

Sustainable Communities Affinity Group Submission to the 2021 GA

"It is no longer enough to speak only of the integrity of ecosystems. We have to dare to speak of the integrity of human life, of the need to promote and unify all the great values." (Laudato Si')

"We will go into the future as a single sacred community or we will all perish in the desert."
(Thomas Berry)

The Sustainable Communities Affinity Group (SCAG) was created at the 2017 General Assembly. The founders were members involved with the three remaining US Grail Centers at Grailville, Cornwall and the South Bronx. SCAG members have formally decided to merge with the Cornwall Group, which is working actively on behalf of sustainable communities for Cornwall, for the Grail, and for the Earth. The two groups share goals, projects, and active members. They continue to hold separate meetings, as well as combined ones. As one entity, ***we are firmly committed to finding Common Ground in the Grail and creating strong, sustainable, inclusive community in furthering our Grail Mission.***

The meaning of "Sustainable Communities." Sustainability requires coherence among the parts of a whole. We have come to understand that Sustainable Communities of many types and everywhere in the world – both in Nature and in human society -- are needed to counter the consequences of Global Warming and the continuing loss of Biodiversity. ***They are interdependent and mutually supportive***, so that even small communities such as those in the Grail can learn from and support one another, and thus can have an outside impact for overall sustainability and regeneration on the planet.

Such an understanding of the connectedness among Communities has always been part of the Grail Vision, leading to a Mission so ambitious as to "transform the world." Originally this meant primarily the human world, but today the Earth itself urgently needs human care. In helping ourselves and offering to help the Earth, we need to learn much more *from* Mother Earth, who sustains and regenerates herself through interwoven ecosystems (communities) and the consequent biodiversity. **The Grail community cannot sustain itself without the support of Earth communities. In turn, it may be that many Earth communities cannot long sustain themselves without intentional reciprocity by communities such as the Grail.**

The meaning of "Affinity Group." Sustainable Communities tend to be composed of sub-communities or groups. Grail women typically belong to multiple communities or groups. As one SCAG member put it:

"My main concern is what I might describe as Quantum Ecology/Ecosystems of Human and Nature co-participation. To realize that concern, one Grail Group does not suffice. So, my Grail groups are UFER, GLUNN, SCAG (including the Cornwall Team). And these efforts are made real by being grounded in the Bronx Grail Center, local church, and local community ('Build the Block')."

The term affinity group points to SCAG's connection not only to the Earth but also to other groups in the Grail. The overlapping of members among Grail groups already indicates unity of vision and purpose such as SCAG wishes to enhance. SCAG members are active among many Grail groups unified under the Grail Vision:

Earth-Centered groups: Laudato Si' Study Group, Grail Climate Action Group, Cornwall Group.

Social Justice-Centered groups: Anti-Racism Committee, Re-Visioning Group.

Spirituality Core: We treasure the Weekly Prayer provided to Grail membership by the Spirituality Core group. We believe there must be a spiritual level to all Grail work. SCAG is guided by the Grail's spiritual Vision, as well as wholistic expressions of sustainability such as Pope Francis's *Laudato Si'*.

The Arts: The Arts are also an essential spiritual dimension of the Grail. We wish to restore their visibility and definition in the US Grail, which have been reduced in part because of the gradual dissolution of Grail Centers, that is, loss of Places for art, including the liturgical arts, to be engaged in both spiritually and physically.

Grail Centers: The US Grail precariously retains two land-based Centers (Grailville and Cornwall) and one urban Center in the Bronx, which at present conducts the most vital work to sustain and regenerate the Grail. There is overlapping of Grail members here, too, i.e., many Grail women who strive to preserve the Centers are working with other Grail groups in the US Grail and in the International Grail, which has affirmed the importance of Grail Centers.

International Grail Networks and Working Groups: Members of SCAG are involved in sustainable communities' work through Earth Network, GLUNN, etc., and thereby also cooperate with UN goals such as the Sustainable Development Goals.

From a GLUNN report: *This proposal is rooted in the IGA decision for Grail commitment to contribute to the implementation of the Sustainability Goals. We hear Grail echoes in the stated UN objective, "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development." We have nurtured allies in this effort through networking with NGOs over many years with Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (PFII), Commission on Social Development (CSocD) and in particular our work with the Working Group on Girls with the coordination internationally being done by Grail Link to the United Nations Network (GLUNN). Although all the goals are interconnected, this proposal concentrates on the impact especially of SDGs: 4. Quality Education, 5. Gender Equality, 11. Sustainable Cities and Communities, 13. Climate Action, 16. Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions, 17. Partnership for the Goals.*

Indigenous Communities: SCAG greatly values Indigenous wisdom for sustaining all our communities. We pay heed to Article 10 from the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: ***Indigenous peoples shall not be forcibly removed from their lands or territories. No relocation shall take place without the free, prior, and informed consent of the Indigenous peoples concerned and after agreement on just and fair compensation and, where possible, with the option of return.***

We acknowledge the forceful removal of peoples from their lands through slavery, land grabbing, and violence. With the US Grail prioritizing anti-Racism, and International Grail Networks focusing, as well, on Migration/Refugees and Indigenous Peoples, Grail sacred land should be a place of hospitality, creativity, healing, reconciliation, and reparation. We need not see the land as a commodity.

From a Cornwall Group report: *In considering the role of permaculture design, we are aware that the original inhabitants of Orange County were the peoples of the Munsee Tribe. This tribe is part of the Lunaape Nation located in Mahwah, N.J. We have acquaintance with Chief Dwaine C. Perry of the Ramapough Lunaape Nation through the UN Committee on Indigenous Rights. We will consult with him on the incorporation of Ancestral tradition of harmony with Nature and care for the Earth. We are inspired by the stated commitment of UN Member States of "turning the vision of world transformation into a reality."*

Cosmological Perspectives: SCAG has absorbed fundamental concepts of community and sustainability from the works of cosmologist Thomas Berry, a longtime friend of the Grail. His understanding of communion and community extended to every bit of the universe, which like every human and natural community is characterized in its evolution by Differentiation, Interiority and Communion. Hence the infinite numbers of diverse communities, each with its own truth, each dependent on all others. These universal principles underlie sustainability and regeneration.

Applying Thomas Berry's words in *The Dream of the Earth*, SCAG members believe that the Grail should ***"understand in some depth its role in creating a future worthy of that larger universal community of beings out of which the human component emerged and in which the human community finds its proper fulfillment."*** Such understanding will grow all the more through action in creating sustainability and community on many levels.

The Sustainable Communities Affinity Group meets biweekly on Zoom, Tuesdays at 7pm ET. In addition, the Cornwall Group meets weekly on Zoom, Fridays at 6pm ET. All are welcome to join as members or guests. For information and Zoom link, please write to Mary Lu Lageman at lpneuma@aol.com.