

Background Information on the Central Regional Council of the Anthroposophical Society

The Central Regional Council is an initiative group within the framework of the Anthroposophical Society in America. The following exploration of how our role and work have evolved in the past eleven years (since 2000) should be especially helpful to those of you who have not had an opportunity to join us at one of our regional meetings during these past years. We welcome the opportunity to discuss any questions you may have.

When did the CRC come into being? Is it a representational body?

Governance of the Anthroposophical Society in America has not been directly representational since “regionalization” in 1980 - designating Eastern, “Midwest” (re-named “Central” in 2001), and Western Regions. Prior to regionalization, the General Council (national board) of the Society was composed of a representative from each Group and Branch in the nation. This made sense when the membership was smaller and more densely clustered around large population centers in the Northeast, but as membership grew into the thousands and spread across the country, it obviously made for a cumbersome and unwieldy governing body.

The delineation of Regions and the establishment of Regional Councils allowed for a much smaller and more efficient General Council, the legally responsible governing board of the Society in America. The newly formed Regional Councils, in turn, were mandated to work more intimately with members, groups and branches to build up the life of anthroposophy in their respective regions.

Regional Councils are truly initiative groups rather than governing bodies. They do not consist of elected representatives from Groups and Branches, and they have no legal or administrative responsibilities other than to support the life of Anthroposophy in their respective regions. The way in which this mandate has been taken up by each Regional Council has been, through the years, a reflection of the individuals who have comprised those councils.

The question of whether to bring more representation into the structure of the Society has been raised from time to time and will likely be taken up again in the near future as the General Council reviews the By-Laws of the Society.

How has the CRC taken up its tasks to support Anthroposophy in the Region?

Since February 2000, the focus of the CRC’s work has been to try to discern how best to nurture community and manifest the gifts of anthroposophy here in the “heart-land” of the continent. We started literally from the ground up, with a study of the spiritual geography of the region, and concurrently took up an examination of the spiritual mission of America. Based on this research, in February 2002, we began practical work with earth-healing, in service to the country, the region and its inhabitants - human and elemental. Out of this first phase of our “millennial initiative,” we held two regional gatherings - in East Troy, WI in June 2002 and in Detroit, MI in August 2003.

This work led us naturally to the question: What is the healthiest and most effective approach to carrying out our mandate to serve members in the region? We realized that a healthy breathing between center and periphery required active and open communication and engagement in both directions. Our existing regional newsletter, *The Correspondence*, had a vital role to play; but it was essential that we establish strong, direct collegial ties with the Groups and Branches, as well. We held our first retreat for representatives from Groups and Branches at the Rudolf Steiner House in Ann Arbor in August 2004, with 15 in attendance.

When we met with Group and Branch representatives a second time, in Chicago in May 2005, Marianne Fieber's *Songtrails* Project offered the perfect vehicle (albeit on foot!) for sharing our reverence for land and place, human history and community. It was in Chicago that we introduced our picture of a Circle of Co-workers, comprised of representatives from every Group and Branch in the Region, to be brought together in a regional Annual General Meeting. It was also at that meeting that we celebrated our first regional Festival together.

Hurricane Katrina pre-empted a regional AGM in 2006. Instead, we organized an Easter pilgrimage to New Orleans and the Gulf Coast. Drawing on the *Songtrails* tradition, 35 of us from as far away as Alaska, California and Germany gathered near St. Louis, MO, and journeyed south along the Mississippi River; stopping to mark the earthquake of 1811/12, and to visit the National Civil Rights Museum, at the spot where Martin Luther King was assassinated. We spent two days in New Orleans and two days in Ocean Springs, MS, planting and spraying bio-dynamic preparations to help restore balance to those devastated environments. In Ocean Springs, we also experienced the spirit-filled and healing art of Walter Anderson and his family.

At our third meeting, *Embodying the Heart Mission of America in our Anthroposophical Communities*, with Group and Branch representatives, at Camphill Minnesota in May, 2007, Robert Karp presented his research on vessel-building - exploring how we can consciously create horizontal and vertical connections to each other and to the Hierarchies, both within the Anthroposophical Society and in the community at large.

May 2008 found us in Foxhollow outside of Louisville, KY for the fourth meeting with Group and Branch representatives. There were 37 participants, including representatives from the national leadership of the Society. We were delighted and honored to have Torin Finser and Marian Leon with us. Torin's contributions wove a thread connecting the Goetheanum to the vessel of our own regional Circle. The theme of the weekend, *Harmonizing our Planetary Soul Types*, explored planetary influences in our group work. We were joined by John Stolfo, eurythmist as an artistic carrier of the weekend.

Columbia Rising! Celebrating the Good Spirit of America was our theme for May 2009 in Dittmer, MO outside of St. Louis. In addition to the exciting research on Columbia as the Spirit of America, presented by Rick Spaulding from Chicago, we came together in celebration of an edited version of Percy MacKaye's *Masque of St. Louis*. The masque is a remarkable Michaelic pageant whereby dark materialism is overcome through courage bestowed from the cosmos. Through exercises coming out of the Foundation Stone Meditation we continued to strengthen our Central Region Vessel.

Heading east once again, we chose Hope Springs Institute in Peebles, OH for our May 2010 annual meeting, *Stars, Stones and Mutuality: Weaving the Social Fabric of the Future*. We took as an impulse for our work together the Steiner's lecture, *Brother/Sisterhood and the Fight for Survival*. Our festival celebration took us out into the beautiful rolling hills of Ohio to create a Songtrail around the Great Serpent Mound. We were led in eurythmy by Connie Michael and speech with Kim Snyder-Vine. It was at this meeting that it was announced Robert Karp and Lori Barian had made the decision to step off the CRC.

Building on a growing collaboration with the Schools Group of the Mid-States Fund Sharing Group our 2011 gathering in Ann Arbor, MI was given the title of *Currency, Community, Culture: Beginning the Conversation* taking up the subject of associative economics. Our invited guest Luigi Morelli introduced the method of Focused Conversation as a tool for engaging a group of individuals in a rich and efficient process for getting to the heart of a topic. A panel of guests shared their efforts toward cultivating regenerative communities. A Songtrail was offered through Nichol's Arboretum

and scene's from Goethe's *Green Snake and Beautiful Lily* were staged with eurythmy and original songs by the entire group of nearly 25. Continuing on our work with Steiner's lecture *Brother/Sisterhood and the Fight for Survival*, we lived with the question 'How can we foster mutuality in our Central Region?' as we build together a future worthy of the human being.

In 2012 we headed south to Little Rock, AR and the beautiful mountain in Petit Jean State Park. Our theme was *Grail of the Central Region: Questing from the Heart*. The local Anthroposophical group in Little Rock found the perfect location, Camp Mitchell, for our weekend which was woven throughout with themes from *Parzival*. An original adaptation of the classic legend and songs set the stage for our pageant on Saturday evening. A Songtrail was led among the grand rocks with special contributions by geologist Becky Stemper from Houston. We engaged in an exercise toward strengthening heart thinking by using gestures to help ask the question, 'What ails thee?' of our fellow human beings.

Who are the current members of the CRC and how did they come to join the Council?

The current membership of the CRC, in order of length of time served, is as follows:

- Marianne Fieber (Ann Arbor, MI) - since 2006
- Mary Louise Hershberger (Fargo, ND) - since 2007
- Dennis Dietzel (Roseville/Twin Cities, MN) - since 2009
- Alberto Loya (Ann Arbor, MI) - since 2010

How are new CRC members selected?

It is essential that members of any council, regional or national, be able to work harmoniously. Both the General and Regional Council are free to select colleagues to bring onto their respective councils. The one exception is the representative from each Regional Council who sits on the General Council (GC). For this, the Society has a "two green lights" system. Both the Regional Council and the GC must approve the regional representative, usually nominated from within the existing Regional Council.

With our ongoing study of the land, people, and spirit of our region, the CRC is attentive to reflecting in our own membership, the membership of our region, both geographically and population-wise. We also prefer to strike a balance of male and female energy. After some admittedly clumsy attempts at recruitment in the first years of our current "millennial initiative", however, we realized that we're not "blind date" material! Carrying Anthroposophy into the entire region requires more careful vessel-building than that.

This is a key reason that the ongoing development of our regional Co-Worker Circle is absolutely essential. In this work with you, it is not a matter of who is and who isn't on the CRC - we're all in it together! And through our work together or "working" and developing relationships over the months and years, we hope that it becomes clear to you and to us who should be part of the Council itself.

This then, is our own adaptation of the "two green lights" system: When there is a vacancy, we solicit and gladly accept nominations to the CRC, reserving the right to choose from among those nominated, whom we feel we can best work with. Likewise, if someone appears on our horizon, we submit them for your approval. Either way, our regional AGM affords us the opportunity to vet candidates and make sure we are all comfortable with the decision.

Because we have been funded entirely by dues and donations to the Anthroposophical Society, budgetary constraints have limited the number of members on the CRC and the scope of our work. In addition to our regional AGM, the cost of bringing 5 or 6 of us together for one face-to-face

planning meeting per year, taps out our current annual allotment of \$6K. We have come to rely heavily on email and conference calls. We have moved to a more frequent communication, the *e-Correspondence*, in an effort to increase the communication opportunities within our region as well as to be more cost-efficient with our limited budget.

As we aim now to expand our regional endeavors to include some larger projects, the active participation of our regional Co-workers will become ever more vital. We are always glad to hear from you: questions, concerns, good news to share, or just general updates from your local area. Please keep the communication flowing!

Do the CRC members have term limits?

Finally there is the issue of term limits. Because we understand ourselves to be an initiative group rather than a governing board, setting arbitrary term limits has not felt “organic” to our way of working. We have felt it more appropriate to trust the natural ebb and flow of destiny that occur within a karmic circle of colleagues. If there are imbalances in our council we would prefer to see these addressed through the kind of open collegial conversations we are fostering at our regional AGM’s rather than through the abstract legalities of term limits. Thus far this approach has served us well. Over the last eight years four members of the CRC have left and three new members have come on. This feels like a healthy balance between continuity and fresh perspectives, especially as our working relationship with the Central Region’s Circle of Co-workers deepens and strengthens.

Past Council Members Include:

- Margaret Runyon (New Orleans, LA)
- Robert Karp (IA - now WI)
- Lori Barian (WI)
- Bart Eddy (MI)
- Michael Holdrege (IL)
- Jenny Floch (OH)
- Susan Stevenson (IL - now PA)
- Phyllis Phillips (TN)
- Jack Michael (OH)
- Nance Marshall (CA)
- Burley Channer (MI)

Current Council Biographies

Marianne’s first connection to the Anthroposophical Society was as an employee of the national office in Chicago, IL in the 1990’s. Having been involved for years in professional theater and having completed the Waldorf administration course, Marianne developed the Songtrails Project, which strives to develop a living connection between human beings and the Spirit of Place, by walking along specific trails, delving into local history and offering songs and verses for the elemental beings. Since May 2005 Marianne has lead *Songtrail* walks and festival events for several CRC gatherings. She is eternally grateful that her research and experience has found a place to flourish in support of the work being done in the Central Region of the Anthroposophical Society.

Mary Louise says the CRC “had her” with the invitation to take a “Journey to the Heart of a New America” in 2003. Her heart responded to this call and her head is still catching up! She attended the subsequent gatherings in Ann Arbor and Chicago as a representative of the Fargo, ND group, The Circle of Friends - an Anthroposophical Fellowship, and eagerly carried this impulse, to awaken the heartland, back home. Wanting, but unable to be a part of the Easter Pilgrimage, she helped

organize a concurrent healing event at the Mississippi headwaters. At the May, 2007 meeting at Camphill Minnesota her name was offered to the council for consideration.

Dennis is the Central Region representative on the Society's General Council. He has been living and working with anthroposophy since 1976. His wife, Marianne, was studying teacher training from 1976-77 at the Detroit Waldorf Institute, where Dennis attended many lectures with Hans Gebert and Werner Glas. During this time Dennis studied saxophone with Bruce Weinberger and Sigurd Rascher (Sigurd was a guiding light for Dennis in his early years of discovery in anthroposophy). Dennis spent 1988-94 as a farmer and houseparent at Camphill Village Minnesota, where he developed a deep appreciation of biodynamic agriculture and the rhythm of the festivals through the seasons. He is currently a biodynamic gardener and beekeeper. He has also been active as a board member and parent in Waldorf schools (he and Marianne have two grown sons, Kevin and Soren, and a daughter, Nina, who died in a car accident in 1996 in Harlemville.) His interest lies in developing a common sense approach to spiritual science that is grounded in the world with clear thinking and, at the same time, allows the imagination to expand beyond what is experienced with the five senses. Dennis has been a Class Holder in the School for Spiritual Science since 2005 in the Twin Cities and in Viroqua, Wisconsin.

Alberto first met anthroposophy in 2002, through the friendly members of the Basic Books Study Group, which meets weekly at the Rudolf Steiner House in Ann Arbor. The group was lucky to have Ernst Katz around, sharing his various charts and insights to help when it wandered off course. He was inspired. Alberto first met the CRC at the 2003 "Journey to the Heart of a New America" conference in Detroit (during the big blackout). He also joined the CRC in the pilgrimage to New Orleans in 2006, soon after Hurricane Katrina, and felt great affinity to their mission and style of work. We have met in several other conferences and events, and our friendship has matured over the years. Alberto feels honored to have been nominated to join the CRC, and likes the balance the CRC team achieves of having fun and doing serious spiritual and community building work.

Activity History

2002 - East Troy, WI

2003 - *Journey to the Heart of a New America*, Detroit, MI

2004 - Ann Arbor, MI

2005 - *Living Map Festival*, Chicago, IL

2006 - *Healing Pilgrimage to the Gulf Coast*, from St. Louis, MO - Gulf Coast

2007 - *Embodying the Heart Mission of America in our Anthroposophical Communities*, Camphill Village, Sauk Centre, MN

2008 - *Harmonizing our Planetary Soul Types*, Fox Hollow Farm, Crestwood, KY

2009 - *Columbia Rising! Celebrating the Good Spirit of America*, Dittmer, MO

2010 - *Stars, Stones and Mutuality: Weaving the Social Fabric of the Future*, Peebles, OH

2011 - *Currency Community Culture: Beginning the Conversation*, Ann Arbor, MI

2012 - *Grail of the Central Region: Questing from the Heart*, Little Rock, AK

Collaborative Participation

2012 - *Straight from the Heart(land): Building Regenerative Communities*, Twin Cities, MN

- Partnering with the Great Lakes Region of AWSNA and School's Fund Sharing Group of the Mid-States Shared Gifting Group