  
Our shared ups and downs.

Do you have hopes?  
Do you have fears?  
Must be we're human to feel  
There might be tears.  
We need some clowns.

There is our tree.  
Our tree we must grow.  
It needs our faith and our love  
But laughter also.  
Where are the clowns?  
There ought to be clowns.  
Well, maybe they're here.

And lo and behold, two clowns appear! A rather bouncy male clown and a very tall and girly female companion come to the front of the Oratory and notice the beautiful small tree in front of the altar. They are not, however, at all impressed by its size, and mime their strong opinion that it needs to grow much higher if it is to signify our Grail. But how to help it grow?

Ah...fertilizer! All the work of the past: the women who did the work, the dreams and fulfillments of dreams, the struggles and trials – all of it! The clowns offer orange and brown ribbons to all present, to hold while they speak in small circles of particular situations, people and ideas they cherish. The clowns then collect the ribbons and pile them around the roots of the tree, acknowledging that the new growth comes from all that has gone before.

And on to the present: what is going on now that is growing our Grail tree? This time the ribbons are white, and the groups invest them with recognition of all that is happening, large and small. The clowns collect them solemnly and weave them into a chain which is placed around the tree.

The future: green ribbons for our hopes and dreams. Two chains of ribbons are tied to the tree and then spread out in all directions – around the altar, down the floor – who knows where our future will lead? The clowns drift away, their work done, as the ceremony continues.

Our opening ritual closes with an adapted version of Miriam Therese Winter's *Psalm of Bringing to Birth*. It is a litany of our commitment to “the Holy among us who heralds liberation, human liberation, women's liberation, and has taken flesh among us and in Spirit dwells within us”.

**Tuesday 6/24/08**

As note-taker Mary Gindhart recorded: "Session opened on time", which seemed like a good start to the week. Another good start was the "Soul Moment" which preceded all business every day. This first one consists of a rendition by Terry Marshall and Fran Martin of the "Rule of Love", taken from all major religious traditions.



Next we agree (quite speedily) on Ground Rules/Norms for our interactions throughout the meetings. Maureen Tate introduces our central symbol for the week: a towering, inventively magnificent tree created from heavy cardboard by Elizabeth (Lebe) Robinson. Here, Maureen tells us, is an image of our Grail. The essential roots that support this Grail tree are Membership, Decision-making and Finances. The sap that courses through it, feeding every part, is our Spirituality. And though it's bare now, the leaves that we will add to it through these days will represent all that we are already doing, and all that we hope to do in the future.

### ***Appreciating Grail Transformative Work***

Our first task is a pleasant one: sit in small groups and consider the ways in which each of us is living out our Grail mission now. After this exchange, and brief reporting to the large group, we all take some colored leaves, write a few words signifying these activities, then tape them on the Grail tree.

The appreciation doesn't stop there, though. We go on to articulate what inspires us in the Grail's transformative work in the world and what makes each of us proud to be a Grail member. Finally we are asked to think of three wishes we have for the future of our Grail. These we also write on leaves and tape onto our tree, which begins to look quite lively.

### ***Appreciating Grail Centers***

Having received written input from the Bronx, Cornwall and Grailville centers in our packets when we arrived<sup>1</sup>, we are divided into three groups to meet with center staff members. We hear more about the work they are doing and can ask any questions we have. There are times to "change partners", so each participant can hear from all three centers. After this process, we are asked what we have heard that made us feel proud of our centers, and those points, too, wind up as leaves on the tree.



In general, the news is good – perhaps better than some had expected. Exciting projects are developing, finances aren't too bad, some new people are getting involved through the centers. Again, though, there is the bittersweet note: center staff is thin on the ground and is often badly over-stretched. Young women are seldom free to take on large center responsibilities, and so on. Conclusion: we do have some laurels, but we can't rest on them....

### ***Forming Spiritual Practice Groups***

These were highly valued in the National Meeting of 2007 and the same basic model is used: find companions whose regular spiritual practice is similar to your own (i.e., don't use this as a time to sample a method that is new to you), meet with them each day and share in whatever ways are appropriate to your practice. The groups from last year are named and briefly described; a couple of new possibilities are added, and sign-up sheets are posted. No one is

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<sup>1</sup> The Q&As prepared by the Centers are included in Appendix C

obliged to continue in the same group as last year (many of us have more than one practice) and any group with at least three members is considered viable. We *are* asked to stay with the same group for the duration of the GA. These are the groups that formed:

Journaling  
Psalms & other Scripture  
Zen meditation  
Centering prayer  
The Eucharist

Walking the Land  
“The Power of Now” via Eckhart Tolle  
Other silent meditation  
“No *particular* practice”  
Music/Singing

### ***Realities and Change***

Maureen Gallagher leads an evening session with a PowerPoint presentation on “Prophetic Change”. This is extremely rich, full of both wisdom and practical advice about dealing with change, personally and organizationally. It’s a pity we can’t put it all in this report but that is not feasible, so here are a few of the most important points:

- Change is the *norm* in our world.
- It is a process rather than an event.
- The transition process involves ENDINGS, IN-BETWEEN SPACE, and NEW BEGINNINGS.
- Endings can cause feelings of loss and grief which need to be acknowledged.
- The in-between space can feel like a “wilderness zone”, full of possibilities but also of confusion, insecurity, danger.
- Moving *toward* new beginnings must start with a thorough and realistic assessment of the realities and limitations of the present.
- Moving *into* new beginnings requires
  - working from the group’s basic spirituality and values;
  - supporting one another in the process;
  - communicating effectively both within the group and toward the wider world;
  - maintaining an attitude at once optimistic and realistic.

**Maureen Gallagher** – how to describe our fabulous facilitator? Of course she has masses of credentials and an abundance of experience; of course she’s smart and intuitive and hard-working (typing up notes in the evenings when the rest of us were kicking back in the Bistro). But she also had a deep understanding of how to work with us as a group. She had already been laboring for some months with the Council on development of the Scenario, which gave her a running start. And she brought to us warmth, patience, compassion, flexibility, and especially humor – all of which were also a living example of how we could deal with one another....  
P.S.: She also came with a seemingly endless supply of multi-colored Post-It Notes!

We reflect on “endings” in the life of the U.S. Grail as well as new beginnings already in existence. We discuss the feelings that we experience and especially the fact that, in any group, there is a spectrum of attitudes toward change, ranging from those who rush to embrace it (“pioneers”) to those who much prefer continuity and stability (“settlers”) with many variations in between.

We list for ourselves the things we really do not want to see changed in our Grail, then take a sobering look at our present realities and limitations. Maureen reminds us, however, that optimism and realism are not opposites, and that positive energy tends to attract positive responses. She further points out that when groups are in transition, many members feel obliged to work harder and harder. Instead, we are challenged to “Work *smarter*, not harder.”

Then, pondering all these things in our hearts, we retire – either to bed or to the Bistro, each according to her needs.

## Wednesday 6/25/08

For the Soul Moment, Fran Martin sings the Carolyn McDade song “I will tell you the beauty of my country”, which helps us remember that our GA does not exist in a bubble but is taking place in the particular context of the real world, as it is here and now....

Bonnie Hendricks of the NLT reminds us that we are about to start working on the Scenario for the future of the Grail in the U.S. **[Note: the entire Scenario document was sent to all Grail members in the last pre-GA packet. Relevant sections of it are also reproduced as Appendix A in this report. References here, e.g., to choices between two options, are therefore brief.]**

Maureen Gallagher draws our attention to the Grail tree before us, which, incidentally, is an oak that is growing colorful maple leaves! She reminds us of the many things we wrote the day before under the heading of “what we want to keep for the future” even in this period of change:

justice	spirituality	membership participation
Grail Centers	local solidarity	work for peace
arts and music	sustainability	Holy Week at Grailville
sense of community	hospitality	stories from the past....

And then it is on to the Scenario. Maureen Gallagher facilitates the process and reminds us that the document we received was a distillation of the original work done by the Council, combined with the responses from the membership. Now, when many of us are face-to-face, we need to further refine the Scenario.

### ***Scenario Description***

Throughout the week we were able to meet seven women who are exploring Grail membership and who came to the GA as observers. Several of them had written self-introductions for the participants' packets, and all of them turned out to be very interesting people! (Here's hoping they will explore themselves all the way into the Grail.)

This introductory portion of the Scenario establishes the context of the Grail in the U.S. at this moment in time, upon which the Scenario has been constructed. We break into groups of four or five and consider the Scenario Description with these questions in mind:

1. What opportunities does the Scenario present?
2. What are you most proud of? What is most important or valuable to you in it?
3. What is missing?

Significant points from each group are recorded on paper, to be collated and reconsidered later in the week. Meanwhile, a few “headlines” are shared in the plenary, such as:

- Good balance between support and responsibility
- Re-energizes the movement by connecting individuals to collectives
- Affirms work of centers and groups
- The Grail as an international movement needs to be more explicit throughout the scenario

### ***Membership***

A primary concern in this area is our demographic which lacks a new generation of women, particularly younger women, able to devote sufficient time and energy to the movement to keep it moving.

We reshuffle, forming new small groups, this time considering further questions:

1. What opportunities does the Membership framework present?
2. What surprised or challenged you?

3. Given our current situation, should we put our energies into Option One or Option Two? [Option One: Membership grows as the result of member-initiated efforts through Groups/Centers; Option Two: Movement-Building Campaign, including full-time National Outreach Coordinator] Or is there a third option?
4. How would either option affect you? How much time and energy are you willing to put into either option or a third one? Note the benchmarks for each option.

Again written records are collected and more leaves are added to the tree while in the large group “headline” feedback is shared, such as:

- All members are called to full responsibility.
- We need a national person to help local groups.
- Reconsider the cumbersome process for Grail membership; perhaps another level of membership?



An encouraging sign that we had done our homework and came well prepared is that all this takes place in the first half of the morning session! After a break, we come back for more....

### ***Governance, Part One: The Council***

The primary issue in this area is the need to clearly separate the roles of those who are legally and financially responsible for setting policy, and those who implement policy. It is not advisable for Trustees of charitable organizations to be paid, whereas the staff who carry out implementation work need to be properly remunerated. Our current situation does not meet either of these standards. Moreover, the Grail in the U.S. has become increasingly complex over the years, requiring an on-going body of people who are thoroughly informed and able to make timely and responsible decisions.

The same work method is used, with similar questions: What was most meaningful to you in the proposed Governance framework? What was surprising or challenging for you? Given our present circumstances, what is your thinking about Council membership and Council elections?

A sampling of the headlines arising from small group discussion:

- Separate Council and staff roles.
- We need a specific manageable process for regional input into Council.
- We need clarification on the identity of regions, new Council roles, how NLT is formed, role of (the proposed) hired National director.
- We got a better understanding of governance issues through the discussion.
- How do we train people for new leadership roles?

### ***[Governance, Part Two: The GA]***

We are running short of time, so this topic is introduced, people are referred to the appropriate sections of the Scenario, and discussion is postponed until Thursday morning. At which point we are off to a well-earned lunch....

### ***Exploring Spiritual Values, Part One***

Mary Gene Devlin begins the afternoon session by lighting a candle in a small Grail-shaped candle holder which has been present at spirituality meetings since 2006. The group spontaneously sings a verse of “Rise up, O flame!” in response.

Mary Gene reminds us that spirituality has been identified as the “sap” that gives life to our whole movement, but that we have important questions in this realm. What *is* our Grail spirituality? How are we individually different and what do we have in common? She illustrates her points by telling of her friendship with a Kenyan Grail member, whom she had met at the International Spirituality Forum last year. Despite their great differences in age and culture, they

recognized that they shared “that Grail thing”. They have kept up a regular correspondence and become very close, crossing boundaries of time, space, politics and indeed spirituality – “her spiritual practices and mine differ, but we share something basic. We are not starting at square one – we have a connection – that mysterious something that binds us.” Though the terrible turmoil that occurred in Kenya recently has receded, Mary Gene asks all of us to pause for a moment of silence to connect supportively with the Kenyan Grail in whatever way we choose.

This is, of course, a lived experience for all of us of “that Grail thing” that we find so difficult to articulate, as we discovered in last year’s National Meeting, but Mary Gene urges us to work again at the articulation as we move through the GA.

Simonetta Romano leads us in a right-brain embodied visualization exercise to help us begin to look at our spiritual values from another angle. In small groups we share about our guided fantasy, and then those who were present at the National Meeting last year, which was devoted to issues of Grail spirituality in the U.S., are asked to tell the plenary group what they find most memorable about it now. Those who were not there are encouraged to ask questions.

A very few of the many memories named:

- The sense that all of us were praying whether we call it that or not
- Feeling of oneness in the spiritual practice group
- Rosa Ruiz’s statement that we need great honesty to create an authentic ritual; we “need to get naked with each other”
- Intense listening was a special experience – it brought a sense of connectedness, and sometimes we heard things we’d never heard before

Simonetta asks us to form “not-so-small” groups in which we can (after time for reflection) share our personal answers to the following questions. No discussion is called for, only intensive, attentive listening to one another. The questions for self-reflection:

1. What is my understanding of the word “spiritual”? What does the word mean to me?
2. What are the three most important spiritual values that I try to live by?
3. What are the sources of these values?
4. How are my spiritual values manifested in my life?
5. How are they manifested in my Grail life?

A few people comment on points that have struck them, including: some unexpected similarities; a sense that at the deepest level “sources” appear similar; satisfaction with this process.

### ***Spiritual Practice Groups***

According to the plan set out on Tuesday, the ten clusters that had formed gather in their appointed places and begin their time together at 4.30. Each group is free to set their own agenda and to stay together as long as they like until supper.

### ***Open Space***

This evening and the next one have been left free for anyone who wanted to propose a gathering around any topic that was not part of the general program. As these were informal gatherings no notes were taken for this report. The groups meeting on Wednesday:

- “Hearing from the Elders/Pioneers”
- “The Heartland Ecovillage”
- “Transformative Leadership Training”
- “The Obama Campaign”

Thursday 6/26/08

**Why were there clowns?**

Mary Gene Devlin leads the Soul Moment to open this day. The glow of the beginning sessions has given way to our weighty questions – governance, membership, finances. She steps to the mic and starts with due seriousness, but is immediately interrupted by a sad clown, trudging wearily in, bending under the burden of a heavy pack. Approaching the front he lowers it onto a chair, opens it and begins drawing out a series of signs. Each bears a single word followed by a big question mark. The first is “Scenario?” then “Governance?” then Membership?”

On and on it goes: every sign bearing one of the key words of the GA, each one shown to the leader and to the whole group, then tossed onto the floor with an air of hopelessness – and with each sign the clown’s face contorts further in pain and frustration. He takes out another: Fund Raising?... grimaces and hands it to the most elderly person in the first row. Then we get Benchmarks? – this one he takes over and pounds fiercely onto a bench. The clown becomes increasingly agitated as he pulls out the seemingly endless stream of issues we are dealing with. Finally, shoulders drooping, he begins to weep.

At this point Mary Gene approaches him and says, “Now, now, don’t worry. I can help you.” She takes his hand and leads him to a seat in the front row. “Now you just rest there, and I’ll read you something that will give you what you need,” she says to him (and, of course, to the assembled group). Then she reads from Rilke:

“...have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves.... Don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. And then in the future you may gradually, without noticing it, live your way into the answers.”

***Governance Part two: The GA, Continued***

Here the main issue is the dwindling participation in GAs. How can the GA remain our primary vision-setting, broad policy-making body if participation is not representative of the whole?

Questions similar to those used with the previous Scenario sections are discussed in small groups and reported back. In this case there is far less broad agreement, more desire for clarification, and more alternatives or modifications to the GA Options suggested by individuals.

The length of a GA presents a conundrum: long assemblies allow time for bonding, community-building, and sufficient time for discussion of issues – yet for younger women with work and/or family responsibilities, giving a whole week to this process can be very problematic. The business-like long-weekend model, with ample preparation beforehand, is more feasible time-wise, but some question coming from a distance for such a short time, particularly with rising travel costs. One area of general agreement is that extensive preparation makes for a better GA, and that this one has been a model for the future in that respect.

Besides the time factor, more work is needed on:

- Greater clarification of the roles of the Council and the membership regarding decision making: Members decide on broad issues of mission, vision and general direction, but how much autonomy does the Council have on specifics?
- Clarity is needed on the role of regions in both preparation and representation in a GA.

There is a general tendency to agree with the provision of Option One that, while discussion and interaction on issues takes place at a GA, voting should be done by mail afterwards, involving the entire membership.

## ***Finances***

The painstaking preparation and extremely thorough presentation of this difficult subject tends in itself to raise confidence in the Finance Team! Those who earn the kudos are Bonnie Hendricks (NLT Finance person), Theresa Czerwinski and Cherie Holman, co-Treasurers, and Mary Farrell, former Treasurer and current member of the Finance Team.

We view a PowerPoint show that is a True or False game for us: a series of questions with multiple choice answers which alert us, in a gentle and entertaining way, to the number of misconceptions many of us have held about the overall U.S. Grail financial picture. Perhaps the most striking illusion shared by many is that the vast majority of Grail members make regular financial contributions to the on-going expenses – this is *not* the case at the moment.

After this consciousness-raising experience, we are asked to write our questions on index cards. These are collected and read during a stretch break, and then the panel of Bonnie, Theresa, Cherie and Mary provide detailed and clear answers to a wide variety of them. This was a real demonstration of transparency. (Indeed, they add that any Grail member may request a copy of the 990 [The Grail's annual tax return] which is filed with the IRS. "We want you to know," they say!)

Small groups then discuss the financial issues raised in the Scenario. Detailed intricacies are considered (e.g., financial relationships between centers and national, methods of fund-raising, just compensation for staff, etc.). Some headlines that emerge from the small groups are:

- This is an area that definitely needs attention if we are to continue our mission.
- The "bare bones" option is not attractive to most; we ultimately want growth.
- There has been improvement over past situations but we need to do more.
- We should remember the motto "Work smarter, not harder".



## ***Emerging Issues, Q&A***

This afternoon session begins with Maureen Gallagher asking a series of questions to those currently serving on the Council. Their responses are fascinating but, in the interest of brevity, what follows is an attempt to summarize the most significant points in their answers.

1. *You have worked hard to prepare for the GA. What has given you joy and energy?*

A general feeling of support from the membership, both before and during the GA... The smooth way we are working together here – not adversarial... A sense that new energy is rising.

2. *What are assumptions that need to be tested regarding the current role of the Council?*

Some people think we have our own agenda, but we are more concerned about what is coming up from the grass roots... The belief that we have all the necessary competencies – sometimes we don't!... Administrative work may look uninspiring, but it is necessary.... Some of us who are regarded as "young people" aren't all that young!

3. *How do you make decisions? What kinds are there? How do you involve members?*

The biggest challenge is figuring out who are the right people to consult when making

decisions. We are occasionally accused of making “top-down” decisions but in fact we are very wary of this. Some decisions require consultation with the whole membership, some with center directors, some with specialists/experts in certain fields. We often spend a lot of time just trying to discern who to consult and how much weight to give to various opinions... We don’t always agree with each other, either.

4. *If you could change one thing to make your job easier and to give you energy to be a Council – what would it be?*

**Separate governance and staff (implementation) work!**

When these roles are all mixed together, lines of accountability are blurred and the workload can become unmanageable, making it extremely difficult to find members who can or will take on such tasks... The Grail also suffers when Council members are so busy with their administrative/executive jobs that they haven’t enough time to do the thinking, conferring and research that policy work requires.

5. *What is your greatest hope that will result from this GA?*

The biggest hope of the Council members, expressed in various ways, seems to be that the whole membership will become more energized via the new Scenario: that *everyone* will feel the call of our mission, feel personally called to contribute whatever she can, be that financially, organizationally, inspirationally.

Maureen Gallagher closes this Q&A session by saying she has found these women a wonderful group to work with, especially as they were able to disagree with each other respectfully, and came to better decisions because they worked through their disagreements. This is followed by an enthusiastic standing ovation for the Council.

***Emerging Issues, Work Groups***

Color-coded summaries of the small group feedback on each Scenario section are handed out. These are lengthy, containing whole collections of comments and issues raised around each major subject, to wit:

- Scenario Description
- Membership
- Governance: Council
- Governance: GA
- Finances

Maureen Gallagher asks us to choose a small group based on the area about which we feel most passionate and study the data carefully as a group. Keeping in mind the question “What is best for our Grail?” look for trends in the feedback. (An example of such a trend might be that many people feel strongly that “all Council members should be Grail members”.) After each group has reviewed all its material, offer your best thinking to the Council. This should be written, so that tomorrow we will be able to affirm it (or not!) as the GA.

After the work groups we have a bit of “Catch your breath” time until supper. (For many, it is a time to either catch up on an old friend’s life, or simply to catch a nap....)

***Open Space***

Thursday evening Open Spaces:

- “Southern Africa”
- “International Grail”
- “Africa Project”
- “Economic Justice”

## Friday 6/27/08

Emily Thomas leads our Soul Moment, asking us first to draw a spiral, a bit like a labyrinth, or a snail shell. Then she reads Marge Piercy's poem "The Spring Offensive of the Snail", which ends with

... for some time we might contemplate  
...the snail who always remembers  
that wherever you find yourself eating  
is home, the center  
where you must make your love,  
and wherever you wake up  
is here, the right place to be  
where we start again.

Emily then asks us to do a finger labyrinth from our drawings, and to remember throughout the day that "We are here, the right place to be."

### *Scenario Conclusions*

This Scenario process began, as Maureen Gallagher reminds us, with "the hard-working Council seeking clarity and support to move the mission of the Grail forward", which led to scenario-building, and membership feedback on those first five scenarios. All of this was distilled into the Scenario we have been working with this week, and now we are at the point of offering our best thinking on the Scenario and on what our next steps as a movement should be.

After the GA the Council will refine the Scenario, based on these GA recommendations. Meanwhile, GA participants will communicate as much as possible (hopefully with the help of this report) to those not present of how we worked and the conclusions we came to together. Finally, the Council will distribute the "Best Thinking Scenario" to members for a formal vote.

Our work method: Each person receives three cards, a green, a yellow and a red. One person reports from each of the Thursday work groups (Scenario Description, Membership, Governance: Council, Governance: GA) and after each report Maureen Gallagher asks us if we can affirm that small group's report, taking their advice into consideration. Those who affirm raise green cards, those with reservations raise yellow ones, and those opposed red ones. Those with reservations (no red cards are raised) are given an opportunity to speak and hand in a written statement of their concerns; anyone who wants to personally discuss her point can put her name on the card and this will be followed up by the Council.

All the Scenario points + advice are affirmed, though some are carried with a considerable number of reservations. **[Note: This material is printed beneath each relevant section of the original Scenario, in Appendix A.]**

At this point Maureen Gallagher takes her leave of us, with many warm words of praise for the work we have done and the way we have done it. The Council members gather round to express our thanks to her; Beth gives Maureen an alabaster Grail cup, filled with greenery, "because we've been working on leaves, not flowers. You'll have to come back to see the flowers!" Then Mary Kay Louchart leads the community in singing a blessing song to Maureen.



*Maureen Gallagher with the Council*

## ***Exploring Spiritual Values, Part Two***

In the afternoon we are asked first to distill our individual spiritual values, identified on Wednesday, into a list that expresses at least a rough consensus of the values in this *group*. These are recorded on a newsprint sheet. Then we are to choose one person who will become a “composite” of the values expressed in our group. She needs to “embody” all the values on that paper, and that means she has to have a personality, a name, etc., to be a believable person. Each of these “value persons” then will part in a panel discussion on the hypothetical subject of whether or not a week-long Wicca festival can take place at Grailville.

Simonetta introduces the role-play by reminding us that the meeting is going to unfold before our eyes – there has been no rehearsal! As an audience, we are asked to be quiet and observant of body language as well as what is said.

After the panel discussion (which was quite serious but sometimes also hilarious) we are asked to say what we have observed about both the content and the interaction among the panelists: what spiritual values were expressed there? Here is a sampling from the many responses:

- Sensitivity and kindness
- Openness to diversity
- Respect for the past
- Solidarity with women
- Listening to each other with a readiness to change views
- Commitment to social justice
- Recognition of our ignorance about the group in question
- Identified an earth-based spirituality the Grail can share with Wiccans
- Perhaps so enthusiastic that they failed to get enough information?
- Failure to consider reactions of Loveland people – is that inclusive?
- Being inclusive to some almost inevitably means being exclusive to others!
- What are the positive/negative attributes of renting to a group that we don’t actually want to be part of?
- Responsible financial concerns

Simonetta ends asking each character to tell us what spiritual values she was representing. The lists are posted on the trunk of our tree so we can, as Simonetta puts it, “all be proud of them”.

The early evening offers an informal (and optional) group sing-along in the Caravansary, which is enjoyed by many.

## **Saturday 6/28/08**

Judith Blackburn leads the Soul Moment by reading pieces by Anne Hope and Caresse Cranwell, from *The Grail in the 21st Century*.

## ***Exploring Spiritual Values + Input to International Council Meeting***

The purpose of this session is to gather reflections from the Spiritual Practice Groups and share them with the whole to give everyone a picture of what happened in the individual groups. This information will be brought to the International Council meeting in the Netherlands in the fall.

Four questions are given to the Spiritual Practice groups to consider:

1. What do you do in your spiritual practice group?
2. What are you looking for in following this practice?
3. How does this practice help you with living the life you want to live?
4. How does this practice fuel your Grail work?

All of the groups express satisfaction with their experience together and give brief commentaries. However, these pale in comparison to their very interesting detailed answers. It does not seem suitable to attempt to summarize these, so **see Appendix D** to get the full story.

The next question for the plenary group is: *Can we identify the most important spiritual values present in THIS assembled group at this moment in time?* Among the replies are:

- Love and Empathy
- Search for the Divine in our lives
- Presence of God as creative energy in all of us and creation
- Seeking grounding
- Being in the now, attuned to the presence of the holy in the moment
- In addition to respect/reverence/love for each other, reverence for all people and all the differences, ways, thoughts, ideas
- Justice as a spiritual value – relationships with ourselves and others
- Drawing on that energy/power of practices to take action in world
- Respect involves acceptance and dealing with each other in both productive and unproductive (fallow) phases
- Desire to live a life centered in the holy
- Value of community: Doing/creating things together; being together

We are asked to identify contradictions, issues that seem to get in each other's way rather than enriching us. Points are raised and identified as needing on-going work in the future in the U.S.:

- Rituals: Some feel a strong need for a set of rituals which can be repeated and in which everyone can feel comfortable. This would strengthen our bonds and show a clearer identity to the world. Others say we should rejoice in the variety of rituals our various practices make available to us, and that unity in diversity is a key to our identity.
- We need to keep working with our diversity, experiencing it until we become used to it. We need to find ways to *articulate* how this works for us.
- When we shared our spiritual practices in our practice groups, they were calming and supportive. How much do we need common rituals, and how much do we need to strengthen the various practices we already share?
- Interreligious dialogue is important – the singing of the Rule of Love reminds us of the common essence of all the great religions.
- Many of us practice various forms of meditation and the differences of style become unimportant. The Wisdom Texts also take you beyond where you are, and so do many Eastern texts.
- Language can become confusing when “short hand” from a particular religious culture is used. Example: What do the “St. Vincent de Paul Society” and “Matthew 25” mean to those outside their particular traditional context? Each tradition has its own references which are not universally understood.
- The *sources* of our spiritual values may seem contradictory among us: Are we motivated by Jesus Christ? by a living spiritual teacher? by a direct experience of the Divine in the universe? And how much does it matter if our sources are different as long as the values are the same?

- We are committed to transform the world. We need to become a *movement* which is a visible presence, working with other movements for change.
- How can we describe the *corporate entity* of the Grail in the U.S.?
- What keeps me in the Grail is *community*. Being in this community is what holds us together.
- Why is our country's situation of diversity problematic in connection with the international Grail?
- Where do our Christian (Catholic) origins belong in our documents?
- Some who have remained Catholics have felt uncomfortable in the U.S. Grail for many years, but now feel much better.
- The Metanoia Program – can this help us get a Grail with the passion, etc., of our early Grail?
- One person said: “We were diverse even when we were all Catholic – sometimes we make too much of this issue!”

The above will be communicated to the International Council, to give a picture of our reality here. And after this heroic morning's toil, we've worked up a good appetite for lunch....

***Next Steps: Implications of Scenario Process***

This afternoon session is optional – open to all who want to look in more detail at a particular issue raised during the week. But everyone is invited to come at 2:00 because a “special guest” will be there.

**Why were there clowns?**

- The special guest is Froggie, our most venerable Grail clown. She and her companions first appeared among us during the GA of 1975 (!) and she has served us well through many troubled times.
- She is extremely talkative, but hand-puppet clowns have that freedom. She and her friends observe the goings-on from the Grailville pond and comment upon them from their own very down-to-earth point of view. One of the answers to the Why of clowns is exactly what Froggie & Co. have so often done: they talk about issues that are causing tension or anxiety in the group, and the frog's-eye-view not only makes us laugh but also gives us another perspective on whatever we're wrestling with.
- Of course we all take the Grail seriously, but Froggie inevitably helps us not to take *ourselves* too seriously.



Judith Blackburn introduces the afternoon work session, asking people to group themselves around “unfinished issues” of their own choosing. The Agape Preparation Group has to leave in order to do their work, but those who remain meet around:

- Membership – strategizing ways to grow the Grail, plus considering when, where, how and why to use the Grail name in public situations.
- Regions – what constitutes a region, what is their function, and the relationship of regions to the Council.
- The Grail's Christian Origins, Presence & Spirituality
- Separating Council policy-making and staff implementation roles

Feedback forms are distributed and groups are asked to report back at the Closing Session on Sunday morning.

### ***Agape***

Fran Frazier presides over our Agape Feast, and it is truly a feast of love rather than a feast of all-you-can-eat. The food is simple and delicious, but not copious; clearly meant to be *tasted* with real pleasure while other kinds of sharing also take place. We begin with a song and a special Grace for this meal. Then a six-clown troupe appears to act out what Fran calls “The Commitment of Commitment”.

.....

#### **Why were there clowns?**

Two clowns set out on a Grail Quest, using a big map that shows the Dark Wood, the High Mountain to climb, the Great River to cross. They are soon joined by an enthusiastic new member and a rather shy, self-doubtful young one. But when the going gets tough, the enthusiast pulls out, despite the efforts of the others to support her. However, the boat-person who ferries them over the river is persuaded to join the Quest, and another Searcher appears as well. Just when it seems they are doing fine as a team, the old Leader begins to totter around, weak in the knees. No longer able to carry the burden, she passes on her leader-whistle to the youngest member of the group who has grown stronger by now.

Clown Theology: Clowns bumble around, trying to excel and falling on their faces. They mirror back to us all our human frailty and foolishness. They show us ourselves and let us laugh at them – and us. And often the story they tell is full of wisdom....

Fran highlights the Moral of the Story: Agape isn't just about love that is easy and comfortable; it is also about commitment to the group through times of struggle.

There is more singing, blessing of the bread by all present, a blessing poem, then the breaking and sharing of the bread and wine. The meal proceeds amongst happy conversations, and closes with a last communal prayer and song. Amen....

The rest of the evening is devoted to a party, with our usual tradition of home-grown entertainment, happily ranging from the sublime to the ridiculous.

### **Sunday 6/29/08**

#### ***Closing Session***

The small groups that met Saturday afternoon present their reports to the plenary group. These reports are reproduced in **Appendix B**, under the heading “SMALL GROUPS – FLYING AT 1000 FEET”.

Evaluation sheets are handed out, filled in then and there, and collected. The 54 responses, when typed out, filled 12 single-spaced pages. **See Appendix E** for a condensed summary.

After a bit of winding-up merriment and a group photo, we move over to the Oratory.

## ***Closing Ritual***

It is always difficult to “report on” a ritual; these things definitely fall into the category of “you had to be there”. However it can be said that this one was focused on the tree as symbol of our Grail. This time, though, it is not the huge tree we had covered with our leaves of appreciation and hopes and dreams in the Caravansary, but the modest little living tree that has stood in front of the altar in the Oratory.

We sing of the Tree of Life, pray an Iroquois prayer that honors the profusion and beauty of nature and the universe, pray a Litany of Thanksgiving, hear and reflect upon texts from Hebrew and Christian scripture, and end the indoor ceremony singing “God, the Mystery of Our Lives” and the Russian Alleluia. But there is also an outdoor ceremony: the actual planting of that living tree outside the Oratory. (*See report cover picture.*) Long may it grow and thrive there, as our Grail also grows and thrives....

And so to the last lunch, farewells, and then the clean-up volunteers set to work putting Grailville back in order again.

For most of the participants, the remaining task is to communicate as much as possible of these events to their Grail sisters back home (this report is, of course, meant to be of assistance in that communication) and to carry out the commitments they made in their evaluations. For the Council, though, the big challenge is to amend the Scenario, taking into account all the recommendations and advice provided by the GA. As some of this was far from unanimous, they will have to make some judgment calls, weighing all the variables carefully. It’s a good bet that they will appreciate all the prayers and good energy we can send them during this period.

When they have completed this challenging work, we will all receive the amended Scenario for the Future of the Grail so we can vote on it and, hopefully, move into a new phase of our Grail life together.



*2008 General Assembly*

# Grail General Assembly • June 23 -June 29, 2008

## PARTICIPANT LIST

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JUDY ALVES	FRAN FRAZIER	TERRY MARSHALL
JOYCE ASFOUR	MAUREEN GALLAGHER*	FRAN MARTIN
BETH BARR*	RUTH GALLANT	CAROL MCDONNELL
SHIRLEY BEAUPRE	JOY GARLAND	FRAN MCLAUGHLIN
MARGARET BISEL (Angela Miller)	ELIZABETH GERHARDT*	ANNE MERCIER
JUDITH BLACKBURN	BARBARA GIBBONS	JOYCE MINKLER
TEAGAN BLACKBURN	BOBBI GILL	ELIZABETH MURPHY*
MEG BRUCK	MARY GINDHART	EMMY NORMANDIN
CAY CHARLES	PEGGY GOEDERER	TRINA PAULUS
RUTH CHISHOLM	LOEK GOEMANS*	DOROTHY
ROSE MARY CLARK	ELISE GORGES	RASENBERGER
MARY CLIFFORD	PAULETTA HANSEL*	ELIZABETH ROBINSON
NANCY COONEY	UNA HARGRAVE	SIMONETTA ROMANO
VIVIAN CORRES	FRAN HEBERT	LENIE SCHAAREMAN
MARY THERESE COYLE	MARTHA HEIDKAMP	MARIAN SCHWAB
THERESA CZERWINSKI	BONNIE HENDRICKS	AUDREY SORRENTO
THERESA DARDAR	ALICE HENNESSY*	DEBORAH SULLIVAN*
MARY KAY DELGADO*	BECKY HILL	MAUREEN TATE
VIRGINIA DETERS*	CHERIE HOLMAN	EMILY THOMAS
KATE DEVLIN	ANNE HURLEY	MARIA EMILIA THOMAS
MARY GENE DEVLIN	SHARON JOSLYN	SHARON THOMSON
JACKIE DISALVO	JANET KALVEN	KATE TWOHY
ALICE DOUGAN	ALEXA KANE	BETH WASMER
INGRID FARNHAM*	MARY LU LAGEMAN	JAN WEINKAM
MARY FARRELL	LYLLIS LING	DUANNE WELSCH
CECILIA FIGUEROA	PEG LINNEHAN	CAROL WHITE
EVA FLEISCHNER	MARY KAY LOUCHART	JEAN WILSON
	JUDY MARKLE	PATRICIA YOUNG

*\* denotes GA observers and staff participants*