

Suggested Changes to Grail Structure and Governance

Input by Several Grail Groups

The Revisioning Team drafted several suggestions for revisions to Grail structure and governance. We are not concerned here about which might be by-law changes and which might go into a procedures/guidance manual, but rather, the general concepts and approaches.

These ideas (in blue below) were shared with Grail Groups of all sizes, including Grail committees, teams, regional and issue-based groups with the invitation to both react to these suggestions and to propose additional recommendations. This document is a composite from all groups that submitted their comments. There is no attempt to bring a consensus document or single recommendation. Rather, this reflects the diversity of perspectives among Grail groups which we hope can serve as a point of departure for dialogue at the Grail 2021 GA and beyond. Contributions are followed by the name of the group (or several groups where there is agreement). Text in italics below represents existing by-laws language.

Executive Summary:

- Discussion on integrating the US Grail's commitment to racism throughout our governance process. (throughout this document)
- Discussion on the centrality of the General Assembly and the Grail membership as the decision-making body of the Grail. (p. 2)
- Discussion of a proposal for an Advisory Team that would be selected by Grail groups. (p. 3)
- Discussion of Membership having the responsibility for suggesting and voting on by-laws changes. (p. 4)
- Discussion of making Council meetings open to all Grail members as observers. (p. 5)
- Discussion of the role of the NLT. (p. 5)
- Discussion of the role of several Grail committees, including an Election Committee, Personnel Committee, By-laws Committee, Anti-Racism Committee, Communications Committee and others, and the meaning of a Standing Committee. (p. 7-9)
- Discussion of changing the requirement that members make a financial contribution in order to be able to vote. (p. 9)
- Discussion regarding how members who have been inactive re-engage with the Grail. (p. 9)

Grail Responsibilities

The Grail shall carry out its corporate purposes in a manner which witnesses to the values and commitment of the Grail and which meets the needs of the times. This includes a commitment to becoming an anti-racist organization both internally and externally, viewing all our activities through an anti-racist lens. [Anti-Racism Committee]

Structure

The General Assembly

The GA, a convening of the membership, which can happen at any time, length or frequency, will be virtual or virtual and simultaneously face to face. The GA is the primary decision-making body of the Grail and sets the agenda for Council. Some GA decisions may need to be followed up by ballot vote of membership. GA's require preparation among members, with education and FORUM discussions. [Revisioning Team]

Groups that agreed: Anti-Racism Committee, Cornwall group, Laudato Si group

- We agree but wish to encourage the processes of sociocracy, consent, consensus decision, etc., both in the preparations for the GA and the GA itself. [Cornwall group]
- General Assembly should be only once a year [Northern CA group]
- The GA should be held at a fixed schedule, and at least every three years. Exceptional GA should still be possible - if called by a significant (TBD) number of members - for discussion and decisions that cannot be resolved by the council in consultation with the Advisory Team. [Soul Moment Team]
- The number of members needed for calling a GA should be clearly determined and stated in the by-law, for avoiding situations where one or two members with an issue are entitled to call a whole national gathering on it. [Soul Moment Team]
- The GA should maintain an on-going schedule (every two or three years) so that all the necessary preparatory processes can be put in place in good time. Exceptional GA could be held as they have been in the past when needed. Especially if the GA is a decision making body, it is important that members have information far in advance and prepare seriously for what needs to be decided. We also suggest that members' "gatherings" are held each year to allow for

sharing on projects, programs, and activities, or for discussion on subjects of common interests. [Philadelphia Grail]

- We feel encouraged that so many people want to be involved. But until and unless the GA is streamlined and online, the time it takes to pla a GA makes us think that every two years would be enough. If there is a pressing issue, members could pursue an initiative to have an earlier GA. [Finance Committee]

The General Assembly role:

- · *Sets priorities for the organization.*
- · *Reviews the overall state of the Grail, including membership, finances, program, governance, to discern priorities for the next period. (existing by-laws)*
- · Builds community among Grail members and shares diverse and common Grail culture.
- · Integrates the Grail's commitment to Anti-Racism.

[Anti-Racism Committee]

GA Planning Team

A GA Planning Team will be created by the Council, based on volunteers and with an eye towards racial, ethnic, age and geographic diversity. At least one member of the Anti-Racism Committee will serve on the GA Planning Team. The Planning team will make Grail anti-racism commitment central to the GA [Anti-Racism Committee]

The Advisory Team

A new Advisory Team, made up of representatives from self-identified Grail Groups, will shape the collective work of the Grail. Representatives' role is as liaisons between Council and Grail interest groups for frequent two-way communication. [Revisioning Team]

Groups that agreed: Cornwall group, Laudato Si group

- Cornwall agrees and wishes to add that every self-identified group should be included in sending a representative in the Advisory Team. [Cornwall group]
- The Anti-Racism Committee does not support the creation of an Advisory Team. As proposed, it is drawn from self-selected groups without a direct election process. Given that the current Grail is majority white, that would create a majority-white Advisory Team. Even if there were to be national elections that guaranteed leadership of women of color on this body, the Advisory Team seems

set up to be a check on the Council. We do not think it is wise to have a self-identified team with the ability to direct or stop the work of an elected Council. We cannot support a new structure that seeks to undermine the leadership of women of color, who we hope will have a growing presence on the Council. [Anti-Racism Committee]

- What is a Self-identifying group? When are these groups appropriate? Would a large Advisory Council be functional? [Northern CA group]
- Advisory Council: should have a size limit and a budget limit. It is too large to be functional [Northern CA group]
- There should be some stipulations about what we need in an Advisory Team – diversity of age, race, geography, etc, for example, and maybe specific skills as well. A self-identified group would not be appropriate. As written, this is simply a re-statement of the Re-visioning team’s original proposal, where self-identified groups were to select a representative to make up a 13-member Common Council. [GVIC]
- We support the idea of a body representing membership in on-going communication with each-other and council. We suggest changing the name to: Advisory Circle, and to define more clearly how this group is going to function. Maybe needs to have a secretary or convener. [Philadelphia Grail]
- Is there a minimum size to the Grail groups? Do they need to have been established for a minimum amount of time?

Members can propose by-law changes if 10% of voting members propose the change (this is per Ohio state law). Members vote on by law changes (either at a called virtual GA or by ballot vote). [Revisioning Team]

Groups that agreed: Anti-Racism Committee, Bronx Grail, Cornwall group, Laudato Si group

- 10 % of membership to propose changes: too small. It is Ohio law but does the Grail have to follow that law? [Northern CA group]
- We find our present process for revising and changing the by-laws adequate to the needs of the organization. [Soul Moment Team]
- The present system - by-laws are reviewed by Council once a year – seems to be sufficient to some of us, since the review period may invite suggestions or include non-council members in the review process. By-laws changes should be suggested by a reasonable percentage of active members. Too vague to say “members can propose”. A process for proposing changes in by-laws should be

better defined. By-laws changes proposals should be voted during the GA. A majority of votes should reflect and finalize all decisions. [Philadelphia Grail]

- We're against Council being the ones who decide what should be changed in our by-laws. We members should vote and we should be able to bring forth what we want to suggest be changed. Maybe a 10% agreement among the membership is good, or at least 10% of the group submitting the changes? [Bronx Grail]
- We would prefer to see the threshold for proposing Bylaw change raised to 25%, despite the lower threshold in OH law.

[Integrate Grail anti-racism commitment into by-laws.](#) [Revisioning Team]

Groups that agreed: Anti-Racism Committee, Cornwall group, Finance Committee, Laudato Si group, Philadelphia Grail, Soul Moment Team

- We agree with the need to integrate anti-racism into by-laws, but this point sounds like an instruction for the future, not a by-law to be included among other by-laws. [Laudato Si]
- We agree with Revisioning Team proposal but wish to encourage the processes of sociocracy, consent, consensus decision, etc., both in the preparations for the GA and the GA itself. [Cornwall Group, Wisconsin]
- Finance Committee strongly agrees!

The Council

[Maintain Council of 7-9 members.](#) [Revisioning Team]

Groups that agreed: Cornwall, Finance Committee

- Reword: Each new Council will designate internal leadership for managing meetings and agendas. [Anti-Racism Committee]
- Laudato Si' group agrees, but wonders what happens if not enough members run for Council
- Ideally 7 or 8 (9 is starting to be too many), but we have questions about the real possibility to have such a number of members committing to the work of council. We would suggest changing to: "Maintain Council of a minimum of 5 to a maximum of 8/9 members" [Philadelphia Grail]
- Council should remain 7-9 members. [Bronx Grail]

Review and revise the NLT function so that full Council will be making decisions. Allow Council to designate internal leadership for managing meetings and agendas. [Revisioning Team]

Groups that agreed: Cornwall group, Laudato Si'

- On the positive side: it seems a good thing to unburden the NLT members of responsibilities and sharing them with the rest of the council. On the other side: one more time the proposed change seem to communicate mistrust and a need to control who is elected in position of leadership, which is very sad in an organization that claims sisterhood and community as values. [Philadelphia Grail]
- Full council, not just the NLT should be making decisions, having had a full consultation with membership. [Bronx Grail]
- Please explain more fully. The NLT gives direction and makes small, immediate decisions when needed and when full Council involvement is impractical. We believe the NLT serves a useful purpose. [Finance Committee]

Members are invited to all Council meeting as observers, except when personnel issues and other issues requiring confidentiality are addressed. [Revisioning Team]

Groups that agreed: Anti-Racism Committee

- Members can attend Council meetings as Observers? Need clarification. How many can attend? Should be arranged ahead of time, with clearly identified purpose? Need clarification. [Northern CA group]
- Laudato si' group agrees but was concerned about who will decide what issues require confidentiality, or on what criteria the decision will be made. Somehow maximum transparency should be ensured.
- Cornwall group has problems with this. Confidential issues should be very strictly and clearly defined to ensure the utmost transparency, even in some Personnel decisions, and who can decree an issue as confidential should be defined as well. There has been too much secrecy in the past.
- We are not in complete agreement as regards instituting the possibility for "observers" to be present at council meetings. The presence of observers will affect the dynamics and process within the council, and the ways council members can discuss issues that might be difficult to discuss in public, such as issues involving members' behavior, not just staff's, for instance. Moreover, the

council needs to be protected by intrusions and disruptions that are always possible when observers are present. Our suggestion – if we want to go on with this change – would be to create very strict guidelines for the observers, such as: keeping the silence, respect boundaries etc. [Soul Moment Team]

- We have some reservations due to the potential disruptions and distractions brought by “observers” at ZOOM or face-to-face meetings. [Philadelphia Grail]
- Observers at council meeting would be good so more of us know what is really happening---helps transparency which is something we currently lack. [Bronx Grail]
- Add members are invited as *silent* observers [Finance Committee]

An **Election Committee** will be elected by members will oversee nominations through consultation with the Advisory Team. They will serve for a term of three years, with the role of creating guidelines and criteria for elections including addressing diversity in all its forms (race, age, region, etc.). The Advisory Team, will reach out to Grail groups to encourage nominations. The committee will compile *all* incoming nominations for member vote. [Revisioning Team]

Groups that agreed: Laudato si’

- An Election Committee, elected by members, will oversee nominations for Council. They will serve for a term of three years. Their role includes creating guidelines and criteria for elections including addressing diversity in all its forms (race, age, region, skills, etc.). They will interact regularly with Grail groups and Grail members to get to know the membership and will keep a database of potential candidates with their skill sets and areas of interest. The Election Committee will compile a *slate* representing this diversity, which seeks for parity of women of color. This will be submitted for vote by membership. [Anti-Racism Committee]
- We didn’t come out with a common perspective on this one. Some think it might be helpful to address diversity, but it involves the creation of one more team/group, and - again - it might be difficult to find people willing to fill those positions. [Philadelphia Grail]
- We are concerned about getting three-year commitments. We have a question about all incoming nominations—what is this about? We have trouble finding volunteers in general. [Finance Committee]

Revise Council job description to lighten the load and make it possible for younger women, working women, mothers, etc. to step into leadership. Also encourage Council

to create task forces to work on specific issues (such as Catalyst Fund), thus lightening the load and broadening input. [Revisioning Team]

- Sounds good! [Finance Committee]

Groups that agreed: Anti-Racism Committee, Laudato si' group

Council does not need an outside facilitator/moderator/ mediator [Bronx Grail]

Committees

A standing committee is an ongoing committee to service certain administrative functions of the Grail, as opposed to an ad hoc committee, which is as needed, with a finite period of existence. [Revisioning Team]

- We have ongoing committees for Personnel, Anti-Racism now; not sure how this is different from a standing committee.

Groups that agreed: Cornwall group, Laudato Si group

Committees shall recommend to Council non-Council members to serve on their respective committees. The Grail's commitment to racial parity in leadership should be reflected in all Grail committees and committee leadership. [Anti-Racism Committee]

It is the job of *all* committees to pay attention to decisions the Council is making and advise about how those decisions might relate to the purposes of the committees -- e.g., anti-racism, climate change, finance, etc. [Anti-Racism Committee]

The Standing **Personnel Committee** manages Grail personnel, with Council members represented on the committee. [Revisioning Team]

Groups that agreed: Cornwall group, Laudato Si group

- There currently is a Personnel Committee. We can affirm and activate it without change to the by-laws. [Anti-Racism Committee, Personnel Committee]
- The Personnel Committee works with the Council regarding possible new staff needs and works to shape job descriptions. In the hiring process the Personnel Committee will reflect the Grail's commitment to racial diversity. [Anti-Racism Committee]
- Personnel Committee's role is to recommend personnel policies and not to manage the personnel. [Northern CA group]

- Management of personnel should remain under the responsibility of the council because of confidentiality issues. [Philadelphia Grail]
- Hiring/managing personnel seems more appropriate to Council. The Personnel Committee is not currently involved. There is already a liaison Council member for each committee now. [Finance Committee]

Establish a standing **By-laws Committee** which gathers recommendations for annual by-laws changes. Members, Council or committees can propose by law changes to this committee and members vote on by law changes (either at a called virtual GA or by ballot vote). [Revisioning Team]

Groups that agreed: Anti-Racism Committee, Cornwall group, Laudato Si Group

- Re-visioning needs to have a built-in process for regular, yearly re-evaluation. What about the changes that we instituted went well? Why, and how can that be encouraged? What could have gone better? How do we understand what happened, and how can that be improved or remedied? We need to establish this firmly so that we don't let doing it slip by. Maybe the By-Laws Standing Committee could take this on. [Laudato Si group, Wisconsin]
- We find our present process for revising and changing the by-laws adequate to the needs of the organization. [Soul Moment Team]
- It doesn't seem necessary to create another committee to gather by-laws recommendations/proposals. The Advisory group should be enough to gather and pass on to council information on members proposed changes. [Philadelphia Grail]
- We hope there are volunteers for this! Too optimistic. What's wrong with the current process? [Finance Committee]

Make the **Anti-Racism Committee** a standing committee. [Revisioning Team]

Groups that agreed: Anti-Racism Committee, Cornwall group, Laudato Si group, Philadelphia Grail, Soul Moment team

- Make Anti-Racism committee a standing committee: not appropriate in the By-Laws. [Northern CA group]
- Friendly amendment: As a procedural committee which looks at all of the operations of the Grail, including council, finance, personnel, membership, etc., The Anti-Racism Committee would also be a standing committee. [Anti-Racism Committee]

- Isn't it already a standing committee? [Finance Committee]

Communications Committee? We need attention paid to US Grail publications. National Grail News, Gumbo, other publications, for example, "US Grail Core Social Policies", "The Grailville Poets" other. This group would set editorial policy, (perhaps in consultation) oversee and encourage these publications. Maybe this group would be one of the Grail Interest Groups, or maybe a Standing Committee. [Laudato Si group]

In job description of the **Finance Committee**, include language calling them to review budget priorities and expenditures with a racial justice lens. [Anti-Racism Committee]

Expand the **Aging Committee** [Northern CA group]

Create a **Horticulture/Land Committee** to oversee land use as well as maintenance of cemetery [Northern CA group]

Membership

Change membership policy to end financial requirement as prerequisite for voting, and the need to engage in an explorer process for re-entry after three years of inactivity. Recognize the expectation that Grail members will give of their time, talents, prayers and money as they are able. [Revisioning Team]

Groups that agreed: Anti-Racism Committee, Cornwall group, Laudato Si, Wisconsin

- Need clarification. Members who were inactive after 3 years should not be put into the Explorer phase. What they need is an update and not the history of the Grail. What about the Emerita members? Their membership should not be questioned. [Northern CA group]
- We think that an annual donation should be part of the expected support that members have to give the community. We share responsibilities for the well-being of the community – and its work – and financial contribution should be understood as a vital component by all members who claim to "love the Grail" and recognize the importance of self-sustainability. An internal fund-raiser should be sent out at different times during the year, as it is done presently. If members are not able to offer any amount of money – not even one dollar – then they could apply to the scholarship fund or at least offer a sign of their on-going interest and support of the Grail. No name should be erased from the membership list in case the financial responsibility is not fulfilled, however the Membership Team, in conversation with the member, should explore the motivations for not giving a financial support and possible solution. [Soul Moment Team]

- We are divided on this aspect. On one side to some of us the yearly financial contribution seems to be absolutely possible to all members, even those with a very low income, and the only concrete way to affirm a commitment to the Grail each year. In its absence: how are we going to show our contribution? Maybe we could use a ritual each year to re-affirm our intention to serve The Grail? On the other side, issues around cancellation of names in The Grail list, are seen as a “not-so-Grail” way of operating. Monitoring who has given and pursuing members to meet their financial obligation has placed a policing burden on the Membership Team and takes time and energy that they could be spending on other membership outreach and enrichment tasks. A suggestion is made to contact members who have not been heard from for at least a year, to inquire about their wellbeing and their desire to continue being part of the organization. [Philadelphia Grail]
- All members are encouraged to ‘pay dues’---it’s normal. But when someone hits hard times whether financially or for sickness or has family responsibilities that take all of her time, she shouldn’t be excluded because paying dues was not a top priority. [Bronx Grail]
- We have mixed views on this, given the Finance Team’s responsibility for the financial wellbeing of the Grail. Why not establish a solidarity fund funded by members from which those members unable to give can draw? We don’t necessarily agree with dropping a re-engagement process for long-lapsed members. [Finance Committee]

Use of FORUMS, which can be organized by any member or group of members, for member engagement in major decision-making and ballot-proposals. Forums will seek to incorporate changes to ballot proposals to address member concerns. [Revisioning Team]

Groups that agreed: Anti-Racism Committee, Cornwall group, Laudato si’ approves -- enthusiastically!

- Cornwall group wishes to add that individuals or groups can call or create a Forum simply for a GOOD IDEA (such as the Soul Moments, for example), not only for major decisions or ballot proposals. [Cornwall group]
- How is a forum different than a meeting? May we have more definition and info on how it works? [Finance Committee]
- In addition to Forums and GA, we think that we should have at least a “national gathering and/or retreat” once a year for:
 - Sharing on subjects of common interest and learning from one another
 - Broadening and deepening members’ common grounds of interests and action

- Just BE together in prayer and reflection, nurturing our spiritual search [Soul Moment Team]

This seems too vague. It is unclear who has/needs to participate, what are the criteria for calling a forum. It seems to – again and again – multiply and complicate excessively the life of the organization and expect a too high level of participation in organizational issues more than programmatic ones. [Philadelphia Grail]

Expand other items that members vote on (TBD). [Revisioning Team]

- Laudato si' is not inclined to expand voting -- it prefers consent and consensus
- Cornwall group agrees, noting that By-Laws' changes will be voted on.
- For example? Not enough information. [Finance Committee]

The membership process is developed by the Membership Committee and is posted on the US Grail website. Women seeking membership engage in that process with designated Grail members. [Revisioning Team]

Membership and Voting (red reflects additions by Membership Committee)

From membership team. See more details in their proposal to GA and in NGN.

A Grail Member

- Consciously lives out her connectedness to the Grail vision and mission.*
- Contributes to the Grail to the extent she has the capacity: her time, talents, her money and or prayers.*
- Has voting privileges and responsibilities*
 - Those who select to vote will take the responsibility of making themselves aware of the issues brought to vote by following communications sent out nationally and regionally and by attending by meetings and forums when possible. In the case of elections, they would make themselves aware of the bios of those seeking election.

Emerita Member

- contributes as she is able
- selects for voting privileges and responsibilities

It would be on the honor of each Grail member to contribute as she is able. It would be on the honor of each Grail member to vote responsibly.

Regarding Emerita members, to the extent they have the capacity, we welcome their contributions including their prayers. To the extent they no longer have a capacity to contribute, we thank them for their contributions in the past. They remain as members.

[Membership Committee]

General Comments:

Our group affirms the values involved in the intention of improving participation and democracy in the present Grail organization. However, we find that in general what is proposed as changes in the by-laws seem to show a great deal of distrust in responsible, elected leadership and – at the same time - a very high level of expectations on membership's desire and ability to be involved in all matters of organizational decision making. We doubt that this last is true – the majority of members are interested in programs and projects, not in administration, unless there is something very serious at stake, as in "land-sale" - and we fear that some of the changes might make the work of the organization more burdensome that is necessary. [Philadelphia Grail]

One unanimous point in our discussion is that, in order to simplify and expedite our decision-making processes, we would like to see a change in the by-law regarding decision-making and voting by membership, so that final decisions can be made by a simple majority of voters instead of by a 2/3 of them. [Philadelphia Grail]

Cornwall group adds three items:

- 1) All by-laws changes should be recorded in Endnotes to the by-laws, with the date for each change, and possibly with other important information about the circumstances for making the change.
- 2) Somewhere in the by-laws include the concept of subsidiarity.
- 3) That the Executive Director (ideally other staff, too) be Grail members. With effort, there's always a way to engage people, including by changing the job description. These would be salaried positions.

We do appreciate the work of the re-visioning group. [Bronx Grail]
