
The
FELLOWSHIP

for readers of The Urantia Book

Executive Committee Letter

November 1991 - January 1992

AVAILABILITY OF *The Urantia Book*

Many readers report first acquiring *The Urantia Book* by browsing in a bookstore. Some see it and are reminded of a conversation they have had with a reader; others buy it without ever having heard of it before. That is why The Fellowship has worked for years to encourage bookstores to keep the book in stock and on the shelves.

Most bookstores get their stock from wholesale book distributors who supply thousands of titles from hundreds of publishers. For obvious reasons, bookstores prefer this one-stop shopping to the alternative of dealing with each publisher separately. In general, a bookstore will not stock a book which is not available from their distributors. Many will not even special order *The Urantia Book* directly from the Foundation to meet a customer request; it is just too much trouble for them.

In October 1990, the Trustees of URANTIA Foundation adopted a sales policy which included the refusal to sell *The Urantia Book* to book distributors. In order to track the effect of this policy, The Fellowship immediately conducted a survey of over 450 bookstores in 15 major cities in the United States. Three months later, in January 1991, the survey was repeated. Not surprisingly, it showed a sharp drop in shelf copies of *The Urantia Book* in bookstores.

One year later, in January 1992, another follow-up survey was completed. Again, the data show a continued sharp decrease in the presence of *The Urantia Book* in bookstores. The results suggest that *The Urantia Book* is fast disappearing from bookstore shelves. Consequently, the possibility for someone to discover *The Urantia Book* while browsing through a bookstore is also disappearing.

In addition, the nature of shelf availability has also changed. The few bookstores which continue to keep *The Urantia Book* in stock are more likely to be of the specialized "new age" type; the book is less likely to be found on the shelves of general purpose and chain bookstores such as those in shopping centers.

The best remedy for this problem would be to reopen sales of *The Urantia Book* to book distributors, but the Trustees have shown no inclination to do this. All other remedies require significant effort from individual readers and can only partially offset the negative results of the Trustees' restrictive sales policies. Nevertheless, some improvement is better than continued decline.

The Fellowship's "Adopt-a-Bookstore" program is designed to assist individual readers who are concerned about this problem, and who wish to devote some time and effort to encouraging their local bookstores to restock *The Urantia Book*. Results have been

impressive in areas where this program has been tried. Descriptions of this program have already been widely distributed. If you wish more information, contact The Fellowship office.

On a related matter, recently the Trustees further restricted sales of *The Urantia Book* to individuals. Formerly, the Trustees were willing to sell an individual up to five copies of *The Urantia Book* in a calendar year. As of January 1992, individuals may purchase no more than three copies in any one year period. The Trustees have provided no explanation for this increased restriction on sales to individuals. When combined with the effect of the Trustees' book distributor policies, the result is likely to be a significant decrease in the rate of dissemination of *The Urantia Book* throughout the world.

Copies of the January 1992 bookstore survey will be available shortly on request from The Fellowship office.

1992 MID-YEAR GENERAL COUNCIL MEETING

The mid-year meeting of the General Council was held in Los Angeles California on January 31-February 2, 1992. In the past, attendance at the mid-year General Council meeting has usually been limited to councilors and their spouses. This meeting was open to all who wished to come. It was designed to encourage interaction and dialogue between general councilors and Fellowship members and friends. Over one hundred individuals were present at the meeting, including representatives from all of the western Fellowship societies. The program was developed jointly by general councilors, members of First Society of Los Angeles, and the School of Meanings and Values.

The General Council meeting was held on Friday evening, and was open to observers; approximately forty observers attended. The program for Saturday featured several stimulating talks on outreach and leadership. These were followed by large and small group fellowship experiences. The Saturday program closed with several presentations by Fellowship committees, followed by an evening social. Sunday morning featured a session of personal sharing by several readers, and the meeting concluded with group worship and closing comments.

Many positive comments have been received about this meeting. The meeting was characterized by a degree of openness and accessibility which many members found encouraging. The opportunity for extended and relaxed fellowship seems to have helped to heal up most of the irritations which developed in the turmoil of the last few years.

The success of this meeting has generated discussion about holding some future meetings of the General Council and/or Executive Committee at floating locations to encourage more person-to-person interaction with members. It is likely that the Executive Committee will plan to have one of its upcoming meetings at a location other than Chicago, and in addition to conducting organizational business, will plan to meet with members from the local area.

SUPPORT FOR LOCAL AND REGIONAL MEETINGS

The Executive Committee approved a proposal designed to foster local initiatives in planning and holding regional conferences. Regional meetings are one of the most effective means of fostering study and fellowship in the *Urantia Book* community. They are relatively simple to arrange, and are usually inexpensive and geographically easy to attend. Holding a regional meeting is an excellent collective project for a local reader group. The group must work together to provide for the physical details of location, meals, accommodations, and financing; they must plan the program topics and formats, and select speakers and workshop leaders; they may design experiences of group prayer and worship, or work to develop a children's program.

Regional meetings generally give a number of individuals the chance to prepare a talk or moderate a small group discussion. This tends to encourage a more intensive study of *The Urantia Book* than that which usually takes place at weekly study group meetings. Regional meetings always provide excellent opportunities for informal and extended fellowship, and are generally good experiences for new readers. They also bring together members of all local area study groups, and often are attended by readers from outside the local area.

Much more could be added about the benefits of regional meetings. They encourage the study and dissemination of *The Urantia Book*, provide meaningful fellowship opportunities, and constitute a significant form of service to the revelation and those who are striving to study and live it.

For all these reasons, The Fellowship has decided to increase its efforts to encourage local initiatives in arranging regional meetings. The new program will provide assistance with financing, suggestions for speakers, conference organizing advice, publicity and mailing services, and more. The specific details are now being developed with implementation expected in spring 1992.

SITE SELECTION FOR 1996 INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

As planning for the August 1993 International Conference near Montreal, Canada continues we need to begin the search for a site for 1996. Regional meetings are relatively easy to arrange, but international conferences are complex and require planning to begin about three years in advance. An acceptable site for IC96 will be able to accommodate about 2000 persons at relatively reasonable cost. Ease of travel, local environment and quality of facilities are other considerations. In addition, it is important to have a dedicated team of volunteers from the local area who are willing to work on conference planning and execution.

Please let us know if you are aware of any locations and facilities which you think would be good choices for IC96.

1992 SUMMER SEMINARS

Some years ago the Education Committee began a series of summer study gatherings which were designed to examine *The Urantia Book* sequentially from beginning to end. The 1992 Summer Seminar, in Lake Forest, Illinois, will mark the completion of that effort. The final session in this series will focus on the second half of Part IV of *The Urantia Book*; the theme is "Personal Religion and Cosmic Citizenship." The gathering promises to be a memorable one. In addition to examining a section of *The Urantia Book* which is of great personal interest to so many readers, there will also be present that sense of gratification which accompanies the completion of a long term project of this kind.

The conclusion of this series raises the question "What next?" Should the pattern be repeated, or should some other model be used? What about location? These seminars have always been held near Chicago. Should they remain there, or should they be moved to different locations each year to facilitate wider participation? Many of you have attended one or more Summer Seminars over the years, and you may have some thoughts about this activity. Soon, the Education Committee will be discussing this matter; they would be grateful to have your suggestions for the future of the Summer Seminars.

WRIGHTWOOD SERIES STUDY FORUMS

The "Wrightwood Series," a new program designed to foster in-depth study of *The Urantia Book*, will hold its initial sessions during the spring of 1992. Two topics are being considered: one will examine the subject of race as presented in *The Urantia Book*; the other will look at spiritual fellowship in the family, the community, and beyond. Over the years, many readers of *The Urantia Book* have indicated interest in a deeper understanding of both these subjects.

Small groups of well-prepared readers will assemble at the Wrightwood Avenue facility to discuss these topics. We expect that some form of product will result which can be widely shared. The project is experimental, and will have to develop through experience. Eventually, we hope it will provide useful study aids and also serve as a stimulus to increased in-depth examination of the contents of *The Urantia Book*. Additional information about this program will appear in the winter 1992 issue of the *Bulletin*.

What other subjects would you recommend as a focus of study for this program? Do you know any individuals who have developed significant insight into some aspect of *The Urantia Book* whom you would recommend as a participants in this program? Share your ideas and suggestions with the Education Committee.

1992 BUDGET

The November Executive Committee meeting is devoted to budget preparation for the following year. As you know, The Fellowship has faced significant financial problems during recent times, but the situation is now much improved. Both the number and

amount of contributions increased significantly this year. The combination of reduced expenses and increased contributions has given The Fellowship financial stability. Many thanks to all for your timely and generous support.

The Executive Committee approved a total operating budget for 1992 of \$220,000. However, the actual cost of supporting Fellowship activities is always higher than the annual budget indicates. This occurs because many individuals support Fellowship activities directly, rather than through the normal contribution process. Since individuals undertake these expenses on their own initiative, the exact amount of these in-kind contributions can only be approximated. Conservatively, we estimate this amount to be about \$50,000 annually. This figure should be added to each annual budget to get a clearer picture of the actual expense of Fellowship operations.

The Executive Committee is committed to responsible management of Fellowship assets. We are determined to maximize the use assets for direct support of our constitutional purposes of the study and dissemination of *The Urantia Book*. In addition, the Executive Committee believes that The Fellowship must be accountable to its members and friends for the proper use of contributed funds. Our financial records are public, and open to the review of any interested persons. The only privileged information concerns the identity of donors, and similar personal information. Recently we have simplified our accounting reports to provide clear and unambiguous answers to all questions of income and expense. There are no secrets, and no hidden categories. We welcome all comments and suggestions concerning the financial management of The Fellowship.

We may have a small budget surplus this year. That will give us the ability to foster existing programs, and initiate new efforts to encourage the study and dissemination of *The Urantia Book*. Joe Liszka, our treasurer, is eager to have suggestions from members for future activities. Assuming we had sufficient funds available, what should we be doing with them? Can you suggest any new programs, projects or activities you believe The Fellowship should undertake? If you have any thoughts about this, please let Joe know. More than anything, we need good ideas and committed people to help actualize them.

CLOSING COMMENTS

Much current discussion about the future of The Fellowship incorporates terms like "openness," "dialog," "accessibility," "inclusiveness," "responsiveness," "local initiative," "empowerment," and similar concepts. This reflects the view that The Fellowship's major role is one of facilitation, assistance, coordination, communication, inclusion and collective decision-making. The object is to encourage as many as possible to take an active interest in the study and dissemination of *The Urantia Book*.

In the last few years The Fellowship has made substantial moves in the direction of decentralization, and will probably continue to do so. Stimulating local participation and initiative is an important objective. Fellowship meetings have been moving from place to place to facilitate increased local involvement and participation without the expense and inconvenience of travel. Major responsibility for several activities has been

assigned to groups away from the Chicago office. The recent January 1992 General Council meeting in Los Angeles and the 1993 International Conference in Canada both involve non-members in significant aspects of planning and execution. Studies are underway to develop methods to improve the participation of societies and members-at-large in Fellowship elective processes.

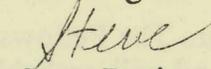
The Fellowship encourages independent development of study aids. Shortly we expect to have available a new pronunciation guide and a listing of all the changes which have been made to the text of *The Urantia Book* since the first printing. Other study aids are in development. These study aids are produced by motivated individuals. The Fellowship offers encouragement, technical assistance, coordination, and help with printing and distribution.

The group process still operates; teamwork is still one of the most important lessons we have to learn on Urantia. But there is greater appreciation and respect for a wider variety of viewpoint and taste. There is more trust in the good will and good judgment of others. There is less fear that individuals will do things that will damage The Fellowship or reflect negatively upon *The Urantia Book*. We are learning to see our differences as valuable assets rather than troublesome impediments.

All of this is exciting and good, but it is also complex and fragile. We cannot magically jump from one state of existence to another; we can only evolve. The near future will provide varied opportunities for active participation for all interested readers of *The Urantia Book*. Perhaps there will be changes in some current impediments to the study and dissemination of *The Urantia Book*, opening up additional possibilities for active service. The greater complexity of an open and inclusive organization will require increased patience, tolerance, trust, and self-control. It can only succeed if we are willing to more fully love and value one another.

While The Fellowship will continue to foster a wide variety of activities, it will remain true that the most important contribution each of us can make is our continued personal study of *The Urantia Book*, coupled with our sincere efforts to give living expression to its teachings. That is fundamental. The foundation of all social progress is centered in the inner life of individual religionists. The quality and value of our collective work will improve as we each develop a better personal grasp of the contents of the revelation, and that requires continued study. That is why active and regular participation in a study group is a valuable social contribution anyone can make to this work. The sharing of ideas and ideals with other readers tends to clarify and augment individual comprehension while encouraging continued study; and every individual effort to progress in personal comprehension of *The Urantia Book* makes a direct and essential contribution to the success of our more organized collective activities. "One is free to choose and act only within the realm of one's consciousness." -p. 377

In loving fellowship,


Steve Dreier