

# **WEST CENTRAL VIRTUAL FORUM**

## **FINAL REPORT**

**September 10-12,  
2021**

**LAST NAMES OF CLASS A (NON-ALCOHOLIC) TRUSTEES  
AND NON-ALCOHOLIC EMPLOYEES ONLY APPEAR IN THIS REPORT**

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## CONTENTS

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Unanswered Ask-It Basket Questions.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Workshop Reports.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Presentations.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Past Trustees' Sharing.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Closing Remarks.....</b>	<b>22</b>

## **INTRODUCTION**

The 2021 Virtual West Central Regional Forum was held on September 10-12, 2021. Registration for the Forum was **421** his included **166** members attending their very first Forum.

Dear A.A. Friends,

Please mark your calendar for the upcoming 2021 *Virtual*  
Regional Forums:

**Southwest** October 8-10

**East Central** November 19-21

## UNANSWERED ASK-IT BASKET QUESTIONS

**Q. Past A.A. literature, such as the pamphlet about young people, has become outdated and modified or retired. If we decide to make a second Big Book, one with "common language", do we understand that in a few years that language will also be outdated?**

R: You are correct that our literature requires ongoing review and updating as needed. The G.S.O. Publishing Department and Trustees Committees support this effort, with requests for updates most initiated by the Fellowship. The aim of all of this being to effectively carry our message and fulfil our primary purpose. Plain Language is a set of recognized standards for writing with clarity, simplicity and readability and is based on concise and clear writing. As such, trendy terminology is avoided. The other aim of the plain language translation is to improve accessibility for those who read English at lower reading level.

**Q. When will the fifth edition of the Big Book be ready?**

R: At their July 2021 meeting the trustees' Committee on Literature chair designated a subcommittee to work on the development of the draft of a fifth edition of the Big Book *Alcoholics Anonymous*. The subcommittee is currently working on a timeline for the call for stories as well as establishing the editorial criteria for the draft. It might be helpful to note that the development of the Fourth Edition Big Book involved more than a year of planning based on sharing between the trustees and the General Service Conference. If you aren't already, be sure to be in touch with your Area Delegate to stay updated on the considerations taking place for the development process.

**Q. What is the average of subscriptions to Grapevine magazine by area?**

Grapevine is unable to provide an average of subscriptions by area but can provide numbers broken down by state. These numbers are as follows:

Alabama: 380	Hawaii: 334	Massachusetts: 1,295	New Mexico: 391	South Dakota: 195
Alaska: 294	Idaho: 484	Michigan: 1,790	New York: 3,219	Tennessee: 765
Arizona: 1,525	Illinois: 2,005	Minnesota: 1,702	North Carolina: 1,482	Texas: 2,649
Arkansas: 313	Indiana: 912	Mississippi: 196	North Dakota: 287	Utah: 418
California: 6,785	Iowa: 688	Missouri: 1,119	Ohio: 1,461	Vermont: 220
Colorado: 1,266	Kansas: 581	Montana: 495	Oklahoma: 401	Virginia: 1,501
Connecticut: 760	Kentucky: 565	Nebraska: 573	Oregon: 1,211	Washington: 1,845
Delaware: 253	Louisiana: 376	Nevada: 658	Pennsylvania: 3,487	West Virginia: 239
Florida: 3,392	Maine: 391	New Hampshire: 373	Rhode Island: 220	Wisconsin: 1,541
Georgia: 1,433	Maryland: 967	New Jersey: 1,660	South Carolina: 624	Wyoming: 157
D.C.: 100	Armed Forces Americas: 1	Armed Forces Europe: 13	Armed Forces Pacific: 9	Guam: 5
Palau: 1	Puerto Rico: 16	Virgin Islands: 9	Alberta: 442	British Columbia: 736
Manitoba: 152	New Brunswick: 117	Newfoundland and Labrador: 48	Northwest Territories: 15	Nova Scotia: 158
Nunavut: 3	Ontario: 1,497	Prince Edward Island: 61	Quebec: 199	Saskatchewan: 223
Yukon: 27	Mexico: 7			

**Q. Have the G.S.B., A.A.W.S., C.F.O., Treasurer, Trustees' Finance and Budget Committees discussed a proposed plan to replace the \$4 million drawdown of the prudent reserve?**

R: The reserve is top of mind for me as GSB Treasurer and trustees' Finance Committee chair. We have already made a small replacement (\$250,000) in August 2021 and will continue to work to rebuild the fund over a reasonable period. (During the uncertainty of Covid-19, we would rather rebuild slowly than risk having to draw the fund again.) During 2021 and in developing the 2022 budget, we will carefully balance the need to fund Conference Actions and services requested by the Fellowship while maintaining financial flexibility.

**Q. The slide by Kevin Prior, the G.S.B. Treasurer, on the prudent reserve showed what the reserve is used for. I understand operating shortfalls and the retirement legacy costs because years ago you put that money away for that future expense. But litigation and legal fees sounds like they were added after the manuscript debacle. Also, the same with capital construction projects sound like they were added after the fact. Why are/were these added the prudent reserve standards?**

R: The reserve fund may be used only for extraordinary expenses (not simply to cover deficits from operations). However, there is no restriction on the type of extraordinary expense. The attached excerpt from the 1991 General Service Conference Final Report which included "refurbishing and renovating the office premises of the G.S.O." as a use of the reserve fund. This report predates by almost 30 years the 8<sup>th</sup> floor construction project that was completed in 2020. The other items listed (i.e., legal fees) are an example of an extraordinary expense that would not be part of a budget for "normal operations."

# WORKSHOP REPORTS

Session A: 11:55 AM-12:45 AM EST

## A.A.'s Future in a Virtual World

**Moderator: Jim S., Reporter: Heidi B.**

**Question 1:** Tips/tricks for hybrid meetings?

**Discussion:** Use the Big Book and 12x12 topics. List Zoom information online. We use big screen TVs, laptops. Try the OWL system. Sound is the most important factor, have good equipment, especially microphone. Do all meetings need to serve all spaces? Hybrid meetings make it more difficult to feel one with the fellowship. Participants have questions about structure of virtual meetings — what district, area belong to? Attendees can turn cameras off if concerned about anonymity. Certain formats lend themselves to virtual — large speaker meetings perfect, although newcomers can get missed. We use laptops with tablet for members that want to be on video. It makes it more intimate. Virtual platforms are more anonymous because you turn video off and use only audio. We have had major success getting members involved in virtual meetings. Members from across US can participate virtually. Treatment center clients are participating virtually. More members can participate.

**Question 2:** Traditions and how they apply to virtual meetings.

**Discussion:** Ask yourself questions: are we self-supporting? Are we carrying the message? Are we taking care of each other in the virtual room? No outside issues. Make sure that no one that is not an alcoholic can see or hear the meeting. Am I willing to go to any length? That means in person or virtual. Zoom has the capability to record, make sure no one is recording meetings. In hybrid meetings, have a section for members that don't want to be on camera. It's difficult to record audio only on Zoom. Virtual meetings have been around for some time, but some of us are only now aware. Have a plan for "bombers".

## Tradition Ten

**Moderator: Jamey N.**

*Workshop Report unavailable*

## La Vina

**Moderator: Karina C.**

*Workshop Report unavailable*

Session B: 2:30 PM-3:30 PM EST

## How to Reach Anyone, Anywhere

**Moderator: Katie E., Reporter: Jason G.**

Katie E. opened with sharing her experience, strength and hope from the last two years of carrying the message during Covid-19. Our world is ever changing, and we of A.A. need to

continue evolving. We suit up and show up to continue helping new men and women. Allowing ourselves to be inconvenienced or pivoting with changes. Giving numbers over Zoom, connecting always. Discussion opened with the workshop topic as the main discussion, and added question from Bill H., Area 24 C.P.C. Chair about "How to work with treatment centers in a virtual world."

Many touched on going further in connecting on Zoom, showing up early, and giving out info. Others reminded us to try and "keep the lights on" when possible, as those still struggling are continually trying to find us.

Adolpho S., (AZ) reminded us to make sure that the translations in the Big Book are correct, and Lorna (ND) spoke on helping those who aren't computer savvy and getting to those incarcerated in new ways. Sherri P. (ND), and Sarah H., reminded us to meet people where they are, and Dorothy and Jim (ND) emphasized "The Job is Never Done", continue working to carry the message. *Show* them what AA is about, don't just tell them, and *show* them that somebody cares.

*A very special thank you to Katie E. for stepping up to the plate and agreeing to moderate this workshop with one day's notice.*

## **Fun In Service**

**Co-moderators: Cara G. and Jess N., Reporter: Ashley S.**

Where do you draw the line at having fun at business meetings? Is there a line? Where is the line between tomfoolery and deadly earnestness? Business meetings: Keep it light and informal, try to follow Robert's rules loosely. People can call point of order whenever they want. Keep it inclusive. We have fun, but we need to go toward getting business done. One thing that will chase people away from the business meetings is if they get off track and eat up too much time. It is especially important that you get through the agenda items. You want it to be as interactive and upbeat as possible, so that people want to come back! Have people come early and have treats for them. Get the business done and encourage them to stay afterwards. Throw in a little bit of A.A. history. Written the first 3 concepts into a skit. If we can make people laugh and crack some jokes. Sticks to Robert's rules (not waste people's time but can laugh about stuff). Use light humor to help with this. Jokes and laughing help people feel comfortable and more approachable. Test the water and know your crowd. Get a sense of the room. Use the agenda to stay on task (Tradition 9), but you can still be fun along the way. Bringing sweets is often helpful: it brings fun! We never run over an hour because they are one-liner jokes. Keep it conversational. Use the agenda: Why are we here? What is our purpose? Bring a friend = get a pen! Give a subscription to the Grapevine for showing up! Open with a Grapevine joke! Put business cards on bulletin boards around town around town with sponsees. How do I get sponsees to participate in service without firing them? Do extra things outside of the schedule together. Be inclusive. Show enthusiasm, invite people to go with you! Show enthusiasm, invite people to go with you! Have the sponsee do the service positions that you do. "You and I are serving pop at the meeting!" Share with sponsee: "this is what I do" and invite them. Take sponsee with you to committees and service commitments. Traditions Jenga! Work sponsee into it if needed. If you really want to stay sober, part of what you are going to do is service work. It is a way of passing on our Experience, strength, and hope.



# PRESENTATIONS

## Presentation Reports 8:15-8:30 PM EST Session A Presentations

### **Going Beyond Fear--- Sherri P., Area 53, North Dakota**

Hello. My name is Sherri and I am an alcoholic. I am the Area 52 North Dakota Delegate, Panel 71. Due to God's grace, great sponsorship, and the program of Alcoholics Anonymous, I am sober today since May 25, 2007. So, going through fear. What is that? How do you do that? Well, I can tell you what "being stuck in fear" was when I was drinking. If I don't say it out loud, it didn't happen or isn't happening. If I don't bring any attention to that, everyone will forget. It also looked like being a chameleon and taking on the same opinions and actions as those I was around, because I KNEW if they really knew me, they wouldn't want me around. It looked like my father asking me, "Are you sure about this?" as he's preparing to walk me down the aisle, and my response was, "It's a little late now. Look at all the people that are here." I was so driven by what people would think of me, or what my life looked like to others, that I was paralyzed by fear. I always found myself saying "if only...", or the "would've/could've/should've" and quite often "I wish". I also would have told you I wasn't afraid of a thing. I was tough. I could take it. I'll just pull myself up by my bootstraps. I didn't realize in those moments I was fearful. I wasn't aware of that until I did my 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> step. Fear was a part of almost every resentment, just like in the example on page 64 of the Big Book. After completing my Fifth Step with my sponsor, I spent the quiet time reviewing my steps. I could see that fear was a strong contributor to my life being unmanageable. Not only was it the reason I didn't feel "enough" in so many areas of my life; fear blocked me from my relationship with a higher power. I would have told you I had a relationship with God, but it was on my terms and my perception of that relationship. My God was a loving God. He loved me so much that He would forgive me for any wrongdoings I had done or planned to do. You see, my relationship with my God was based on MY will. This is where I wholeheartedly took Steps Two and Three over again. This is where going through fear began for me. I believed that there was a power greater than me and if my life was going to improve, I needed to turn it over to that power.

Now this is where life becomes wonderful and full of puppy dogs and rainbows right? Not so much. Becoming honest with myself, my God and my sponsor was what needed to happen on a day-to-day basis. Who am I kidding? Sometimes it was/is a moment-to-moment basis. Around year five my will and my ego became bigger than God's will. I almost drank. In about a 2-week timespan, I had taken almost every alcoholic behavior back. The only thing I didn't do was drink. It was painful and embarrassing. I was so afraid to get honest with my sponsor and tell her what was really going on. I got back on my knees and asked God for the strength to be honest with her. When I did, do you know what her reply was? It wasn't "You should have known better." Instead, it was simply, "Well I guess you need to bump up your meetings and get back to the basics." I did and the result was my desire to be helpful to another alcoholic was bigger than my idea that I deserved things because I was sober for this amount of time.

Other instances that fear creeps into my recovery is sometimes through sponsoring others. One night, before I sobered up, when I was drinking with my mom, I said to her, "You know Mom, if you and Dad wouldn't have put me on such a high pedestal, it wouldn't have hurt so much to fall off." She said, "Oh honey, we didn't put you on a pedestal. You did." I can still feel the sting of that comment today. That sting was truth. When working with others, I can get caught up in thinking my way is best. If only you would have done what I suggested, you wouldn't be in this situation. That isn't helpful to anyone. That is only me being fearful of what people will think of me because I didn't sponsor someone correctly. It was only by going through fear and talking with another alcoholic and asking for suggestions that I was able to get through the situation. It was suggested that I get on my knees and turn the person I was sponsoring over to God's care and protection because I can only offer my experience as to what worked for me. I cannot make anyone "take" my suggestions. It was amazing that by taking that simple action, I know and believe that I am not responsible for anyone's drinking or sobriety. I don't sponsor people or work with others worrying about how I will look in the situation. I can see that it's not about me.

I don't know if fear will ever completely leave me. I still must do fear inventories. I literally must write it down on paper, in black and white or else I just can't see it. Next, I have to turn that fear over to God. I ask him to allow me to be a vessel of His will for myself and others. I have to tell other alcoholics about my fears. When I share them out loud with another alcoholic, the fear loses its power, and I am able to walk through it with the help of others. They can also help me see if my fears are irrational or not, which they usually are. If I don't take that action, the fear bounces around inside my head blocking me from my higher power and others. My sponsor has told me, "If you have faith there's no room for fear, and if you have fear there's no room for faith."

I have stated a few times in this presentation that "I got on my knees". I'm alcoholic and I'm a good starter but not always a good finisher or very consistent. Recently, probably during the 71<sup>st</sup> General Service Conference, I have become consistent with getting on my knees - morning and night. I have to say that while I have had moments of fear, I haven't been paralyzed by it and I can quickly see that those moments crop up if I have skipped a night or morning of taking that action.

In closing, I will say that "going through fear" isn't anything I can do alone. My experience has shown me that with the help of God and Alcoholics Anonymous, I can always get to the other side of fear.

Thank you for being here today and for allowing me to share.

### **A.A. Traditions Brought to Life: Tradition Two — Jess N., Area 41, Nebraska**

Throughout my life and sobriety, there has been a consistent emotion that ebbs and flows. Chances are you too have been driven by fear. The only thing that has relieved that fear is the step work given to me as a suggestion. When I was tired enough, I was willing to take those suggestions and practice them in my life. Working steps two, three, six and seven on

a daily basis gives me the chance at walking through the day without fear tapping on my shoulder.

Little did I know that fear would show itself in a new form after finding this newfound way of living. With less than two months sober, I got roped into my first business meeting experience with a Saturday morning group I had been attending. I rode there with a friend who had been sober for a while, and she said that she forgot there was a business meeting after the meeting. She said that since it was her home group, she needed to attend and that I could wait outside or come join in. Loneliness is not a favorite of an alcoholic, so I decided to attend. I had absolutely no idea what was happening; all I knew was that people were talking, rather passionately I should mention, about a video called Hope that had full faces. None of it made sense, but what I gathered was that they were fully against it and that it was going to kill Alcoholics Anonymous.

After a while, I started attending business meetings at my home group and became more acquainted with whatever seemed to be happening at the time. It was a slow process to understand it all, and I could not figure out why people got so passionate. People seemed to get passionate about everything. There were always animated people on both sides of an issue and then eventually some kind of vote would happen. Then the real absurdity began; those people who were arguing with each other would step outside and smoke and laugh. What was happening? What was wrong with these people? Eventually, I also noticed people who would immediately leave, and that too was something I questioned. Why didn't they stick around after the business meeting?

It wasn't until years later, that I heard someone say that they stayed awake at night worrying about the future of A.A. My instant reaction was to ask where God was on those tiresome nights. At that moment, I was able to identify feelings I had had, and seen in others. It was fear. She was a mean mistress, and she was present in more than just daily events of your average alcoholic. She also took a seat in the business meetings. Even more concerning, sometimes I would invite her to sit next to me or even on my lap. I really began to think about that. What right does fear have to take an uninvited seat? How can we kick her out and revoke the invitation? The answer is simple. Go back to the basics. If I could apply the steps in my life to kick her out, why couldn't I do that in business meetings?

Step Two says that all I need to do is believe that a higher power can restore me to sanity. If I believe that God can restore me to sanity, and if other alcoholics also believe, that higher power can restore us all to sanity. It's just a simple belief; that's all we need as a foundation. Do I believe or am I willing to believe that God can take care of us? Do I believe that if I or others make a mistake, God can help to remedy that mistake? Do I believe that my higher power wants me to grow and learn even if it's uncomfortable?

Step Three says that I now get to turn my will and my life over to the care of God as I understand him. To me, that means I agree to invite God into my day and can invite him into specific events of my day for a little extra backup. If a group conscience is part of my day, I have to turn that over too. Many business meetings open with a prayer of some kind and the reading of our traditions. We have taken a physical and spiritual step by praying at the beginning. We are working Step Three as a collective and entrusting him with our business so that a true presence of God can be felt in our group conscience. Acceptance of a group conscience, whether I agree or not, is a true third step practice. If I am truly handing things

over to God, I have to accept that there is something that needs to come from this experience. Sometimes I am right, and we learn something as a group, but even more fun is when I am wrong, and God has a lesson for me to learn.

Sometimes I am wrong. Gross. If you're anything like me, you don't like to admit that. It's part of the human experience, I guess. Just as I believed that a higher power could restore me to sanity, Step six allows me to free of or from myself, of defects that could land me back at Step Two. We have all let our defects flair in debate and discussion. We step on the toes of our fellows and boy do they retaliate. My only purpose in a business meeting is to look at decisions from a standpoint of the traditions. The rest of my actions are defects of character. If I have those, I have to have some grace to know that the people around me do as well. I am here to tell you, no one wants to listen to my defects during a business meeting and they hinder what we can do for the still suffering alcoholic. It's ok if I don't like a group conscience, but I do have to allow for it to be right or wrong. My defects are not going to bend the conscience to God's will. This realization of self leads me to ask for help again.

Through Step Seven, I can ask my higher power to remove my defects. If something stands in the way of God's will, it is our defects. I can simply ask for God to remove my shortcomings and pray for him to remove your defects too. If he sees it fit, he will remove what he wants from me and from you. Again, sometimes his will is for mistakes to happen, for us to get uncomfortable and for us to learn something from it.

The grace of Steps Ten and Eleven allow us to remedy mistakes and make changes. This allows us to be wrong and really do something about it. At all levels of service, we can be wrong, and nothing binds us to not making it right. What a gift!

After reflection, I retreat to the question of where is God in all of this? Can I trust God's will? Can I apply the steps that have proven effective in my life to all situations or just the ones outside of A.A.? If you haven't found the answer to these questions, I do hope you think about them the next time you feel either at peace or uncomfortable with a group conscience. Tradition Two is founded upon God and his will. Let us learn from it and grow as a fellowship.

### **Why A.A. Business Meetings are Important — Mary Ann G., Area 24 Iowa**

My home group is where it all began for me when I got sober in 2004. My first home group was enthusiastic and encouraged service work. I remember my sponsor mentioning the business meetings of the group and I thought to myself, "is that where they talk about how much money we need to contribute to the basket?" I was curious. What I learned during my first few business meetings was that they spoke in a lot of acronyms...C.P.C., G.S.R., D.C.M. I didn't know what any of these were, or what they did, but I was going to find out! My sponsor held a service position in our home group, and I learned through watching her serve as the literature chair. She would bring her report to the business meetings where she talked about the number of books sold, the books she had ordered and new pieces of literature available through the General Service Office. I started to learn about each of the Chair positions in my home group through listening to each report and began to understand how they functioned and carried the message of Alcoholics Anonymous.

During the unfinished and new business of the business meetings is where I got to see discussion on all different types of topics — financial, group traditions, meeting location, and many others. I thought to myself, “Wow! This is where the action happens.” I was amazed at the different perspectives that members were discussing, but all were respectful and diplomatic, even if they disagreed. When I first started attending business meetings, I was afraid to speak up if my opinion or thoughts differed from others, but I watched how my sponsor and others in my home group were able to discuss and still be cordial and respectful.

I love my home group today and I certainly have participated in some lively business meetings. On several occasions, I have held an opinion on a subject and after listening, really listening to others in my home group, I have changed my mind. I have also watched how the minority voice in action has swayed the group because one to two individuals brought up a great point that the rest of us might not have previously considered. I love the book “The Home Group: Heartbeat of A.A.” Read it if you haven’t picked it up — some great experience. Page 47 reads, “It took me a while to discover that the group really did have a conscience and identity of its own, which had nothing to do with me.” Before participating in business meetings, I didn’t quite understand how A.A. ran, but slowly learning through service I began to understand how God worked through others and through service in Alcoholics Anonymous to include business meetings.

I learned how to be respectful of others, and discuss finances, traditions, and how much coffee to make in my home group business meetings. The lessons learned were then brought to district business meetings, next Area 24 business meetings, and eventually to the General Service Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous. During the 71st virtual General Service Conference, I realized the group conscious was alive and well — even through my computer. Many years ago, I had learned how to discuss different perspectives in my home group business meetings that helped me to serve and recognize when I needed to listen and be open minded. There were many times during the conference I felt the inner nudge from God reminding me I needed to listen and consider other conference members perspectives. The mute button made it a little easier to grumble under my breath or slump in my chair, but I was reminded of the members of Alcoholics Anonymous who have been graceful and humble enough to listen and let God in to form the group conscious.

My home group recently just voted in our business meeting to move from virtual to in person at a temporary location. Some folks were hesitant, while others were ready to move forward. God has worked it all out for us. Our meeting is now hybrid, so we offer the in person meeting with a virtual option. The last business meeting we were able to conduct hybrid as well. I do trust that the true group conscious will continue to nudge us when we need it and sustain us to stay sober and carry the message of Alcoholics Anonymous to the still suffering alcoholic. That is our purpose, and I am so glad I learned how to listen and be open minded in business meetings and accept when the group might decide to go in a different direction than what I think is best. I have learned through experience that God is in charge and somehow, he works it all out.

I owe so many things to Alcoholics Anonymous and the life I’ve been given. Today in my professional life — I conduct meetings and you can guess where I learned to conduct those meeting – A.A. I’m so grateful I can recognize when I need to be still and listen.

**Presentation Reports**  
**9:00-9:20 PM EST Session B Presentations**

**The Responsibility Statement — Ramona B., Area 76, Wyoming**

When I first agreed to do this presentation, my mind was full of brilliant ideas and a boatload of enthusiasm from participating in the 71<sup>st</sup> General Service Conference. Then I asked God to direct my thinking, and as usually happens, I realized that although I was passionate about the responsibility statement, I really didn't know much about it. So, I went to my favorite website, aa.org, and did a little research.

Did you know.....? That the responsibility statement was first used as the theme for the 1965 A.A. International Convention in Toronto. A Trustee named Al S. is given credit for writing the statement. As part of his address to the more than 10,000 alcoholics present, Bill W. said, "*The first concern of AA members should be with problem drinkers the movement is still unable to reach,*" He estimated that there were 20 million alcoholics in the world at that time, five million in the U.S. alone. "*Some cannot be reached because they are not hurt enough, others because they are hurt too much,*" he declared. "*Many sufferers have mental and emotional complications that seem to foreclose their chances. Yet it would be conservative to estimate that at any particular time there are four million alcoholics in the world who are able, ready, and willing to get well if only they knew how. When we remember that in the 30 years of A.A.'s existence we have reached less than ten per cent of those who might have been willing to approach us, we begin to get an idea of the immensity of our task and of the responsibilities with which we will always be confronted.*"

As I read this statement, my thoughts turned to the Traditions. Tradition Nine tells us that we are responsible to those we serve, and Tradition Five states that our primary purpose is to carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers. As a delegate, I believe I am to serve the area which elected me, but in light of Tradition Five, the responsibility we of A.A. always bear is to serve the still suffering. Since the fourth edition of the Big Book was published, we have been boasting about 2 million alcoholics sober in A.A. around the world. That is a remarkable achievement, but only half of the number that Bill, in 1965, thought were able, ready, and willing to get well if only they knew how. A.A. is now 50 plus years older and the population of the world has doubled. 6 billion people inhabit the earth today and if 5% of those folks are alcoholic (the National Council on Alcoholism says 7.5%) we are talking about 350 million. Sure, not all those people are ready, willing, or able to get sober but I'm willing to bet that it's likely more than 2 million.

Looking back on the actions of the 71<sup>st</sup> conference, I remember carrying the message to the still suffering was foremost in the delegates' minds. After much prayerful consideration and discussion an honest effort was made to make Alcoholics Anonymous more accessible and more attractive to those who, by themselves, can't find a way out of the alcoholic life. In that same address in 1965, Bill stated "Let us always try to be inclusive rather than exclusive."

I believe that when 10,000 alcoholics in Toronto on a July night in 1965 led by Bill and Lois Wilson recited the Responsibility Statement for the first time as a group, they committed

themselves and all who followed their path to carrying the message of AA to all who suffer from alcoholism.

I invite you to recite that commitment with me now.

I am responsible. When anyone, anywhere reaches out for help. I want to hand of AA always to be there. And for that I am responsible.

### **Going to Any Lengths: Recovery, Unity, and Service — Stacy M., Area 36 Southern Minnesota**

The short answer to this question is that we do it through self-sacrifice. We start by abandoning our old lifestyle. Then we abandon our old ideas. That is how we start going to any lengths for our own recovery. Next, we learn that the “whole” is more important than any one “part.” For the good of our groups, and A.A. as a whole, we give up our insistence that there is only one way to do things. We learn to give up our “right to be right.” At the same time, we give up on passivity. The ongoing success of this program lies in each of our hands. We don’t go along with an idea just because the majority thinks it is a good idea, or just because we want the meeting to end. In the process of trying to meet in the middle, we start to become unified. We cast aside selfishness to help others. Often, we set aside our own comfort to make sure that those who want our help can access it. That is how we learn to go to any lengths to serve. How we go to any lengths to do these things is subjective and will vary from individual to individual.

Here are some examples from my own experience. When I came to Alcoholics Anonymous, I knew that I could not continue to spend time with my friends who drank like I drank. It would have been too tempting to pick up a drink. I also learned very quickly that most of them weren’t friends anyway. I abandoned them and they abandoned me too. I could not hang out at the bar anymore. I knew if I did, it would only be a matter of time before I drank again. I abandoned those things. Before long I found a sponsor who helped me work the steps. As a result of working the steps my thinking and my actions started to change. Slowly but surely, I stopped hurting my loved ones and started being more considerate of them. I became a better employee. I could be counted on to show up for work and my performance improved greatly. I was an A.A. member in good standing. You could trust me to do what I said I would do. It didn’t take long before my schedule was filled with going to meetings, working with newcomers, working the steps, answering phones, and following my sponsor around to service functions. Time kept passing and I kept staying sober. Going to any lengths for me really meant putting A.A. first in my life. When I did that, my life changed dramatically just like the Big Book promised in the Appendix on Spiritual Experience. I found recovery by being willing to change EVERYTHING!

At six months of sobriety, I found my first home group, Tradition Five. Before that I didn’t hear anyone talk about the Traditions. Tradition Five taught me that unity is our most cherished gift here. I learned that all the other traditions support our unity. We are autonomous, but we give up our autonomy if the action we are taking might affect other groups or A.A. as a whole. We let a “loving God” guide our minds on issues facing the group and A.A. and, when the group conscience does not go our way, we support what the group

decides. Sometime in the mid-1990s, my home group discussed and debated whether to add childcare. I was not in favor of it. Going to any lengths for unity at my group meant that, when the group voted to do so, I made a point to volunteer in the childcare room at least twice each year, and sometimes more. I learned that my opinion on “inside” issues was important. My home group taught me to share my opinion and respect the viewpoint of others – even when I think they are wrong. Area and district meetings provided additional opportunities to witness this in action. There was a time when I shared what could have been an unpopular observation about how widely accepted it had become for people to speak negatively about my religion at meetings. Going to any lengths can mean walking through uncomfortable feelings to share something that matters to me when no one else is sharing about it.

My first home group and my first sponsor both demonstrated the importance of service. I learned right away that my life depended on it. Being willing to go to any lengths meant sponsoring young women on opposite ends of the metropolitan area who didn't drive and being willing to drive 90 miles round trip twice each week to make sure they both got to meetings. Being willing to go to any lengths meant answering phones for the local central office from my home on a Saturday afternoon from 3pm until 9am on Sunday morning – and this was before the internet provided access to meeting information. It meant, at times, missing a family member's birthday or other event because of an A.A. commitment. I also think it means stepping out of our comfort zones both in thought and in action. I believe that in going to any lengths we are asked to set aside our old lives for new ones. We have a solution here that works so sometimes we set aside our own ideas in favor of the best ideas to keep the solution intact and available. We are the only ones who can offer this program to others, so we set aside our lives and our comfort to make sure others find and get this solution. Being willing to go to any lengths means letting go and letting God guide me and us in whatever way he sees fit for so long as he might need us

### **Unity – Why it Matters --- Connie R., Area 40, Montana**

When I came into A.A. 40 years ago, I never heard anything about the traditions. I wasn't concerned at all about how I could be a contributing member of this program. My only thought was how to get out of the mess I was in with my ex, family, and employer. I heard the word unity thrown around but took no notice of how that would affect me, which was what I was most concerned about. I came here to make things better for me.

We all know how that works and, of course, I left the program, still trying to find that magic solution that was going to fix Me. I was fortunate enough and desperate enough, to find my way back to the rooms of A.A., and, by the grace of a loving Higher Power, I found myself in a group that not only read the traditions at each meeting but also talked about them when they shared. I had a sponsor that believed that the traditions are a set of tools provided to help each of us to be able to relate to others within a group setting as well as in society as a whole.

The first tradition, “Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon AA unity”, seems like a simple order. It tells me that it is important that I learn to care about someone, or something, other than myself. Over the years, my understanding about the



principal of Unity has grown and changed as has my understanding of how my recovery relies on my being able to connect with others.

Years ago, a past Area 40 Delegate, Robbie S., shared the unique perspective that the 1<sup>st</sup> tradition presents the ultimate purpose of the Traditions, Unity. Essentially, what unity represents then is our desire to stay together to continue to help each of us as individuals to stay sober.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> tradition presents us with two vital elements that we as a fellowship and as individuals need to achieve that purpose. In my recovery, as an individual, I need a higher power and guidance. Collectively, we need God, as he speaks through our group conscience, to guide us and trusted servants, to do those things that we as a collection of diverse individuals cannot do ourselves.

The remaining 10 traditions provide a framework for how our group conscience and trusted servants work together to serve our common welfare... our unity. When it dawned on me how, just like the Steps, these principles all work together, I began to see the traditions in a very different way.

Bill Wilson explained in *A.A. Comes of Age*, that, *"Pride and fear and anger—these are the prime enemies of our common welfare. True brotherhood, harmony and love, fortified by clear insights and right practices are the only answers. And the purpose of A.A.'s traditional principles is to bring these forces to the top and keep them there. Only then can our common welfare be served; only then can A.A.'s unity become permanent."*

Losing sight of what our primary purpose is, allowing outside issues to dictate how we treat people, forgetting that A.A. is bigger than just our home group or our district, this mind set justifies actions that can cause tension, fear, and intolerance.

When I first came to A.A., I was terrified that if you found out that I had not actually tried to commit suicide, that I wasn't that far gone yet, I would be turned away. When I shared my fear with my sponsor and eventually with my group, no one turned their backs and told me I was not a true alcoholic. Instead, I was told to come all the way in and sit all the way down. I was told that I was home... that I belonged.

It was through general service work that I learned A.A. was bigger than just the local group that opened their arms to me; bigger than the district we were part of, and even bigger than the Area that we belonged to. What an amazing experience to be able to open my heart and my mind to a Fellowship as broad and inclusive as ours. I came to realize that there were hundreds, then thousands, then millions of other sufferers from this disease. The phrase "You are not alone" suddenly meant more than the fact that you were all here for me. It became abundantly clear that we were all here for each other; that we all suffer, *and recover*, from this disease together or, as the saying goes, we die alone.

When I allow myself to return to being self-centered, and self-righteous I destroy my ability to be a part of the whole. I quickly become separated from God and those around me. The common welfare of anyone else becomes secondary to what I want and what I demand. A

clear indication for me that this is happening is when I begin weaponizing the Traditions instead of using them as the guides to unity that they were intended to be.

Getting past the “me” part of the problem, in order to experience the “WE” part of the solution, requires self-sacrifice. I have found that sacrificing my “self-interest” in the interest of unity is one of the most spiritual acts I can undertake. Oftentimes the “work” part of service work comes into play when I am asked to allow room in any discussion for others to share their experience, and their positions on whatever it is we are talking about. I also must work at setting my pride, my fear and sometimes my anger aside when the Group Conscience decides on something in a way other than how I think it should.

The Serenity Prayer offers a solution to the pride, fear and anger that make up my ego. At the end when I pray for the wisdom to know the difference, I am asking for help in seeing my part in all things. I can only contribute to Unity if I’m aware of the difference between what I can change and what I cannot.

The long form of the 1<sup>st</sup> traditions states “Each member of Alcoholics Anonymous is but a small part of a great whole. A.A. must continue to live or most of us will surely die. Hence our common welfare comes first. But individual welfare follows close afterward.” Unity is not destroyed by outside sources. Frothy emotional appeal will not maintain unity in A.A. Unity must come from our hearts and our desire to make sure that AA will be available for those still to come. Whether it be a loved one or friend, I want A.A. to remain a viable source of hope and recovery. Unity does matter.

## PAST TRUSTEES SHARING

**Ted S.**, past West Central Regional trustee, 2000-2004

The new people attending this forum are the most important people here. One of my sponsors was a past trustee for the West Central region and I remember him telling me, a long time ago, that the most important person in any A.A. meeting is the newcomer. That is exactly why we do what we do, today, to carry the message to that still-suffering alcoholic and to newcomers — to keep them involved with A.A. and service. My sponsor also said that not only are they the most important person in the meeting, but from there you work your way up to nothing. I agree and I believe it is doggone important. The experiences I gained through service to A.A. have been fantastic, as well as many of the friendships. I have a tremendous life — I have been so blessed by Alcoholics Anonymous and a power greater than myself, that I can never repay you for what I’ve got, but I’ve also found out that the more I do, and the more I serve, not only in A.A. and practicing these principles to the best of my ability, the more I get in return. I do it for a specific reason — to maintain my sobriety and continue to grow both spiritually and emotionally.

Class A trustees don’t have to do this to save their life, they do it for the other benefits I’ve been talking about, yet they serve A.A. in a great fashion and they do so many things for us. All we do is ask them to participate. They are the type of people who are very willing to participate and to serve A.A. and to serve their fellow man. I am very grateful for that. If we look throughout our history — in *A.A. Comes of Age* or in other literature — boy, those Class

A trustees and friends of Alcoholics Anonymous had a tremendous impact on this Fellowship, so I want to thank you, again. I know that I probably speak for everybody in A.A.

I was sponsored into service, and I am forever grateful that my sponsor was active in the group and the area, and then later became a trustee. Basically, he took me by the hand and led me. I try to do the same for the sponsees I have today, and I am still active in Alcoholics Anonymous. Tonight, my group has a newcomers' meeting with a local treatment center. We will have forty brand new people in that room tonight and other speakers that will be coming to share. We do this on a regular basis. Like I said, it's about carrying the message to the still-suffering alcoholic. Everything we do in this service structure is geared toward that. One of our past chairs used to talk about that to Elaine, a past General Service Board chair, and she used that as her measuring stick for what we did in A.A. She said that if what we do isn't for the primary purpose of helping the still-suffering alcoholic, we really don't need to be doing it. That is our primary purpose.

I am grateful to be a part of this forum and I am excited for the fact that COVID-19, to some degree, has been controlled, and we are able to have in-person meetings in some of our areas again. It is important, because for me, it would have been tough to get sober and remain sober without interacting with other people in Alcoholics Anonymous. Those people ended up being my sponsors and sponsees. I think when we can do this safely, having Conferences and Regional Forums in person, it is going to be very important for the future relationships and success of Alcoholics Anonymous. That time is coming, and we will get there sooner or later — hopefully sooner.

So, to the G.S.R.s and the new people: I love seeing and hearing that you are out there, and I can't wait to meet you at future meetings. This program has a tremendous amount to offer, and you are just getting started. I feel like I am just getting started and I have been here for lots of 24 hours. Thank you.

### **Dorothy W.**, past trustee-at-large/U.S., 2005-2009

I love service work; I've always loved service work. I was introduced to service work early in sobriety. My sponsor was pushing it. She'd say, "You want to get better, you've got to be of service, any kind of service." I thought, 'Oh yuck. I just want to be sober. I don't want to have to do all these other things; I've got things to do.' It was a slow process and a great process. It started with welcoming people and things like that. Then it was going to service functions like this — and we didn't have a choice. My sponsor said, "The car is leaving at such, and such a time and you are expected to be there." I went, "Mmmm. You've got to be kidding." We don't want to go to all those things, we have other things to do that we think are more important. But we were scared of what she'd do to us if we said, "No." So we were there. And I listened, though not fully expecting to someday be of service to Alcoholics Anonymous. I just thought I'd be a good member of A.A.

I would like to say something to the first timers: Don't keep coming back, just come and stay with us. This program has so much to offer, and we need you. We always need newcomers. I remember many times going to service conferences, and the trustee-at-large at the time would share where they had been and what they had done, and my heart would flutter. I

thought, 'You know, I would really like to do that someday. So, if that's in your plan, God, I am willing and I am ready.' And one day, that opportunity came.

At the time, I was living in Indianapolis. I listened to the trustees share and it warmed my heart. Did I think it was going to happen to me? No. For every service position I've had, my name was drawn from the hat. So, I had the feeling that people really didn't want me. God said, "I have a plan for you, so I am getting your name out of the hat." I thought, 'I can't let God down, so I'd better do a good job and do what I need to do.' Each time it was the best thing that could have happened to me.

As trustee-at-large/U.S., I have traveled to fifteen different countries. This weekend, some people shared about how grateful people are when A.A.s from the service structure of the U.S. and Canada come to their countries or to their meetings and let them know we care. One time, I went to Kuwait, and when I got home, I got an email from a man. He said, "I know I am going to make it in A.A. now because I have a mother in A.A. who knows me." If that doesn't warm your heart, I don't know what does.

As I've mentioned, every position I had, starting with area chair and then delegate, my name was pulled from the hat. I thought, 'My gosh, what a responsibility.' I felt so insecure, and I thought, 'I am never going to be able to do this. I only have a high school education.' I saw all these people with college degrees and big letters behind their name and I wondered, 'What have I got to give to this Fellowship?' But God has always given me what I needed, all I had to do was be willing.

God took me places and never left me there. The past G.M. of G.S.O. and I went to Kuwait once. We got there fine, but when we got into the terminal to get our baggage, they took our passports. We didn't get them back for a long time. We didn't know if we were ever getting out of Kuwait, but eventually we got them back and we went on our merry way. On that trip, during their conference, the night before we were to leave, two ladies from the U.S. living in Kuwait asked me how I got into the position of trustee-at-large. I shared with them and said, "I was so taken with the story of smuggling Big Books into Russia and other things people had done, it just excited me." I said, "I got to come to Kuwait, but nothing here is illegal." And they said, "Oh, everything we've done here this weekend has been illegal!" I was glad I was leaving that night.

All you have to do is be willing to serve. To all you new people who shared, my heart goes out to you. We are just members of Alcoholics Anonymous willing to give away what was so freely given to us. We need you.

**Ken B.**, past West Central regional trustee, 2008-2012

I've been touched by the comments of people who have not attended a forum before and are experiencing it virtually. Virtually, there are interesting advantages (I see someone from Sweden, for instance) that aren't likely to happen in Montana in two years. But there are definite advantages to meeting in person that can't be denied. For instance, sitting next to a staff person, a director, a trustee — meeting these people in person. In fact, that was one of Bill's great concerns, structurally. He resolved "New York vs. All the Rest of Us" through the General Service Conference, but he never was able to address the emotional "New York vs.

All the Rest of Us” until, after his passing, with the implementation of these forums. They really made A.A. all the healthier. I have had the opportunity to attend forums from as far away as the big island of Hawaii to a forum in Trois-Rivières, Quebec, which was bilingual, and everybody wore headphones and heard a translation. It created an equal footing that I’ve never seen in any other forum. These are wonderful events.

I’d like to put a finer point on something our chairperson said in her opening comment, when she talked about our “brown paper bag” service manual. If you joined our merry band, in this century, you’ve probably never seen one that looked like a grocery sack, but they did exist. Today I’d like to share my thoughts on a trend I’ve seen develop in A.A.: In the Ninth Step promises, we take comfort in the thought that we will not regret the past, nor wish to shut the door on it. We often use that promise as a topic discussion and I wonder if we are carrying that promise into the development of some of our literature. For instance, pamphlets are intended for change. About a dozen years ago there was a version of “It Sure Beats Sitting in a Cell.” That pamphlet had a picture of an inmate holding a hand-rolled cigarette. At the time, people who didn’t know the climate in a prison thought it was marijuana. No, it was a hand-rolled cigarette. But it was funny, and we can change pamphlets readily to suit the needs of the public, the outside facilities, and within the general Fellowship. So, instead of the hand-rolled cigarette, we replaced it with a picture of the Big Book, I believe. So, pamphlets are changed regularly, and it’s a good, healthy thing.

However, in 2016, the 66th General Service Conference altered an essay Bill wrote, where he talked about human interactions. He wrote, in part, “Then, too, some of us — of both sexes — have been emotionally damaged in the area of man-woman relations” and he went on to say, “We can be aware also that any sound working relation between adult men and women must be in the character of a partnership, a non-competitive one in which each partner complements the other.” Now, I’d love to direct you to the full document, but, in fact, it’s been removed from the Service Manual, it’s no longer in the Twelve Concepts, and there is a footnote that directs you to contact the G.S.O. Archives. Or you can find someone who is old who still has a copy of the original text. That Advisory Action set a precedent for our current process of what I see as censoring Bill’s essays. Shutting the door, so to speak. The 71st General Service Conference, as you are all aware, seemed to embrace this process by altering two more of Bill’s essays. This time from the “Twelve and Twelve.” In Step Six, it was an alteration involving, again, human behavior, and in Step Twelve, in the area of human relations. Both Actions did specify footnoting for context. I wonder if the footnote will read, “We regret the past.”

We are reducing Bill’s writings to pamphlet status, changing as society changes. But unlike the pamphlets, Bill’s writings in the “Twelve and Twelve” and the *Service Manual Combined with Twelve Concepts for World Service* ought to be respected for two basic reasons:

1. They establish a baseline for our understanding of alcoholism and its impacts on human behavior, warts and all.
  2. Revision constitutes, as I see it, censorship of Bill. And if censorship isn’t bad enough, on its face, I would argue that censorship is an act of government.
- Of course, our warranties *and* our charter both read “the Conference may act for the service of Alcoholics Anonymous, it shall never perform any acts of government.” The Fellowship might do well to reflect on how it is treating our past, slowly shutting the door on it. We might quit reading Bill’s essays as pamphlets, re-establish Bill’s original essays and simply own

our history. And, of course, of course: Footnote for context. I wish you all the best, and I hope to see you all in Montana.

### **Andrew W.**, past West Central regional trustee, 2012-2016

I'm really grateful we got to hear the first timers, as everyone said. I think it is important for us to keep the enthusiasm that first-timers have, even if it is our 21st or whatever forum it is for you. It's great to have that enthusiasm for different reasons, and one of the reasons I have enthusiasm is that I love coming back to these forums — even if it is in a virtual setting. I get to see people that I have not seen for years, and I get to see them in new roles and responsibilities. People who were non committee members and are now trustees, people who were G.S.R.s and are now delegates. It's great fun to see people take responsibility and to keep showing up.

One of the many reasons why I keep showing up is that it has been taught to me — my sponsor shows up and the people I sponsor show up, as well. I got to wish one of my sponsees this morning, via text, a happy 40th sober birthday. The connection we have with each other is so important for enthusiasm and to help keep us coming back.

The other thing I want to mention, two years from now will be the next West Central Regional Forum in Missoula, Montana. Certainly, hoping it will be in person. We were organizing for an in-person forum here, in Missoula, before we switched to virtual. I would love for us to take what we've learned from these virtual forums and use them in a good way. But when we have in-person forums, we can see folks having dialogue and hallway conversations. That is important.

I will put in a plug for the virtual forums, it would be great if we could do one of those a year or every two years. This would let people participate who couldn't participate in other ways. I still strongly believe that in-person forums get people from the local community and local area more involved. Also, having people come from across the region, and seeing all the people I know, and love keeps me coming back. It is also a way to pass on all the gifts I was given, just from being in A.A. and being in service. It's one of the reasons I keep making myself available for different things.

Keep participating. One of the gifts of my sobriety has been the gift of participation and it is one of the things I've been taught in service, as well. We are going to have a virtual area assembly next week and I was looking forward to it being in person, but the area committee made the choice to have it virtually. I will support them in their decision, that right of decision that they have when making that tough choice. I will participate in that virtual area assembly, and I am looking forward to it — I will see a lot of the folks I know and love from across Montana. I loved seeing all of you today. Thanks.

### **Tom A.**, past West Central regional trustee, 2016-2020

In 2001, when the [Fourth Edition] Big Book came out, there was a line in the Foreword to the Fourth Edition. And the line said, "Fundamentally, though, the difference between an electronic meeting and the home group around the corner is only one of format." I read that to you because that was what was written, at first, when they put in the Foreword to the

Fourth Edition. In 2002, they took that line out at the General Service Conference, saying that the difference between an electronic meeting and a meeting in person is *not* just one of format. The 2002 General Service Conference felt there was more to what it means to be meeting in person. I thought of that at my Wednesday night meeting. My wife has a new sponsee, and that lady is sitting between us, reeking of alcohol, fidgeting, up and down to the bathroom. Those are the things you just don't get when you are sitting and staring at a screen. So, it is a lot more than just format.

Also, in 2001, as a delegate, I was at a Regional Forum in Sioux Falls. I made a presentation called "Changing the General Service Structure: A Third Rail Issue." That was my swan song after 13 years of general service. And I think it continues to be a third rail issue. I bring it up because I was on Trustee Nominating for three of my four years, when I served on the General Service Board. During that time, we did an appraisal with about 30 or 40 trustees. We looked at issues, solutions. We offered a report that was an appraisal of board service roles. It was a valuable report with lots of data in it. Maybe my swan song as a trustee is that I did write a proposal for realignment of the General Service Board which maybe now is relegated to the dark recesses of the General Service Office archives, but nonetheless an interesting thing.

So, you might begin to suspect that I think some changes might be useful with the General Service Board between what I presented in 2001 and what I participated in during 2019 and 2020. I think there are some opportunities to improve on what we have here today. To be brief, during this time from when I was a G.S.R. in 1987 to when I finished my tenure in 2020 as your trustee, I basically travelled from the top of that service triangle down to the bottom — I slid to a new bottom. I learned, I think, two poignant things that I will share with you today.

The problem with my alcoholism that Harry Tiebout writes about in *A.A. Comes of Age* is about the unconquerable ego. And Bill puts it more succinctly in the Big Book where he says, "Selfishness—self-centeredness! That, we think, is the root of our troubles." But Tiebout, in a more elegant fashion, has some incredible pages that I always suggest reading. I always try to read it a couple times a month for myself. He says that surrender is, essentially, a disciplinary experience and that is the only way I can somehow keep my ego in check. That is true if I have 35 years of sobriety or 35 days of sobriety.

The other thing I learned on the Board is the remedy for what we have, right here, is to practice and use the Traditions in all the things we do. When we were on the Board, we were very busy, there is no doubt that it is a very demanding job. In my keynote (and the keynote is inside that final Conference report for 2020, which is likely one of the most secret places to hide information) and in our annual report to Alcoholics Anonymous is an incredible amount of information.

This is something taught to me by a good friend; that we need to start — not just end — our discussions by applying the Twelve Traditions whenever the subject matter is being considered. It sure makes decision-making a whole lot faster. If we filter our decisions through the Traditions, we have confidence in correct spiritual solutions in a material world. They are a result of tests and trials, and they work. Again, it comes down to two things, do I have faith in a Higher Power that he will help us find and follow the right path? And do we

really have faith that our Traditions are based on spiritual principles? If number 2 is true, then our principles are working under all circumstances and in all conditions. In my farewell talk as a rotating trustee at the end of the General Service Conference I talked about how I came to realize that it was time to rotate after four years. I think this condition can apply to everyone in service — the human condition and the unconquerable ego. I knew that rotation was the necessary thing for me to do. So that was one of the gifts that I was given. It was to serve and to say, “Tom, it is time to go.” So, with that, it is time to go, thank you very much.

## CLOSING REMARKS

The current West Central regional trustee, Miguel, contributed to the closing remarks and shared the final count of the virtual West Central Regional Forum at 421 members, including 166 first-time attendees. Miguel commented on the unusual circumstances A.A. (and the rest of the world) finds itself in, noting that for nearly a year and a half, A.A. has been taking care of business in a virtual setting, a venue that was previously and largely under-utilized. Miguel quoted Linda Chezem, “Should A.A. fear technology and change by using technology? Prudence is wise, but fear is dangerous. If we let ourselves be too frightened to consider new ways of carrying the message and of sharing our strength, hope and experience, then some alcoholics will die, when they could have found sobriety — if the hand of A.A. could have reached them.”

Miguel continued, “Our role as trusted servants is to meet the alcoholics where they are at...and today it is requiring us to adapt. We cannot necessarily meet in person, the way we did in the past...we have demonstrated that we will adapt, and these virtual forums are an example of how we are doing that. Our responsibility and our spiritual obligation is to carry the message but what our obligation is *not* to change our Traditions to match the technology, but to adapt the technology to fit our Traditions.”

**Bob W.**, General Manager, General Service Office, 2021-present

My heart is completely full. In spite of the format, and the things we discussed, it may not be ideal, and I shared in my opening comments that this kind of format is not ideal for me, but it works because my heart is truly full. I know it’s full because as I am listening to the presentations from the delegates and all the sharing, it directed my thinking back to: Who could be down the street from me, in the gutter? In the places where I was? That is where our thinking is during these events. You all speak to me in the language of the heart, and it has been incredible sharing this weekend and it was a great forum. These forums are designed for the Fellowship to get to know the folks at G.S.O. and the folks among the boards, and for us to all get to know each other. I think that we have done that. It is also to get a pulse of what is going on in the Fellowship and what is important to all of us. I heard that and it was wonderful.

In my opening comments, I shared about how I feel about the Second Tradition and the group conscience and particularly the importance of why participation and sharing, and this



forum, certainly lived up to that tenfold and supports that group conscience, particularly the way we move into next year's General Service Conference. Often, I speak of the importance of how we do things in A.A., rather than what we do. Again, this format lived up to that. We talked about various issues that are controversial, and we are going to continue to talk about issues that are controversial — that teeter on the lines of being outside issues or try to reconcile how they become inside issues to fit within our various Traditions. I think we did that well and very respectfully, and that's the how, not necessarily the "what" we come up with.

I'm so grateful to be part of a Fellowship that does that. So, I want to say thank you...to all the employees of A.A.W.S. and the AA Grapevine who spent many hours here, in their chairs, we kept calling on them, and they kept showing up, putting the cameras on. and they participated. But you know, they get paid. I don't want to slight them at all, but I have to offer my huge thanks to the trustees, directors, and volunteers because they don't get paid, and they spent the same amount of hours with all of you. Particularly, the nonalcoholics who don't necessarily have the same thing inside I feel as an alcoholic. I've got to be here.

I am always touched by the first timers sharing, and this time it did not disappoint. It never does. I see what is happening to you and I remember what happened to me, which many of the past trustees shared about — their first forums. It is how and why service is so important to us and it touches our sobriety, and it cements us and gets us into service. I hope you continue to participate with us; we need you all.

**Linda Chezem**, Class A (nonalcoholic) trustee, General Service Board Chair, 2021-present

This virtual forum is a success because of everyone who attended, not just the tech team, translators, and staff, but everyone who attended. When my children were small, I would ask them how big they were, and the answer they gave me is the same size as the 'Thank You' I am giving to everyone here this weekend and who worked to make this forum possible. How big is my 'Thank you?' It is so big that I can't make it any bigger.

I started out the weekend by talking about my first Regional Forum. It was a door opening for me to better understand service. It was how I began to understand that the General Service Board is not just a legal corporation. It is, through the handshake with the Fellowship (through the General Service Conference), for the trusted servants to carry out what needs to be carried out, in terms of the legal aspects, so that we support carrying A.A.'s message.

So, to the first-time attendees, now more than ever, you are needed. Every day, there are more people who need the hand of A.A. We are reading the data; I am seeing statistics coming in from the National Institutes of Health about the increase in alcohol abuse and misuse. So, as you leave today, remember, you are only stepping out of the room a little bit. Don't go far, be back, be back soon and help carry the message.

I was given the option today to choose how to close this forum. The Declaration of Unity and the Responsibility Statement have been playing tug-of-war in my head all morning long, as to which one we should say together. We are really focusing on service and figuring out how

to make sure everyone comes back, so we will close with the Responsibility Statement. But sometime later today, while you are out and about doing whatever you are doing for the rest of your day, don't forget about the Declaration of Unity and how we must seek unity to make sure that A.A. survives.

**I am responsible, when anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A. always to be there, and for that I am responsible.**