

Our Great Responsibility:

■ Rediscovered Wisdom from A.A.'s Co-Founder

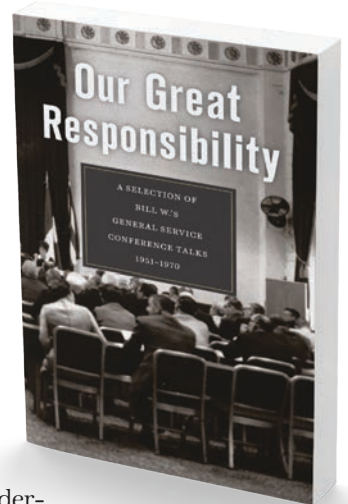
During the course of 20 General Service Conferences, Bill W. gave more than 33 talks, 16 of which are now gathered in the new book *Our Great Responsibility: A Selection of Bill W.'s General Service Conference Talks, 1951–1970*, which is scheduled for publication in early May 2019. Not only does *Our Great Responsibility* represent the first time these talks have been made available in print form to the general reader, but it is also the first original book from Alcoholics Anonymous in over 30 years.

“The talks included in *Our Great Responsibility* capture a clear picture of Bill’s vision for the future of A.A. and pose questions that are still quite relevant today,” says Greg T., G.S.O. general manager. “They also give fresh insights into A.A. history and the enduring purpose of the General Service Conference.”

The discovery of what Greg calls “a gold mine” of material began in the G.S.O. Archives in January 2016. Discussions at G.S.O. and on the General Service Board prompted an exploration of ideas for new book publications based on making archival materials available

to the Fellowship. “We have a massive collection of audio recordings of all Conferences,” nonalcoholic GSO Archivist Michelle Mirza says, “but we literally didn’t know what was included in some of the recordings, or what shape they were in.”

Michelle hired Susan U., former G.S.O. staffer, to undertake the project of indexing the Conference tapes. “Susan had been to Conferences for over 30 years,” Michelle notes, “so she knew what to look for.” Susan brought Bill’s talks to Michelle’s attention. “Listening to Bill’s Conference talks was a revelation,” Michelle reports. “There are Conferences where Bill would reveal a nugget of A.A. information that is not stated or revealed anywhere else. He might go into detail in responses to a simple question about A.A. history. We realized that if A.A.



Bill W. speaking at a General Service Conference, circa 1950.

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Note on anonymity: From time to time in this publication full names and/or pictures of G.S.O. employees, Class A trustees and other nonalcoholics are used. The anonymity of A.A. members is maintained, as they are identified throughout by first name and last initial only.

members could read these talks as essays that captured Bill's voice and meaning, they might gain deep insights into A.A. Looking further into it, we discovered that the talks were for the most part not published in full — some excerpts and summaries, but mainly not in full."

Michelle presented her findings to Greg, who requested that a book proposal be developed. The tapes of Bill's Conference talks were sent out to be transcribed — a complicated and time-consuming process that involved isolating Bill's presentations from long audio tracks, and then having Archives staff painstakingly verify the transcriptions for accuracy. After that, the book proposal was developed under the auspices of A.A. World Services. David R., publishing director, says that it was "particularly thrilling to participate in the early stages of putting this book together."

David gathered a team that included Michelle; Eleanor W., the now-retired A.A.W.S. managing editor; Ames S., her successor; and Julia D., A.A.W.S. associate editor. The proposal for the book was reviewed in June 2016 by the A.A.W.S. board, which forwarded it to the trustees' Archives Committee, which in turn forwarded it to the 2017 Conference Committee on Archives, which approved the development of the manuscript for the book. When the manuscript for the book was completed, *Our Great Responsibility* was approved with minor editorial changes by an Advisory Action of the 2018 General Service Conference. As well as Bill's talks, it includes an introduction and a preface; talks by Lois Wilson, Bernard Smith and Dr. John Norris; extensive chapter notes; three appendices; and over 60 archival images.

People who worked on preparing the book found themselves moved by reading these long-archived talks of Bill's. Robert P., a former delegate and longtime freelance translator for G.S.O. (he has translated such works as *The Language of the Heart* and *The Twelve Concepts of World Service*), comments that he felt "overwhelmed in a positive way" as he translated *Our Great Responsibility*

into French. He immediately "heard" Bill's voice: "I recognized his sadness at times [as Bill recounts the conflicts surrounding the creation of the Conference], but that just makes this book even more human. It is a beautiful story."

John de Stefano, the nonalcoholic G.S.O. staff translator who has translated *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, *A.A. Comes of Age*, *Living Sober* and other important A.A. works, oversaw a team of Spanish-language translators with whom he rendered *Our Great Responsibility* into Spanish. "Having several translators available to translate the different voices in the book was a real bonus," John says. "The talks," he adds, "seemed often to be partly improvised and were extremely idiomatic. Bill might start a sentence with reference to one set phrase or familiar saying and, through a series of apparently impromptu connections, finish the sentence with another — which can make the work challenging to translate, but equally rewarding."

"I was struck by how contemporary the issues that he addresses were," says Julia D., who did much of the editing on the book. "Bill focuses on inclusion and reminds us that we are all human and that we often see things in different ways — as in his talk 'Variations on the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions.' He also had a very impressive handle on how the outside world viewed A.A."

The editing process was complex. "The goal was to stay true to the exact verbiage as much possible," Julia says, "using punctuation and minimal editing to untangle long sentences from talks that Bill mostly made from notes. We tried, too, to retain the rhythms of his speech — to clearly capture his voice. A lot of it was fine tuning. It was a challenge, but a pleasure. I was really struck by Bill's humor and his ability to poke fun at himself."

"Bill has always been the most significant A.A. voice for keeping the doors of A.A. wide open," Ames S. adds, "and for me, as I read these talks, the main benefit is that we go back to Bill himself — give him back his platform, in a sense — and can hear him describe in his own words how broad the expanse of Alcoholics Anonymous really is."



■ The Hands of A.A.

For members of Alcoholics Anonymous who are Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing, the language of the heart is often communicated through American Sign Language (ASL), and A.A. members across the U.S. and Canada are trying to ensure that the A.A. message is carried to those alcoholics who may not be able to “hear” it in the same way that others do.

Norma A. is alternate DCM for District 3c of South West Texas Area 68 and previously served as district and area treatment committee chair. In 2010, she and some other A.A.s from Austin and the surrounding A.A. community helped to set up the Deaf Access Committee (DAC), a service committee serving A.A. members who are Deaf, and comprised of both Deaf and hearing A.A. members. Norma was also instrumental in the establishment of the area’s accessibilities committee in 2018.

Sharing at an area workshop in January of last year, Norma made a powerful plea on behalf of alcoholics who are Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing as well as other members with accessibility concerns: “The bottom line is, are we fulfilling our primary purpose? If not, what is standing in the way? Sometimes it is information — available resources and materials — and sometimes it is our attitudes. We should acknowledge that the need for accessibility is real and growing.... Not only do we want to demonstrate that we are a Fellowship of equals that believes all members should have access, but we are missing out on a huge amount of valuable experience from A.A. members who are not allowed full participation because of whatever barrier keeps them from being a part of the Fellowship.... Can we look past the white cane, the wheelchair, the brace or the interpreter, and see the A.A. member who just wants to be part of a home group?”

One of the speakers at the workshop was Deb B., a Deaf member in need of ASL translation at A.A. meetings. Deb had moved to Austin from another state and was counting on funding for interpreters through a government agency, so when the funding fell through, she needed help. This is what prompted Deb and Norma, along with other Deaf and hearing A.A. members, to form the DAC in 2010. Funded by local A.A. groups through voluntary contributions and supported by the district and local intergroup, the DAC pays for interpreters so A.A. members who are Deaf can attend the meetings of their choice.

The DAC found certified and available interpreters primarily through organizations on websites. They negotiated a deal and drew up a contract. The DAC also brought an interpreter on board who liaises with other interpreters, coordinating and scheduling them, conducting workshops with signers to make sure they learn the intricacies of A.A. lingo, as well as the Steps and Traditions. Without a clear understanding of these unique colloquialisms and practices, vital information might be interpreted inaccurately and a person who is



Deaf could lose the meaning of a whole meeting.

The DAC’s seven years of hard work building awareness of the needs of the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing community paid off recently at the Area 68 Fall Conference and Voting Assembly, hosted by District 3b/3c in Bee Cave, near Austin. The theme of the assembly, held in November 2018, was “We Are Going to Know a New Freedom,” and a vote had been scheduled to determine whether an accessibilities committee would be formed.

As providence would have it, while it is an ongoing practice to have a meeting with A.A. speakers at the assembly, it is not usually someone like Melinni T., an alcoholic who is Deaf and who delivered her A.A. talk in ASL.

For the most part, Melinni’s was a typical alcoholic story. Signing from the podium, she shared that as a teenager and young person, she drank, went to bars and alienated others due to her alcoholic behavior. She was finally asked to leave home and began living in her car. As she described being both Deaf *and* drunk, her particular challenges were evident. When Melinni finally asked for help from her family, she was sent to a treatment center, where she eventually found recovery. And here is where her story changes significantly from the experience of most A.A. members: Melinni knew no other sober alcoholics who were also Deaf, and so she encountered a language barrier. Eventually, she found a few individuals who could sign with her about recovery, but there were no interpreted meetings available anywhere near her. Melinni and another friend who is Deaf went from meeting to meeting with a sign: “I am Deaf. I want to be sober. Please help. Can you provide an interpreter?”

She related that finally one A.A. group collected enough money to hire an interpreter, and, in her desire to stay sober, she joined that group. Later, she moved to Austin and found more interpreted meetings and good sponsorship, and began to understand the importance of the Big Book. Listening to other recovering alcoholics, working the Steps and hearing valuable A.A. experience made a huge difference. She began to grow and change, and through the DAC found a way to serve others like her who need interpretation, becoming the interpreter coordinator and scheduler for the DAC, and later its chair.

Providing a concrete example of the willingness of

many A.A. members to offer services to those who need them, as Melinni addressed the assembly, her message was amplified by the *trilingual* interpretation of the meeting: one interpreter translated Melinni's sharing from ASL to English for those who did not know sign language, and the area bilingual committee chair then translated the English version of Melinni's ASL talk into Spanish for the Spanish-speaking members in the audience — a striking example of inclusivity for all attendees. Melinni's message put a face to the question of developing an accessibility committee, and when the vote was held the following day, the proposal to start a new service committee passed with substantial unanimity — more than a two-thirds majority.

Area 68's accessibility committee now provides a wide range of information and services; makes surveys available to assess needs; helps A.A. groups become aware of accessibility issues at meetings; disseminates Conference-approved material in Braille, ASL, large print and other accessible formats; hosts workshops; cooperates with other committees; shares guidelines on reducing barriers; works with professionals; offers informational material for doing accessibility work and starting a new committee; examines exclusionary attitudes; and gives reports on ongoing activities.

Shortly after the formation of the accessibility committee, another new entity was born from this heightened awareness of the barriers some alcoholics face: the A.A. Deaf Intergroup of Central Texas (AADI), the only such entity in Texas and possibly the world. The AADI has a calendar showing 15-20 meetings monthly inter-

preted in the Austin area and also has one meeting that is conducted entirely in ASL — the New Freedom Group, to which one man recently made a two-hour drive, so critical was his need for a signed meeting.

There is now a much stronger Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing presence in Austin's A.A. community. Members who are Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing regularly attend meetings, become a part of home groups, sponsor and are sponsored, and participate in service.

The A.A. Guidelines on Accessibility for All Alcoholics (MG-16, available from G.S.O.) state, "Respect for the dignity of others is the foundation for all our efforts to carry the message to alcoholics with diverse needs, with emphasis on identification rather than on how we are different. As one A.A. member who is Deaf put it, 'I'm just an alcoholic, like everyone else here. I have the same need to be a 'worker among workers' and not be singled out for special treatment. If you can just make the program available to me, I'll do what I have to do to work it.'"

There are now 283 accessibility committees throughout the United States and Canada, with new committees forming all the time. The increase of these committees makes A.A.'s Responsibility Statement more potent than ever. For, when anyone, anywhere reaches out for help, the hand — or in the case of alcoholics who are Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing, the *hands* — of A.A. will always be there.

For additional information and shared experience about how A.A. members across the U.S. and Canada are continuing to make the A.A. message accessible to all alcoholics, contact G.S.O.'s Accessibilities assignment.

■ Cuban Health Ministry Opens Doors to Alcoholics Anonymous

From November 7 through 9, 2018, almost 100 doctors, addiction specialists, social workers, nurses and medical students gathered for the Third International Meeting Against Drug Addiction, held in the city of Guantánamo, Guantánamo Province, Cuba. They came from Spain, the Dominican Republic and Colombia, as well as from the Cuban provinces of Havana, Cienfuegos, Holguín, Granma and Santiago de Cuba.

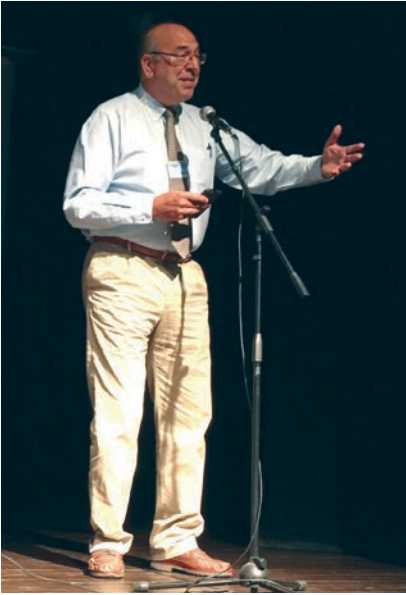
And, for the first time, Alcoholics Anonymous was there, invited by the Cuban Health Ministry to participate. Attending from the United States and Canada were Dr. Peter Luongo, the Class A (nonalcoholic) trustee of A.A.'s U.S./Canada General Service Board who has taught at Johns Hopkins University and whose experience in the alcoholism treatment field extends for over 30 years; Scott H., Class B trustee-at-large/Canada; and Julio E., staff member at the General Service Office. They were accompanied by Hernán M., former La Viña editor (2001-2007), who acted as translator.

"I think all of us recognized that this was historic," Dr. Luongo says, referring to the invitation from the

Health Ministry. A.A. in Cuba has an estimated 1,700 members and 100 groups, and this was a great step toward more active and effective relationships with Cuban professionals in the healthcare arena.

A.A. has made progress in Cuba since the first A.A. group — the Dream Group (Grupo Sueño) — met in Havana in 1993. For a number of years, G.S.O. has been providing literature to the Cuban General Service Office via the International desk, sending publications including *Daily Reflections* and *As Bill Sees It*, as well as literature for Cuba's public information (P.I.), cooperation with the professional community (C.P.C.), accessibility and corrections committees. Additionally, in March of 2017, Greg T. became the first general manager of the U.S./Canada General Service Office to visit the country, responding to an invitation from the Cuban General Service Board to attend their 18th General Service Conference.

Scott H., who accompanied Greg on the 2017 trip and saw "the hunger for A.A." there, believes that the invitation "is definitely a step in the right direction — maybe even a tipping point" for A.A. in Cuba. He and



Class A Trustee Dr. Peter Luongo delivers talk on ways A.A. and the medical profession can work together to help address the problem of alcoholism.

Dr. Luongo both credit Dr. Anselma Betancourt Pulsan, the Cuban alcoholism specialist who was chair of the organizing committee for the conference, as being instrumental in securing the invitation from the Health Ministry.

A highlight of the conference was Dr. Luongo's talk, "Healthcare Professionals and A.A.," in which he outlined the ways that A.A. and the medical profession can work together

to help address the problem of alcoholism. He pointed out that, despite his years of training on addiction, he never really learned anything about alcoholism until he met sober alcoholics who were in A.A. and working in the treatment field.

"I learned from them how important it is to incorporate Alcoholics Anonymous into the way we treat alcoholics," he says. "This is what I tried to pass on to the audience at the conference. I was speaking to psychiatrists, social workers, physicians and nurses who might very naturally ask, 'What value does it add? What can this Fellowship do for patients?' And my answer is, 'A.A. can be an essential part of your treatment plan.'"

"It was a very positive step for Peter to be invited to present," Scott adds. "With his Johns Hopkins teaching experience and his expertise in treating addiction, Peter was very credible to the Cuban audience. His talk and the response perfectly demonstrated why we have Class A trustees."

Another important factor in the conference was that members of Cuba's A.A. community were there as registered participants. At one venue, A.A. members spoke to the professionals about how A.A. works and shared briefly about their personal experiences. A.A. meetings were even held in the empty offices of the Health Ministry — a further example of the growing cooperation between health professionals and A.A.

Scott H. says it became clear to him in informal talks with conference attendees that, with the exception of Dr. Pulsan and a few others, there was limited knowledge of A.A. among some of the professionals present. One participant inquired of Scott if he, as a sober alcoholic, could at least drink wine at family celebrations. "But then a young medical student took me aside and asked

me if I knew anyone who could help her uncle in Miami, an active alcoholic. And I thought, 'Yes, the connection is being made.'" This was further reinforced when the G.S.O. contingent passed out A.A. literature they had brought with them. "It was almost a stampede for the pamphlets," Scott says. "I don't think it took five seconds and they were gone."

Without doubt, an important step was taken in Cuba with this conference to enhance cooperation between A.A. and health professionals, to the enduring benefit of suffering alcoholics throughout Cuba and those professionals who can often point them toward sobriety.

■ Anyone, Anywhere: The Shining Ideal

In July 2018, as is the custom, a Sharing Session was held during the weekend-long meeting of A.A.'s General Service Board — a session whose topic, like many of those that have come before it, was intended to draw a focus on matters of concern throughout the Fellowship. Its theme was "Love and Tolerance of Others Is Our Code — Philosophy or Practice?" and two presenters spoke on the related topics "Making the Doors Wider in A.A." and "Are We Inclusive?"

Pacific regional trustee Kathi F. spoke on the first topic, sharing some of her experience with the idea of inclusivity at the group level. She noted, "I was part of a very active and large home group that met seven days a week and had a very wide mixture of folks in terms of age, religion, culture and race. It seemed the most welcoming group you could possibly find. One day a young lady at her first meeting was asked to read 'How It Works' and introduced herself as an addict. A man with over 30 years stood up and publicly told her she did not belong in A.A. and stormed out. Fortunately, others in the meeting spoke with her and gave her the opportunity to find out for herself if she was an alcoholic. Well, she is, and she has been an active member ever since."

"At one of the group's business meetings," she also related, "there was a motion made to close with the Serenity Prayer rather than the Lord's Prayer, and this passed in the 40-person business meeting unanimously. Prior to the next meeting there were Facebook postings telling people to show up to the business meeting because 'they' were trying to take God out of A.A. The following month's business meeting had over 100 angry people show up and overturn the motion. What was said was, 'If you don't like the Lord's Prayer, get out.'"

In closing, Kathi offered this suggestion: "Even though our doors are wide open, we must ask ourselves who is *not* here and *why*, finding out how they would like to be approached and fitting ourselves to be of service to those who are still suffering."

G.S.O. staffer Clement C., an African American, spoke

on the second topic, “Are We Inclusive?” He shared that he would guess “each of us would have a separate answer to this ongoing question, which has been on the agenda of Alcoholics Anonymous since its beginnings.” He talked about the racism he experienced prior to his arrival in A.A., as one of the first wave of students to integrate schools in the Midwest. Once in A.A., he got sober at an all-white meeting and acquired a sponsor who was white. When he became a G.S.R. and attended his first area assembly, he called his sponsor to complain that there were no people of color at the assembly — to which his sponsor replied, “But *you’re* there.” At that point, Clement realized, his “journey of service had begun.”

Tradition Three frames the doorway to Alcoholics Anonymous. The doorway is broad, and, as Bill W. noted in a 1943 letter, all alcoholics should have the same opportunity to step inside — “that is the shining ideal,” he wrote. Most A.A. members would have no disagreement with that, yet Alcoholics Anonymous can always do more to help achieve this “shining ideal” when it comes to reaching out — as Kathi suggested — to those who are not here and those who are still suffering.

Bill seemed to understand this. In the same 1943 letter, he made it clear that the issue of race was the exception to his belief that A.A. is “the most democratic society in the world.” This came in part from personal experience. He had tried as early as 1940 to invite two black alcoholics to attend an all-white meeting in New York, only to be taken aback by the uproar that ensued between whites who believed that African Americans should be allowed to attend and those who objected to their presence. A compromise was reached whereby blacks could go to meetings as “observers,” but this was ultimately an unworkable stopgap. As Bill wrote, the issue of racial prejudice within A.A. “falls grievously short of our ideal.”

By the mid-1940s, African Americans had formed black-only groups in St. Louis, Chicago and, notably, Washington, D.C., where Dr. James S., the first black alcoholic to get his story into the Big Book, co-founded the Washington Colored Group with the help of a white alcoholic named Charlie G. (It was later renamed the Cosmopolitan Group, to indicate that all races were welcome.) During the ensuing years, some groups slowly began to integrate, but a separation remained that has troubled many in A.A. The question — then as now — was what to do about reaching out to the African-American community in light of the fact that A.A. operates on the basis of attraction rather than promotion. During another General Service Board Sharing Session held more than three decades ago in 1986 on the topic “Carrying the A.A. Message in the Black Community,” Garrett T., an African American and then current Northeast regional trustee, shared, “The A.A. message is very much alive... and growing by leaps and bounds” in the 95 percent black section of Washington, D.C., where his group met. He emphasized that African Americans had, from the very beginning, been getting

sober and carrying the message — primarily to other African Americans. From the vantage point of his 30 years of sobriety, integration was beginning to happen, in part because of demographics: more whites and blacks were moving to the suburbs and thus sharing the same neighborhoods and meetings. But it was also happening because African Americans were becoming involved in general service.

Garrett closed by saying that serious problems remained, however, and while he believed that A.A. was capable of becoming more welcoming, it had not happened yet.

Fast forward to 2019, and there have been only eight black trustees in A.A.’s 80-year history. And, though the number of black delegates to the General Service Conference has been increasing, many African Americans, among other groups, can still feel excluded or set apart in A.A.

While it may seem an intractable challenge that has remained with A.A. for its entire lifespan, there are, if not solutions, steps that can be taken to insure that the hand of A.A. continues reaching out to anyone, anywhere.

Harold G., former Class B general service trustee from the 1980s and sober for nearly 50 years, now lives in Annapolis, Maryland, but went to some of his first meetings on the south shore of Staten Island, where there were few blacks. He adds, “In general, I was received very well. You would sometimes go into a meeting and get the sense that people may not have been happy to see you, but no one said anything.”

Harold feels that more African-American-focused literature is needed to reach more black alcoholics. Outreach via C.P.C. into treatment centers and rehabs would also help. “But the challenge of integrating A.A. is ongoing,” he says. “It’s the nature of recovery and the dynamics of the groups themselves. But when I got sober, I had a very good sponsor who encouraged me to go to meetings no matter where I was or what the racial makeup might be. And that was good advice.”

Arnold R., former Class B general service trustee, believes that one of the issues is that many African Americans turn to their churches, rather than A.A., if they have a problem with alcohol. “But in my home group,” he says, “we invite the pastor to open meetings. We say, ‘If you send people down to this basement, we will give you back better parishioners on Sunday.’”

Francis Brisbane is a former Class A (nonalcoholic) trustee who advises fellow African Americans who tell her they are experiencing problems with their drinking to try A.A. meetings — a variety of A.A. meetings. “I say to them, ‘Go to a meeting, see how it is run, see what’s said there.’ Frankly, if a person can’t find multicultural or multiracial meetings, they haven’t tried hard enough. They haven’t gone far enough. And sometimes it’s up to people of color to help other people find the right meetings. At its heart, I do think A.A. welcomes people of all creeds and all races.”

There are hopeful signs of progress. Having been a member of the G.S.O. staff for four years, Clement says, “Our current alcoholic staff at G.S.O. is the most racially diverse in the history of the General Service Office. Likewise, there were record numbers of African-American delegates at the General Service Conference in the last two years.” However, problems of inclusivity persist, and even when Clement travels to A.A. events in geographic areas with diverse populations, he rarely sees significant numbers of people of color.

Sandra W. is an African-American G.S.O. staff member who got sober in New York, beginning in 1990. “Race never impacted my sobriety in any meaningful way,” she says. “I was always comfortable wherever I went in the city, in terms of meetings. I never let race stop me from drinking. And I like to think that the same held true of getting sober.”

However, as a G.S.O. staff member, Sandra travels around the country and sees A.A. “in many forms and sizes.” She adds, “Very often, I will be the only person of color in the room. On one of my early staff trips, the person who met me at the airport expressed surprise that I was African American. I was on another staff trip when a member told me at dinner, ‘We can’t seem to get any blacks in our meeting.’ I chose to use it as an opportunity to offer some ideas on reaching out to the African-American community.”

Sandra believes that reaching out to African-American alcoholics via literature placed in churches, barbershops, beauty parlors and other places is something that might work. “The most important thing, no matter what a person’s color, is letting them know that A.A. is there for them.”

In his talk at the July General Service Board Sharing

Session, Clement outlined a number of steps that might prove effective in reaching out to African-American alcoholics. These included ongoing columns in Grapevine, *Box 4-5-9* and *About A.A.*, which could provide a platform for discussions about inclusion throughout the Fellowship. He suggested updating the pamphlet “A.A. for the Black and African-American Alcoholic” as some of our other pamphlets have recently been updated to reflect current experience. Inclusivity (of all types) could be a standing topic at Regional Forums and International Convention workshops, and a consideration in the choice of trustees, nontrustee directors and appointed committee members. In fact, a new workshop is being introduced at Regional Forums entitled “Fostering Participation in A.A.: Who’s Not in the Room?” and the statement that routinely announces openings on the General Service Board includes the wording, “In seeking applications for vacancies in Alcoholics Anonymous, the Fellowship is committed to creating a large file of qualified applicants that reflects the inclusiveness and diversity of A.A. itself.”

C.P.C. service committees also have a role to play in trying to reach professionals who work with minority populations. In 2019 G.S.O. is coordinating with local C.P.C. committees to staff informational exhibits at several professional conferences such as those of the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW), the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement (NOBLE) and the National Association of Blacks in Criminal Justice (NABCJ).

Ultimately, Sandra says, “I’m excited that we are talking about this issue — not only talking about it, but putting some small action items on the table. I believe we are beginning to have honest discussions.”

Get Ready!

■ International A.A. Convention: July 2-5, 2020, Detroit, MI

An animated invitation for the 2020 International A.A. Convention taking place in Detroit, July 2-5, 2020 is now available for viewing and download on the 2020 International Convention page of G.S.O.’s website, www.aa.org. The invitation is available in three different time-lengths for ease of viewing and sharing (1 minute and 45 seconds, 45 seconds and 20 seconds). Please take a look and pass it on! Enthusiasm is building for the convention and we don’t want anyone to miss out on A.A.’s 85th birthday celebration with the theme “Love and Tolerance Is Our Code.” See you in Detroit!



Archives Section

■ Through the Years

It's cinematic, really. In 1945, a serviceman on a destroyer reads a magazine article mentioning A.A. that impresses him. In 1957, a woman goes to a therapy appointment and is given her A.A. marching orders. Over a half-century later — when she is 92 and he is 100 — their separate paths to sobriety converge with a call to A.A.'s General Service Office.

In 1945, Bob M. was lost at sea — not in the literal sense, but the alcoholic one. For years, he knew his drinking was a problem, but like most problem drinkers he had no clue there was a way out. While on duty in the South Pacific, Bob was in the habit of exchanging books with other servicemen to pass the interminable stretches of time. In one of the swaps, he received a copy of a 1944 *Reader's Digest* magazine. In it was an article about an A.A. member who worked with so-called hopeless alcoholics. Bob liked the article and found it “really interesting.” “But,” he adds, “I didn't pay much attention, as it didn't have much to do with me.”

By the time his tour ended in 1947, Bob's drinking had progressed considerably, and though he didn't yet know the lingo, he hit bottom. Shortly after his discharge he reconnected with an old friend who told him he had become a member of A.A. Bob says that when he heard those two letters, he “lit up like a Christmas tree” because he remembered the *Reader's Digest* article. It was his moment of clarity: “I was amazed at how quickly that story popped back into my head — maybe because now I knew I needed it.” Bob asked his friend where he could find an A.A. meeting and was told there was one on Friday night not far from where Bob lived. Bob learned of the meeting on a Monday, and he still wonders how he did not drink the entire week leading up to the meeting. He didn't have a car, and so he walked a mile and a half to what would become his home group (he was very impressed with the men who spoke). The friend who brokered the deal became his sponsor and remained so for 39 years, seeing Bob through two brief relapses along the way. In 1969, after his second slip — and at the behest of his sponsor — Bob attended a sober retreat, which marked the start of 48 years of uninterrupted sobriety.

Early in the Fellowship's burgeoning relationship with the press, several newspaper and magazine articles about A.A. had a powerful effect on thousands of

alcoholics suffering in isolation from each other and led many of them to the rooms of recovery. Significant were “Alcoholics and God” in *Liberty Magazine*; the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* series of articles on A.A. in 1939; a *Houston Press* article in 1940; and the well-known 1941 Jack Alexander piece in the *Saturday Evening Post*. In 1944, *Reader's Digest* published the article (which Bob M. read a year later) that was originally turned down by the editors due to their belief that such scant coverage could not significantly impact such a large issue. When they reconsidered and ran the story, over 3,000 requests for information about A.A. found their way to A.A. “Headquarters.” The article focused on the work of Edward McG. (his full name was used in the original article), director of the city's new Alcoholic Therapy Bureau. In his own words, McG. (a “reformed drunkard”) observed that perhaps his success rate

with other alcoholics (75 percent) was due to his own experience as “one who understands, from experience, the hell these men go through.” He revealed that he was a member of Alcoholics Anonymous and credited A.A. with his sobriety. The title of the piece came from one of McG.'s regulars who — after hearing McG.'s nightmarish story and then seeing the healthy, happy and helpful human being in front him — thought, “Maybe I can do it, too.”

In 1957, Frances B. was in therapy, where, often saturated in alcohol, she recounted her many woes. Although Frances says that A.A. and psychiatry “weren't friends at that time,” serendipitously, her psychiatrist believed strongly in the Twelve Steps as a treatment for alcoholism. He was blunt: “Frances, you cannot drink, and I cannot help you unless you get sober.” Frances protested, explaining what a bore she would be if she didn't drink. (After getting sober, she says, “I realized just how much of a bore I had been when drinking!”) So, Frances shared her dilemma with a neighbor who said she'd ask a sober friend to come and speak with her. At first the friend hesitated, but when she herself had a strong urge to drink, she decided, in true A.A. fashion, to go ahead and make the Twelfth Step call. When she saw Frances's trepidation, the woman made her mission clear: “I don't give a [hoot] if you never go to a meeting, I'm here for myself.”

Unhappily, Frances did not go to a meeting, and three years later she was completely lost. She was now living in terror that she would end up on the Bowery. She remembered her conversation with her neighbor's friend and thought she'd “take a chance” and finally give A.A. a try. She was even willing to “get over the God business” to do it and made the call. Some A.A. members came to her home and brought her to Intergroup, where many



shared their stories. Frances has not had a drink since. Her psychiatrist supported her in an unusual way, saying he would only see her during her first year of sobriety if it were a true emergency because he wanted her to get a good base in the Fellowship. Frances said that seeing wet drunks at meetings was what really kept her sober — that it was a vivid reminder of what awaited her if she picked up. Frances is now sober 60 years.

So, what is it like now for a nonagenarian and a centenarian in A.A.? Bob still reads a good deal, but these days it's mostly the Big Book, and he's supplanted the *Reader's Digest* with Grapevine, he claims, adding, "I even had an article published when I was 97!" Meanwhile, being a stickler for finely turned prose, Frances is not as big a fan of the Big Book, but she admits, "At least the people who worked on it were sober." She prefers *Daily Reflections*. Once, when she was anxious and unable to sleep, she called an A.A. friend at five in the morning who was up baking cookies. Her friend read to her from the pocket-sized book, and it immediately settled her down.

Bob still "gets around," going to several meetings a week despite recently breaking his femur: "A group of guys come three times a week and scoops me up!" Frances is blind and has a heart condition, so she, too, depends on the kindness of friends to read to her and take her to meetings, usually six a week. She acknowledges gratefully, "The program people are really there."

Not long ago, Bob called G.S.O., curious if there were any other 100-year-old alcoholics. The "archive gal" got right back to him with a candidate (Frances) who, though eight years shy of the parameters Bob had set, was the next oldest A.A. member who had contacted the office. They have been sharing ever since, and Bob is most grateful for his new "phone pal."

It's the oldest story in the A.A. book, two alcoholics helping each other by sharing honestly and openly with one another — with considerable thanks, of course, to a daring editor and an insightful physician in the middle of the last century who pushed them both toward sobriety — and, unknowingly, toward each other.

■ Special Scheduling Note — Box 4-5-9 Summer Edition

Traditionally, the summer edition of *Box 4-5-9* contains a summary report on the proceedings of A.A.'s annual General Service Conference, along with a sampling of Advisory Actions resulting from the committee deliberations held during Conference week. This year, as the Conference will take place at the end of May rather than the end of April, the summer issue will be slightly delayed in order to allow for timely reporting on the Conference. Normally available in May, the summer edition is now scheduled for publication and distribution in early June.

■ New Publisher to Join AA Grapevine

No stranger to the inner (and outer) workings of AA Grapevine, Albin Z. took over as publisher and chief executive of AA Grapevine, Inc., on February 19, 2019. A longtime resident of Long Beach, New York, Albin got sober in 1989 and quickly got active, serving as group literature chair and clean-up person and taking on a monthly commitment as chairperson of meetings at a New York City rehab and a local detox. In later years, his service continued on the Grapevine Editorial Advisory Board (2006-08); as a nontrustee director on the Grapevine Board (2009-13); as a Class B (alcoholic) trustee to the General Service Board (2013-16); and, most recently, as G.S.O.'s director of administration and services (2016-19).



In addition to his broad knowledge and familiarity with the A.A. service structure and the relationship between A.A.'s three corporate entities (the General Service Board, AA Grapevine, Inc. and A.A. World Services, Inc.), Albin spent 30 years in the publishing industry, most recently as associate publisher of a newspaper company headquartered in New Rochelle, New York. There, he managed a staff of 32 full-time and 14 part-time employees who put out four community weeklies, a Spanish-language daily, a New York City trade weekly and numerous other publications — experience that will serve him well with the many publications and platforms of Grapevine and La Viña.

Regarding some of the challenges that lie ahead, Albin notes, "Throughout the Fellowship, we need to better understand and manage the changing nature of communication in this digital world we live in and the opportunities these new pathways present." With the ever-increasing use of videos and social media platforms, how the A.A. message is transmitted and received is a constantly changing arena in communications. Yet, at its core, says Albin, Grapevine is very simple. "We share the experience, strength and hope of A.A. members — stories of individual recovery — that create identification, exchange vital information about working the program, and amplify the very heartbeat of today's A.A."

Says Cate W., chairperson of AA Grapevine, Inc., "We are sure that the dedication to his job, colleagues, board members and the A.A. Fellowship that Albin brings with him, along with his wealth of experience, will help ensure the continued success of AA Grapevine, Inc."

With characteristic candor and good humor, Albin notes, "I expect life as I have known it is about to change dramatically — and I look forward to it!"

■ Opening for AA Grapevine Nontrustee Director

AA Grapevine's Corporate Board has started its search to fill the vacancy for one nontrustee director, which will open following the 2020 General Service Conference. Interested A.A. members are encouraged to submit a résumé. Basic qualifications for this position are: a minimum of seven years of continuous sobriety with a working knowledge of the A.A. service structure and familiarity with *The A.A. Service Manual*; ability to work with others in a group conscience setting; experience serving on boards of directors (nonprofit experience is most helpful); knowledge of organizational strategic planning, problem-solving and implementation of change; experience with organizational management and finances; and familiarity and experience with publications media, including new communication technologies and methodologies. The time commitment required is significant and includes availability to attend four planning meetings of the AA Grapevine Board, as well as attendance at three General Service Board weekends, which include quarterly AA Grapevine Board meetings and meetings of trustees' committees (to which corporate board directors are appointed). Trustees' committees may also include conference calls between in-person meetings. In addition, directors attend the General Service Conference for one week in April and may be called upon to represent AA Grapevine at Regional Forums or other A.A. functions. In seeking applications for all vacancies in A.A., the Fellowship is committed to creating a large applicant file of qualified persons, which reflects the inclusive-

ness and diversity of Alcoholics Anonymous. Résumés should be sent to Janet Bryan, operations manager, AA Grapevine, Inc., by May 31, 2019.

■ Opening for A.A.W.S. Nontrustee Director

A.A. World Services, Inc. (A.A.W.S.) has started its search to fill the vacancy for one nontrustee director, which will open following the 2020 General Service Conference. Interested A.A. members are encouraged to submit a résumé. In seeking applications for all vacancies in Alcoholics Anonymous, the Fellowship is committed to creating a large applicant file of qualified persons, which reflects the inclusiveness and diversity of A.A. itself. Basic qualifications for this position are: a minimum of seven years of continuous sobriety; a sound business or professional background preferably in, but not limited to, the following areas — finance, management, publishing, legal, or information technology; the ability to work with others; availability to attend all regular meetings of the A.A.W.S. Board (currently, up to eight per year), three weekend meetings of trustees' committees (to which corporate board directors are appointed) and the Conference, for one week in April. In addition, directors may be called upon to attend subcommittee or other meetings and to represent A.A.W.S. at Regional Forums or other A.A. functions. Résumés should be sent to the A.A.W.S. Board secretary, at the General Service Office, no later than July 1, 2019.

Planning a Future Event?

To be included in the *Box 4-5-9* Calendar, information must be received at G.S.O. four months prior to the event. We list events of two or more days.

For your convenience and ours — please type or print the information to be listed on the Bulletin Board page, and mail to Editor: Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163 or literature@aa.org.

Date of event: from _____ to _____, 20_____

Name of event: _____

Location: _____
CITY STATE OR PROVINCE

Address to list: _____
P.O. BOX (OR NUMBER AND STREET)

CITY STATE OR PROVINCE ZIP CODE

Website or email: _____
(NO PERSONAL EMAIL ADDRESSES)

Contact person: _____
NAME PHONE # AND EMAIL

Calendar of Events

Events listed here are presented solely as a service to readers, not as an endorsement by the General Service Office. For any additional information, please use the addresses provided. **Please note that we cannot attest to the accuracy, relevancy, timeliness, or completeness of information provided by any linked site.**

March

- 1-3—*Sioux City, Iowa.* Sioux City Tri-State Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 1823, Sioux City, IA 51102
- 1-3—*Moorhead, Minnesota.* West Central Reg. Svc. Conf. Write: Ch., Box 117, Biwabik, MN 55708; www.wcraasc2019.com
- 1-3—*Toronto, Ontario, Canada.* ON Reg. Conf. Info: orcvolunteers@gmail.com
- 1-3—*Hamilton, Bermuda.* Bermuda Conv. Info: www.aa.bm
- 1-3—*Puebla, Mexico.* Convención Mexicana. Info: www.aamexico.org.mx
- 7-10—*Atlantic City, New Jersey.* EACYPA. Info: njypaa.org
- 8-10—*Albany, Georgia.* Flint River Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 72007, Albany, GA 31708; www.flintriverroundup.org
- 8-10—*Aberdeen, North Carolina.* Area 51 Corrections Conf. Write: Ch., Box 1201, Mebane, NC 27302; corrections@aanorthcarolina.org
- 8-10—*Mount Sterling, Ohio.* Area 53 Mini Conf. Info: www.area53aa.org
- 15-17—*South Bend, Indiana.* 66th IN State Conv. Write: Box 962, Griffith, IN 46319; www.area22indiana.org
- 15-17—*Qwara, Malta.* 13th EN Speaking Internat'l Conv. Info: www.aamalta.org.mt
- 22-24—*Lafayette, Louisiana.* 13th Fellowship of the Spirit South. Write: Ch., Box 53312, Lafayette, LA 70505; www.fotssouth.com
- 22-24—*Tarrytown, New York.* 51st SENY Conv. Write: Ch., Box 22748, Brooklyn, NY 11202; www.aasenyo.org
- 22-24—*Atlantic Beach, North Carolina.* Crystal Coast Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 113, Morehead City, NC 28557; www.crystalcoastroundup.org
- 22-30—*Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.* 27th Area 60 Pre-Conf. Assembly. Write: Ch., Box 1496, Washington, PA 15301; altdelegate@wpaarea60.org

28-31—*Charleston, South Carolina.* SC State Conv. Write: Ch., Box 13796, Charleston, SC 29422; www.area62.org

29-31—*Ames, Iowa.* Aim for Ames. Write: Ch., Box 2522, Ames, IA 50010; www.aimforames.org

29-31—*Camdenton, Missouri.* Circle of Unity Conf. Write: Ch., Box 2576, Lake Ozarks, MO 65049; www.circleofunityconference.org

29-31—*Saratoga Springs, New York.* Saratoga Springfest. Info: www.saratogaspringfest.org

April

4-6—*Darjeeling, West Bengal, India.* Spirit of Unity. Info: aakolkata_ig3@rediffmail.com

5-7—*Ventura, California.* S. CA H&I Conference. Info: socalhandi.org

5-7—*Gulfport, Mississippi.* Gulf Coast Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 334 Long Beach, MS 39560; aasteplovers@gmail.com

5-7—*Laconia, New Hampshire.* 53rd NH State Conv. Write: Ch., 1330 Hookset Rd., Hookset, NH 03106; functions@nhaa.net

5-7—*Seguin, Texas.* SWTA 68 Pre-Gen. Svc. Conf. Write: Ch., 1142 Eikel Rd., New Braunfels, TX 78130; swtaconference2019@gmail.com

5-7—*Dauphin, Manitoba, Canada.* Dauphin Roundup. Write: Ch., 21-4th Ave. NW, Dauphin, MB R7N 1H9

12-13—*Normal, Illinois.* BNAA Roundup Conf. Write: Ch., Box 5063, Bloomington, IL 61702; www.aadistrict10.org

12-14—*Fairmont, Minnesota.* Sunlight of the Spirit Wknd. Info: www.sotsweekend.org

12-14—*Cape May, New Jersey.* 52nd SEPIA Roundup. Info: www.aasepia.org

12-14—*Erie, Pennsylvania.* Erie Area Spring Conf. Write: Ch., Box 1357, Erie, PA 16512; erieconf@aol.com

12-14—*Manchester, Vermont.* Area 70 VT Conv. Write: Ch., Box 4006, Burlington, VT 05406; www.aavt.org

18-21—*Eureka Springs, Arkansas.* Springtime in the Ozarks. Write: Ch., Box 9237, Fayetteville, AR 72703; springtimeintheozarks@gmail.com

18-21—*San Diego, California.* SD Spring Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 12186, La Jolla, CA 92039; www.sandiegospringroundup.com

19-21—*Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.* 48th North Shore Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 91086, West Vancouver, B.C., Canada V7V 3N3; www.northshoreroundup.com

19-20—*Taipei, Taiwan.* 4th Taiwan Roundup. Info: www.aataiwan.com

26-28—*Los Angeles, California.* 32nd Men's Internat'l Conf. Write: Ch., Box 83803, Los Angeles, CA 90083; www.iaamc2019.org

26-28—*Chipley, Florida.* Country Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 677, Chipley, FL 32428; chipley_countryroundup@hotmail.com

26-28—*Bundoran, Donegal, Ireland.* All Ireland Conv. www.alcoholicsanonymous.ie

26-28—*Mesquite, TX.* Girlpalooza. Write: Ch., Box 830006, Richardson, TX 75083; www.girlpaloozaadfw.com

26-28—*Bellingham, WA.* NW Girlstock. Info: www.nwgirlstock.org

26-28—*Santee, SC.* Spring Roundup. Info: dist40@area62.org

26-28—*Alicante, Spain.* 7th Internat'l Conv. Info: www.albirconvention.org

27-28—*Shawinigan, Quebec, Canada.* 50e Congrès. Info: lelianaa@hotmail.ca

May

3-4—*Longueuil, Québec, Canada.* 37e Congrès de Longueuil Rive-Sud. Info: info@lazone.ca

3-5—*Vallejo, California.* 46th H&I Conf. Write: Ch., 413 William St., Vacaville, CA 95688; www.handinorcal.org

3-5—*Marietta, Georgia.* Marietta Spring Roundup. Info: www.mariettaroundup.com

3-5—*Kailua-Kona, Hawaii.* 31st Big Island Bash. Write: Ch., Box 390727, Keauhou, HI 96739; www.bigislandbash.com

3-5—*Fort Wayne, Indiana.* 39st NE Indiana Conv. Info: www.aaftwayne.org

3-5—*Hibbing, Minnesota.* Iron Range Get Together. Write: Ch., Box 855, Hibbing, MN 55746

3-5—*Grants Pass, Oregon.* Rogue Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 1741, Grants Pass, OR 97528; www.rogueroundup.com

17-19—*Kalispell, Montana.* MT Spring Roundup. Info: <https://2019springroundup.wixsite.com/montana>

17-19—*Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.* 78th OK State Conf. Write: Ch., Box 13573, Oklahoma City, OK 73113; www.aaoklahoma.org

17-19—*Lake Jackson, Texas.* Mouth of the Brazos. Write: Ch., Box 1641, Clute, TX 77531; moblj2019@gmail.com

17-19—*Kimberly, Wisconsin.* Area 74 Spring Conf. Write: Ch., Box 8582, Appleton, WI 54912; www.area74.org

17-19—*Little Current, Ontario, Canada.* Rainbow Roundup. Write: Ch. Box 921, Little Current, ON POP 1K0 Canada; www.rainbowroundup.ca

19-21—*Reno, Nevada.* 12th Seniors in Sobriety Internat'l Conf. Write: Ch., Box 11011, Reno, NV 89510; www.renotahoesis2019.com

19-21—*Port Angeles, Washington.* Olympic Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 1081, Port Angeles, WA 98362; www.olympicroundup.org

23-26—*Dallas, Texas.* 33rd Gathering of Eagles. Write: Ch., Box 35865, Dallas, TX 75235; www.dallasgatheringofeagles.org

24-26—*Rosemont, Illinois.* XXXVII Conv. del Estado De Illinois. Write: 607 Lake Street, Maywood, IL 60153

24-26—*Covington, Louisiana.* SE LA Spring Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 4150 Covington, LA 70434; www.springroundupla.com

24-26—*Bloomington, Minnesota.* Gopher State Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 390533, Minneapolis, MN 55439; www.gopherstateroundup.org

30-2—*Little Rock, Arkansas.* SE Conf. of YPAA. Info: www.lrsercypaa2019.org

30-2—*Lahaina, Hawaii.* MauiFest Internat'l Conv. Write: Ch., Box 893, Kihei, HI 96753; www.mauifest.org

31-2—*Tarrytown, New York.* Northeast Reg. Forum. Write: Forum Coord., Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163; regionalforums@aa.org

June

7-9—*Victorville, California.* High Desert Conv. Write: Ch., Box 1894, Apple Valley, CA 92307; www.sunshineofthespirit-high-desertconvention.com

7-9—*Tallahassee, Florida.* Founder's Day Florida Style. Write: Ch., Box 38034, Tallahassee, FL 32315; www.foundersdayflorida.org

7-9—*Metairie, Louisiana.* Big Deep South Conv. Info: www.bigdeepsouth.org

7-9—*Santa Fe, New Mexico.* Area 46 Conv. Write: Ch., Box 28957, Santa Fe, NM 87592; www.nm-aa.org

7-9—*Akron, Ohio.* 84th Founder's Day. Write: Ch., Box 12, Akron, OH 44309; www.foundersday.org

7-9—*Kenton, Oklahoma.* 43rd Camp Billy Joe Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 944, Desert Hot Springs, CA 92240

7-9—*Houston, Texas.* 73rd TX State Conv. Write: Ch., Box 10784, Houston, TX 77206; www.txaaconvention.org

14-15—*Joliette, Québec, Canada.* 43ième Congrès de Joliette et de Lanaudière Nord. Écrire: congres0326@aa90.org

28-30—*Frederick, Maryland.* 49th Area 29 State Conv. Write: Ch., Box 8043, Elkridge, MD 21075; www.marylandaa.org

July

11-14—*Raleigh, North Carolina.* NC State Conv. Write: Ch., Box 41451, Raleigh, NC 27629; www.aanconvention.com

12-14—*Auburn, Alabama.* Area 1 Assembly. Write: Ch., P.O. Box 6501, Montgomery, AL, 36106; aaarea1.org

12-14—*Wheeling, West Virginia.* WV State Conv. Write: Ch., Box 6535, Wheeling, WV 26003; www.aawv.org

19-21—*Concord, California.* Unity and Service Conf. www.unityandserviceconference.org

26-28—*Hot Springs, Arkansas.* 79th Old Grandad Conv. Write: Ch., Box 241303, Little Rock, AR 72223; convention@arkansasaa.org

26-28—*Jefferson City, Missouri.* MO State Conv. Write: Ch., Box 193, Perculiar, MO 64078; www.mostateconvention.org

August

2-4—*Charlottesville, Virginia.* 68th VA Conv. Write: Ch., Box 5044, Charlottesville, VA 22905; 2019vacconvention@gmail.com

9-11—*Boise, Idaho.* Gem State Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 45505, Boise, ID 83704; www.gemstateroundup.org

9-11—*Lisle, Illinois.* IL State Conv. Info: conference@aa-nia-dist43.org

9-11—*Barcelona, Spain.* European Conv. of YPAA. Info: www.eurypaa.org

16-18—*Cartersville, Georgia.* Allatoona Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 200856, Cartersville, GA 30120; www.allatoonaroundup.org

23-25—*Orlando, Florida.* SE Woman to Woman Conf. Write: Ch., Box 1134, Winter Park, FL 32790; www.sewomantowoman.org

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