

EAST CENTRAL REGIONAL FORUM

FINAL REPORT

JULY 12~14, 2019

Detroit, Michigan

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

Dear A.A. Friends,

Please mark your calendar for the next East Central Regional Forum, which will take place in Independence, Ohio on the weekend of November 19-21, 2021 at the Double Tree by Hilton.

A.A. World Services, Inc.
c/o General Service Office
P.O. Box 459
Grand Central Station
New York, NY 10163
(212) 870-3120
Fax: (212) 870-3003
E-mail: regionalforums@aa.org
G.S.O.'s A.A. Website: www.aa.org

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INTRODUCTION

The 2019 East Central Regional Forum was held in Detroit, Michigan. Registration for the Forum was **326**. This included **207** members attending their very first Forum—many were welcomed at the Forum Orientation on Friday evening. In addition, the East Central Regional Forum marked the **212th** Regional Forum since their inception in 1975.

DELEGATE PRESENTATIONS

Enthusiasm in Service

Lori C., Delegate Panel 69, Area 32 Central Michigan

When I first read the loving invitation from the General Service Office to provide some service to the East Central Regional Forum, I was, of course, ready to volunteer in any capacity as needed. I immediately emailed back saying that I would be willing to either lead a workshop or share a presentation, along with offering my preference from the list of suggested topics. Imagine my anxiety when I received a response saying I, personally, could pick either one.

I emailed my service sponsor with this bit of news and then sat and meditated about which one I felt compelled to do. Of course, I have personally led many a workshop over the course of my service to A.A., and this would be the “easier, softer” way for me to go. But, as I’ve learned throughout my time in A.A., if I don’t push myself outside of my comfort zone, then I am “resting on my laurels” and “headed for trouble.” So, obviously, I chose to give a presentation before this body to not only share on something that is near and dear to me—“Enthusiasm in Service” — but to grow as a person and in my current service position as delegate to the General Service Conference.

So here I am. Full of anxiety, nerves full blasting, mouth dry and several other things that I am sure many of you could imagine experiencing when standing before such a prestigious body, ready to share with you the only thing that I truly can: my personal experience, strength and hope about this heartfelt topic.

Upon my first “real” delve into Alcoholics Anonymous — when I started to attend meetings on a daily basis — I was told that not only are we there to get sober, but we need to give back in any way possible. So, my first journey into service was as coffee maker, as it is for many a newcomer.

After a month of sobriety, my sponsor at the time told me it was time to lead a meeting. I did it — not gladly, not with enthusiasm, but with trepidation. I learned very valuable lessons during that time, though: I learned to listen. I learned that it was okay to look up from the table

at people. I received so many more gifts from that small but important service opportunity, and I had my first real taste of giving back what was so freely given to me. I became enthused with providing service, at least at my home group.

When I was given an opportunity a few months later to serve the group as the literature chairperson, I took that new responsibility and first tried to do it my way with the purchase of different meditation books and other items of interest I thought my home group should find important. Another valuable lesson learned. I had to follow directions and a group conscience, and, most importantly, I had to learn how to provide service to a group and not to just myself. I learned that this is truly a “We” program, and if I made it about me, I was bound to get drunk. So, it was during this time that I learned how to give to others. I did any service opportunity presented to me then, and I loved it.

As time went on, I found that only providing service at the home group level, while important and needed, just wasn't enough for me anymore. I started looking into doing more. When I found myself drifting some from the tables of A.A., a couple of oldtimers saw this in me and “voluntold” me I was now the group's G.S.R. This was not on my agenda of the service I wished to do, and I told them no. That was the first time in A.A. I had ever said no to a service opportunity, but there was no chance I was going to do that type of service. Personally, due to the passion these oldtimers had about service (specifically the corrections end of things), there was no way in the world I was ever going to do that. So I erased my name from the service position. They put it back up; I erased. This went on for months, until I reluctantly decided to accompany them to an Area 32 meeting, just to “see what this G.S.R. thing really was.” I learned so much about all the additional services A.A. does, and not just at a local level. I saw that, even though I was just one of many, I could and should learn as much about A.A. as a whole in order to give back to the total program and not just give back at my home group. I was hooked.

Again as time went on, I learned so much about A.A. I learned why service is so important at any level of the program. I learned about the Traditions, the Concepts, A.A. World Services, the Grapevine, the General Service Conference, my district, my area and my home group.

How we all fit in together, why we put so much emphasis on service and exactly what it means when we say “Faith without works is dead.”

Being of service in A.A. has taught me that, yes, I do have to work. I have to first work on me and take the selfishness, self-centeredness and ego out of any service I am asked to do. It is not and will never be about me. It is about A.A. as a whole. Bill W. wrote in the December 1947 issue of the Grapevine that “we relate ourselves rightly to God and to our fellows; that we each see ourselves as we really are — ‘a small part of a great whole.’” This is what enthuses me. Personally, I love giving back to a program that has given me my life. Without A.A. I know I would be dead. I cannot imagine staying sober in any other way.

Bill W. wrote a lot about service, about how and why we do this thing. He wrote that as recovered alcoholics and as a society, we have no real choice but to provide a service. He wrote about our great responsibility. He gave us clear-cut instructions and guidance on just how to perform this service through *The A.A. Service Manual/Twelve Concepts for World Service*. He had the foresight in 1951 to give our society to its members through the General Service Conference. Bill W. among other reasons saw that the General Service Conference and its appointed delegates were able to apply the enduring principle for the purpose of A.A. as a whole. As he wrote in another Grapevine article in June 1951, which was about the first General Service Conference that was held in April of that year: “[The delegates] took in the stark fact that AA as a *whole* must continue to function or else it might well suffer that common penalty of faith without works. Which is: disintegration.” I am grateful for this direction.

Our Big Book states on page 164, in the chapter “A Vision for You,” to “Abandon yourself to God as you understand God. Admit your faults to Him and to your fellows. Clear away the wreckage of your past. Give freely of what you find and join us. We shall be with you in the Fellowship of the Spirit, and you will surely meet some of us as you trudge the Road of Happy Destiny. May God bless you and keep you — until then.” I choose to live this while skipping down the road with enthusiasm.

“Enthusiasm in Service,” however, is not something that can really be written about by anyone, least of all myself. It is a principle of action, or a feeling or an attitude that I choose to present.

It is something that was given to me by those who came before me. It was what I found when I first began doing service more than 20 years ago. It is what drew me into the program of Alcoholics Anonymous and kept me from sitting on the sidelines, only observing this program of action. For me, it is the way in which I have been able to stay sober. I can find no other way to be of service to A.A. except to be enthusiastic. I can wear all the pins in the world that say “Service Woo Hoo!,” but I have to live it, I have to show it, I have to find a way to convey it to others to keep this gift growing and flourishing for years to come. I have to. It is my great responsibility. I found purpose through this program. I remain enthusiastic about any service opportunity granted to me. I am grateful and humbled for such a gift.

Young People in A.A

Kris K., Delegate Panel 69, Area 75 Southern Wisconsin

Good morning, fellow trusted servants. My name is Kris, and I will always be an alcoholic. Currently serving as Panel 69 delegate for Area 75 Southern Wisconsin, I am extremely grateful for the opportunity to share on a topic dear to my heart: “Young People in A.A.” I will start by stating the obvious. Chronologically, I am not a young person. In fact, I am quickly approaching my 65th birthday. Sobriologically, I am in my late teens. And some days, in the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous, I can still feel like a newcomer — not sure what to expect, where to sit, who to talk to, who’s in charge or what to do next. Although I am not often in that position, I cannot afford to forget that feeling.

When I first came into Alcoholics Anonymous in my mid-forties, I had no idea how lucky I was to stumble into a fellowship made up of people very much like myself. The meetings I attended in small-town rural southern Wisconsin were comprised of people close to my age — a few older, a few younger. Most were married or had been. Most were raising teenagers or had adult children. Most were blue-collar workers — working, looking for work, or retired. They seemed to enjoy the area where we lived, what with its fishing, hunting, camping and outdoor activities. And they were alcoholics — just alcoholics, period. I immediately related to these new friends, and I fit right in.

My appreciation for that acceptance and connection continues to grow as I recognize that this is not the experience of many who come through our doors. When I first got here, having been

a career bartender for more than 25 years, I really did not know anyone who didn't drink. My professional and social circles revolved around drinking establishments and drinking people. When it was suggested that I make new friends and find new places to go, I had no idea how to do that. It was "those people in A.A.," those people who were a lot like me, that filled that need.

What would have happened if I had stumbled into a room where they were not like me at a time when all I could see was how different we were, a time before I was able to understand how similar we were? What if I couldn't connect, I couldn't relate and I couldn't stay?

The question in the mind of every newcomer appears on page 152 of our book *Alcoholics Anonymous*: "I know I must get along without liquor, but how can I? Have you a sufficient substitute?" And we emphatically answer that question with, "Yes, there is a substitute and it is vastly more than that. It is a fellowship in Alcoholics Anonymous." What I want us to consider today is the core truth of that answer: We may be offering a substitute, but is it sufficient?

In our ever-changing world, diversity in our communities, and therefore in the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous, continues to grow. We in A.A. have come to understand that anyone can be an alcoholic regardless of gender, creed, race, occupation, education, sexual orientation or age. Anyone with a desire to not drink is welcome in our rooms. Today's young people are arriving at our doors in increasing numbers, and they often face struggles in addition to alcoholism, such as drug addiction, homelessness, domestic abuse or numerous other issues. We do not address these individual issues, although the hand of A.A. may offer direction to resources that do. We can, however, offer a loving and caring fellowship that can help relieve the sense of isolation, fill the need "to be part of" and keep our young people coming back long enough to hear the rest of our message.

One of our greatest challenges is creating an attractive fellowship that young people can relate to, identify with and actively participate in. When I first heard about committees of young people in A.A., I admit I had some preconceived ideas of what they were about. I remember saying, "Do they think they're special? Do they have some sort of young person's alcoholism?" I had some pretty strong judgment, too. I wasn't sure of their purpose in A.A. After attending

my first Y.P.A.A. event about 10 years ago, I openly pointed out that their behaviors resembled what I called “bar behavior.” I questioned whether we should be supporting that. I was closed-minded, I didn’t understand and I didn’t ask. Because of various service positions I have held, Y.P.A.A. conference committees kept inviting me to their events and I kept going. And my perception changed.

I am grateful that I am still teachable, and these young people have taught me a lot. I came to understand that even though we share the same disease, our recovery can look very different. Through shared experience with others, we all learn how to apply the program of Alcoholic Anonymous not only in a general way, but also to both the world in which we live and in the way we live. And this is their world, their stage of life. The energy and enthusiasm brought to the rooms of A.A. might be attributed to an overconsumption of Monster Energy drinks, but I believe it is simply a youthful joy in living. Yes, they may be loud and boisterous, chant slogans, dance or play cards all night or text and play games on their phones, because that is what young people do. Although they may have to work around school schedules, work commitments or childcare requirements, they suit up, show up and share.

Finding a safe and accepting place to be who you are, as you are, is essential to each and every one of us. Let us not forget that these young people in A.A. are our future. We need them, and they have answered the call. They have provided a fellowship that is attractive, accepting and energized, and they deserve our support. The service opportunities created in the planning and hosting of annual Y.P.A.A. conferences and events provide invaluable training for continued work in home groups, districts and areas. The enthusiasm is contagious — so contagious that Y.P.A.A. is an active presence in Europe, as well. The World Service Meeting *Final Report* for 2018 highlighted Y.P.A.A. activities in Finland, which recently hosted E.U.R.Y.P.A.A. Young people in A.A. are alive, well and active in the U.S., in Canada and around the world. By example, they carry a vital message all of us need to hear: Recovery is FUN! When young people in A.A. are asked, “Have you a sufficient substitute?” the answer is yes, and for that I am grateful.

In closing, I share the words of Bill W. from a letter he addresses to his younger friends in A.A. On the occasion of the 12th International Conference of Young People on June 15, 1969,

Bill writes, “I want every one of you to know that in recent years I have found nothing for greater inspiration than the knowledge that A.A. of tomorrow will be safe, and certainly magnificent, in the keeping of you who are the younger generation of A.A. today.” I agree with Bill. We are in good hands.

How to Be a Sponsor

Bobby D., Delegate Panel 69, Area 21 Southern Illinois

As I thought about the topic “How to Be a Sponsor,” I realized that even though I’m very comfortable *being* a sponsor, I’ve never thought at length about *how* to be a sponsor. In fact, I suppose I’ve learned equally from those whose sponsorship I’ve admired and from those whose style didn’t work for me — just another confirmation that we can be either shining examples or horrible warnings! I believe my current sponsor is number 20, but I will quickly add that I went through a dozen of them in my first year and a half. There is a reason for that. Where I got sober, everyone was fond of saying, “Get a sponsor that has what you want,” and, being new, I thought that meant, *ask the guy with a fast sports car and a pretty girlfriend.*

Here are a few things those early sponsors taught me *not* to do: I was 29 when I first got sober, so naturally I wanted a younger guy for a sponsor. I told him I was willing to go to any lengths, but I quickly tired of his constant directions on how I should live my life. It all blew up one night when he told me I’d better go to a meeting a day or I’d get drunk, and unfortunately, I couldn’t make more than five meetings a week. By the end of the meeting, my anger boiled over, and, pointing to the nearest bar, I said, “You want to see drunk? Just step over to that bar with me and I’ll buy *you* your first drink!” I followed him to his car, screaming insults, as all the members of that meeting watched. He went home, of course, and I went to that bar and got drunk *at* him! That night I learned I don’t react well to a sponsor that threatens or tries to guilt me if I don’t follow his directions.

Still steaming with resentment, I asked an older gentleman who I felt pretty sure was a lot less controlling, and for a time all went well. But later, as I attended my first A.A. roundup, my trust in him was shattered as he made an advance on me. From him I learned that trust is sacred, and that trust must be earned. My third sponsor had several years of sobriety and seemed very nice, but he rarely answered his phone. Then came the day I called and found his number

had been disconnected, and later I learned that he had moved out in the middle of the night. My next sponsor was a tax accountant, and the few times we met were great. However, as tax season approached, he became less and less inclined to take my calls, and he finally said he had no time to help me. The feeling of abandonment was intense, and I learned that it is unfair to say I'll sponsor someone if I don't have the time.

My next sponsor appointed himself. He had taken me to my first A.A. meeting, and although we were good friends, we never sat down to study and work the Steps. His focus was on having fun in sobriety, but that wasn't something I seemed capable of at the time; so the day came when he had to let me go. He sat me down and told me that I needed to find a new sponsor, but that it wasn't my fault. "I'm just not the right sponsor for you," he said. "I'm trying to teach you how to have fun, but you can't hear me; you just need someone you *can hear*." From him I learned how to let go of a sponsee when things are not working out without hurting him and how to encourage him to find someone new. Finally, I found a sponsor who sat down and read the book with me as he tried to help me work the Steps. The only problem was that he, like most people in the Northeast in the late 1980s and early '90s, read only the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* book and rarely referred to the Big Book, which contains the directions on working the Twelve Steps.

As I moved to the Midwest and got new sponsors, I learned many more things. Principally, I discovered that I do not do well with a sponsor who raises his voice with me. At six and a half years *dry*, I found myself trying to sponsor half a dozen men who wouldn't listen to me, no matter what I said or threatened. I was D.C.M. at the time and had been heavily involved in service, but I couldn't get along with those drunks!

Taking my inventory, I decided it was my fault and that I should attend a few AI-Anon meetings to learn how to get along with "all them drunks." I asked the only other man in the meeting to be my sponsor. To my surprise, he said that AI-Anons worked the Steps of A.A. themselves, and that we would be reading the Big Book. Without a doubt, that man saved my life. He brought that book alive for me and gave me a whole new perspective at sponsorship. First, he taught me to share the journey with my sponsees — we walk shoulder to shoulder, as long as our paths are parallel. I point out things I've stumbled over, I share my experience with

each of the Steps and we grow closer together as friends and brothers. Second, that sponsor taught me to use the ancient Greek philosopher Socrates' method of teaching. When he was asked a question, he would ask one in return. Using this Socratic method of teaching, I help them find the answer *that is right for them*. I remind them to seek God's guidance first when they are faced with a dilemma, since I don't want them to develop an unhealthy dependence on me. I believe it's my duty to help them rely on God and other people, as well, to help them on their journey.

I also believe God has given me the gift of encouragement, so I try to be quick to see and celebrate their joys and victories. I encourage my sponsees to say yes if someone asks them to sponsor them — even when they're still young in sobriety. There is plenty of precedence for this, starting with Ebby, who became Bill's sponsor with only two months of sobriety, and Bill, who became Dr. Bob's sponsor with only six. As someone once put it, "When the newcomer walks in the door, they're a train wreck! *How are you going to screw up a train wreck?*" By sharing whatever little *they've* learned, they practice the vital principle of giving freely of what they've been given, reaching out their hand to the lonely and frightened newcomer. It also lights a fire under them to stay ahead of their new sponsee — and *that's not a bad thing!*

In conclusion, I believe there's nothing I can do or say that will ever get anyone sober or ever make anyone drink. The outcome is decided *only* by the newcomer's willingness to connect to a Power greater than himself. Besides taking the Twelve Steps, I believe there is no better way to continue growing in humility than by being a sponsor. I am blessed to have the most wonderful sponsor in the world today. He is several years younger than I am chronologically, but he was blessed with sobriety at age 21. I'm also privileged to share my walk with several men whose paths currently run parallel to my own. I know that even when our paths diverge, eventually they'll come back together again, and, like a two-track stereo, we won't have missed a beat!

Non-Alcoholics: Their Role in Meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous

Margaret M., Delegate Panel 68, Area 23 Southern Indiana

There is currently much controversy within the Fellowship concerning the role of nonalcoholics who attend open A.A. meetings. Closed meetings are for alcoholics only, but anyone may attend an open A.A. meeting. Should these nonalcoholics play a part in an open meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous? Should they participate fully, including taking part in the discussion and putting money in the basket? If we do not fully include them, are we not being exclusive, violating the express wishes of our founders? The short answer is *no*.

First, let us consider who is a member of Alcoholic Anonymous. Our Third Tradition tells us that “The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.” This implies that the person had a desire to drink before coming to the program. It doesn’t matter if that person also has an addiction to other substances, so long as the desire to stop drinking alcohol exists. It also doesn’t matter how long it has been since the person abused alcohol or perhaps used another drug (or drugs) between alcoholic drinking and coming to A.A. It also doesn’t matter if a person has used other drugs more than alcohol, so long as the desire to stop drinking is present.

Second, let’s take a look at how our Fifth Tradition describes our primary purpose: “Each Alcoholics Anonymous group ought to be a spiritual entity *having but one primary purpose* — that of carrying its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.” It does not say “to the addict who still suffers,” but refers only to alcoholics.

In the A.A. pamphlet “Problems Other than Alcohol,” our co-founder Bill W. discusses our primary purpose. He defines our primary purpose as “Sobriety — freedom from alcohol — through the teaching and practice of the Twelve Steps is the **sole purpose of an A.A. group.**” (p. 3, emphasis added) If the primary and sole purpose of our groups is to carry the message of sobriety to the still-suffering alcoholic, how then can we allow those who have no problem with alcohol to participate in our meetings — even open meetings? If they have no experience, strength and hope to share regarding getting and staying sober, how can they effectively share at an A.A. meeting? In the same pamphlet referred to above, which is written completely by Bill W., Bill states “*there is no possible way to make nonalcoholics into A.A. members.*” He

clarifies that this does not exclude an addict, so long as he or she has a desire to stop drinking. Bill goes so far as to suggest there is nothing wrong with A.A. members forming a group with nonalcoholic drug users, except that they may not identify themselves as an A.A. group or use A.A. in their group name. (p. 6)

In 1955, Bill focused on our singleness of purpose in one of his many addresses to the Fellowship: “Let us resist the proud assumption that since God has enabled us to do well in one area we are destined to be a channel of saving grace for everybody.” (“The A.A. Group,” p. 7) In the description of open and closed meetings in that same pamphlet, these statements appear: “Nonalcoholics may attend open meetings as **observers**.” and “the A.A. chairperson may request that participants confine their discussion to matters pertaining to recovery from alcoholism.” (p. 13, emphasis added) Remember, our pamphlets are approved by our General Service Conference, and they often quote Bill W.’s own words.

What about nonalcoholics putting money in the basket? Once again, the answer is in the Traditions, specifically Tradition Seven: “Every A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.” Money placed in the basket by someone who is not an alcoholic is an outside contribution, and it therefore violates the Seventh Tradition.

All this may sound harsh and overly exclusive. My home group thinks it does. But reading about the development of our singleness of purpose in A.A. literature such as *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age* and *Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers* shows just how important the first A.A.s felt the membership of only alcoholics was and is to the survival of our Fellowship. Theirs were not the fears of timid souls, but conclusions that sprang from their experience, strength and hope as members of Alcoholics Anonymous.

In the current culture of “a drug is a drug is a drug,” why doesn’t A.A. conduct itself as other recovery programs do and open up full participation to all those with addictions? The answer is in those other programs’ Traditions. For example, both Narcotics Anonymous and Cocaine Anonymous have Fifth Traditions that tell their members to “carry the message to the **addict** who still suffers.” (Fifth Traditions of both N.A. and C.A., emphasis added) “Bulletin 13” of the

worldwide board of trustees of Narcotics Anonymous contains a discussion about how Bill W. was instrumental in getting N.A. started so that there would be a place where drug addicts could go and identify just as A.A.s did in Alcoholics Anonymous. However, the bulletin makes it clear that when it comes to primary purpose, the two fellowships part company. Where A.A. was and continues to be for alcoholics only (anyone with a desire to stop drinking), N.A. membership is open to all who are addicted to any mind-altering substance. The same is true of C.A.: anyone who is an addict, no matter the substance, may become a member and fully participate in all the activities of that fellowship. Although an alcoholic may fully participate in other fellowships, whose Third and Fifth Traditions contain the words “addict” and “addiction” as opposed to “alcoholic” and “alcoholism,” members of other fellowships who are not alcoholics may attend our open meetings as observers only. It is interesting to note that N.A.’s “Bulletin 13” asks N.A. members to respect A.A.’s Traditions and not adopt a stance of “we’re better than them.” It could be said that if N.A. is urging its members to honor A.A.’s Traditions, our own members could choose to be faithful to our Third and Fifth Traditions.

In summary, A.A. does not now have nor has it ever had an intent to exclude members who have a desire to stop drinking, no matter what their favorite drug may have been. We do, however, limit both membership in A.A. and full participation in A.A. meetings to those who meet the requirement of our Third Tradition. Having said that, let me also cite our Fourth Tradition, which allows the groups to decide how they will conduct their meetings unless those decisions affect other groups or A.A. as a whole. Bill W. often said that every group has the right to be wrong. Matters pertaining to the conduct of group meetings should be decided by the members of the home group through a group conscience meeting. Our groups will continue to be watched over by a Higher Power, whether or not the group conscience follows the Traditions, but our founders were convinced that groups that consistently strayed from the Traditions would eventually disappear. Whatever your group decides about how to conduct its meeting, may each of us be guided by our Higher Power as we continue to participate in our wonderful and life-saving program of Alcoholics Anonymous.

FULL FORUM PRESENTATION

Today's World: Integrity, Anonymity and Service

Jenny C., Delegate Panel 68, Area 56 Southwest Ohio

Who are we today? We are publishing our Big Book in more than 71 languages in 180 nations worldwide, with a membership of more than two million, and our newest pamphlets and books reflect our images, interests, desires and needs. The 25th World Service Meeting in Durban South Africa in October 2018 addressed the topic of "A.A.'s Future in the Modern World." The keynote speaker described it as the 'tap of a keyboard that allows us to share information in a fast-paced social media–driven world with advanced technology and sometimes instant spiritual skepticism." We were reminded in that report that the Twelve Traditions are our primary tool. Bill W. once said, "Our Traditions are set down on paper. But they were written first in our hearts. For each of us knows, instinctively, I think, that A.A. is not ours to do with as we please. We are but caretakers to preserve the spiritual quality of our Fellowship; keep it whole for those who will come after us and have need of what has so generously been given to us."

By definition, "integrity" is the quality of having a sense of honesty and truthfulness regarding one's motivations and actions, and it is the principle of Step Five. It is also defined by the wisdom traditions like small cracks in a rock; the cracks widen and once our heart breaks open, the head begins to know "what before only the heart felt." The heaviness is lifted and we begin seeing with our heart, just as the eagle sees love in everything. It means doing what you are called to do, and doing it ethically, purposefully and to the best of your ability. Communication tools will come and go. We are spiritual beings, and A.A. is a spiritual program.

In *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, Bill describes that "every piece of literature written and produced by A.A. including use of its very name is owned and controlled by the Fellowship itself. Only in this way can the integrity of the A.A. message be preserved."

"Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities." We are responsible for our own anonymity as well as for that

of others. A.A. is not anonymous; it is our responsibility to ensure that the public is informed, providing public information with singleness of purpose. For myself, I consider anonymity as meaning to give of myself unconditionally and to not take credit in order to benefit others. I need to stay out of conflict both inside and outside of A.A. It also means not seeking credit or recognition for any perceived good deeds I may do. Our Traditions and Concepts remind us of the necessity to remain within the confines of anonymity, particularly as Bill W. makes reference to this in his writings.

The February 4, 2019, edition of a newspaper in our northernmost district in Area 56 featured an article entitled “Looking for a Second Chance — More Employers Offering Jobs to Released Inmates.” Although the article contained a great deal of positive information about A.A. along with programs that are helping people while they are in jail, a full-face picture, including first and last name of the photographed individual, was largely displayed, and it showed this person reading the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous. A letter to the media from aa.org was downloaded and mailed with the Area 56 return address. The newspaper was given the information that they needed in a kind, respectful way, and no personalities were involved while providing the important information to assure a better understanding of our primary purpose and to better inform and educate the public media and this particular newspaper staff.

We are also becoming more frequently challenged with requests to our area website to include or attach an advertisement from treatment centers or other well-meaning organizations that are having events for which they would like to reach our “audience.” This requires phone calls and emails to provide information about our Eleventh Tradition.

Our literature describes our responsibility of service: “Hence, an A.A. service is anything whatever that helps us to reach a fellow sufferer — ranging all the way from the Twelfth Step itself to a ten-cent phone call and a cup of coffee, and to A.A.’s General Service Office for national and international action.” In the pamphlet “A.A.’s Legacy of Service,” Bill describes how at the first General Service Conference delegates handled “several tough puzzles,” sometimes by giving advice contrary to G.S.O. conclusions. And yet it was seen that in nearly

every instance they were right, proving Tradition Two to be correct. The group conscience could safely act as sole authority and sure guide for Alcoholics Anonymous.

Dr. Bob's message in the July 1944 Grapevine reads, "Tolerance furnishes, as a by-product, a greater freedom from the tendency to cling to preconceived ideas and stubbornly adhered-to opinions. In other words, it often promotes an open-mindedness that is vastly important — is, in fact, a prerequisite to the successful termination of any line of search, whether it be scientific or spiritual."

Words and phrases, I have learned, including "open-mindedness," "willingness to grow along spiritual lines" and "completely give myself to this simple program," reflect the Traditions, which are the means by which A.A. maintains its unity and are how we continue to change and grow as the world changes and grows. Our spiritual principles are unchanging, even as the world around us changes. Humility and tolerance transcend worldly things.

The discovery is that we now have ways to reach others and carry the message faster, farther and wider than ever before. And so, we are guardians of the Traditions, and, following the principles set before us, there continues to be a bright future of growth to reach on a worldwide scale every alcoholic who still suffers and to allow the hand of A.A. always to be there.

FULL FORUM WORKSHOP

Today's World—Demonstrating Integrity, Anonymity and Service

Presenter: Jenny C. **Moderator:** Mark E. **Reporter:** Andrea H.

In this full forum workshop, members took part in a discussion about the ways in which A.A. can demonstrate integrity, anonymity, and service in today's world. An example was presented in which an anonymity break within a newspaper article was responded to with a respectful letter about A.A. anonymity. This is one instance in which "our spiritual principles remain unchanged in an ever-changing world."

Within the open discussion, workshop members shared their personal experiences and asked questions. For instance, some questions asked were: "Did the panel share from personal experience?" (Yes) and "Regarding anonymity, where does it start and end?" (We are not anonymous to ourselves). A member pointed out that "home group members need to know last names so we can find each other."

"Other comments related to anonymity at the level of press, but also related concerns about outside events. Social media anonymity was raised as a concern, as well as pamphlets to address this. It was pointed out that integrity, anonymity and service keeps us sober, as well as "humility and sacrifice." It was also pointed out that it could be helpful to explain anonymity to family and in open meetings. Another raised the idea that it could be helpful to demonstrate to "newcomers — [that] we get to "work" the Steps." Also, members found it helpful to "avoid controversy" but there was a question if it was done both "inside and outside the Fellowship." One comment related the helpfulness of "living the program in and out of the rooms." Finally, the topic of anonymous "spiritual contributions" was touched on, and "writing for pamphlets and articles" was shared as a vehicle for doing so.

WORKSHOP REPORTS

7-7:55 p.m.

Supporting Grapevine: From Your Story to Service

Moderator: Albin Z., AA Grapevine, Inc. Publisher **Reporter:** Christine H.

The workshop began with the moderator sharing a story and encouraging members to write stories and send them to the Grapevine, emphasizing the impact it can have on someone's life. Possible writing workshop format was discussed, such as answer basic questions about writing Grapevine articles, having people share two minutes on what they plan to write about, and then allow time for members to write. It was noted that some communities, such as the Hispanic A.A. community, write well in groups, so facilitation of a format conducive to this can enable more people to share their stories. Other ideas were to have a room set up to facilitate writing, have topics posted for ideas (upcoming topics are available on the website and at the back of each issue), give a timeline and a copy of writing guidelines to would-be writers.

The topic of "What to share about?" was covered and it was shared that "a handout is available that summarizes ideas, tips, dos and don'ts." Certain tips were shared with workshop members: "Be specific, include details, or not — don't let them get out of hand, add slogans, phrases (know your audience), include how you felt, emotions, talk about lessons you've learned, share one event in vivid detail (an "aha" moment) tends to work well." It was also noted that nothing can replace the emotional connection that you share about. Recurring topics writers could use: Holidays, A.A. history, relapse and spiritual awakening. A selection of "don'ts" was also shared: (Don't) edit it to death, (don't) go on about a person and (don't) submit lyrics or poetry. Finally, it was shared that often articles are not used right away — and some are translated for La Viña.

Circles of Love and Service

Moderator: Julio E. **Reporter:** Todd K.

This workshop was conducted in a roundtable format and included two A.A. members as panelists. A question was posed, "What inspires us about A.A. around the world?" Among the responses, it was mentioned that no matter who or how poor and destitute people may

be, the A.A. message still exists and transcends barriers. Among the sharing, it was noted that it can be challenging in other countries (there are sometimes risks to life and liberty) and some of us can sometimes forget how “hard” it can be. Sobriety can be fun and it should be.

A question was also posed asking what one of A.A.’s biggest opportunities is when working with other countries. In response, sharing indicated that when we work with other countries, our biggest opportunities are incorporating inclusivity. While others may not do things “our way,” they may grow into a society more like how we understand the Fellowship and its structure. In addition, other questions were posed in sharing: “How does G.S.O. help encourage medical institutions to increase their students’ understanding of the disease?” and “How do we help other cultural understandings as it pertains to female alcoholics?” In response to the latter, it was shared that “even when traveling abroad (such as in the United Arab Emirates) the “language of the heart” is heard.”

Finally, panelists were asked, “What bold initiative would you like to see started here or abroad?” In sharing it was revealed that “there are not any real bold new messages, it’s how we deliver it.” It was also agreed that helping the professional community understand A.A. and how it works is still necessary.

Fostering Participation in A.A.—Who’s Not in the Room?

Moderator: Sharon F. **Reporter:** Cathi C.

During sharing in this workshop, the majority of attendees felt that they, personally, “were welcoming to all who came to their meetings.” For example, one person spoke of involving newcomers in meeting preparation to help them feel part of the group. Another participant said that they tried to look at similarities rather than differences, and focused on the A.A. program rather than the individual. Members mentioned difficulties in trying to accommodate alcoholics with hearing impairments and speakers of languages for which there is no A.A. literature.

The group also discussed the need to connect with those “not in the rooms without changing our message in order to appeal to them.” A member said, “A.A. has great ideas, who’s

implementing them?” and “Do we pay lip service to love and tolerance, while excluding courageous conversations on the impact of letting religion filter into the program?” It was also asked, “In our desire to avoid offending non- alcoholics and/or addicts, do we avoid the courageous conversation about A.A.’s singleness of purpose with those who could be better served by a different fellowship?”

Tomorrow’s World—Courage to be Vigilant, Enthusiasm in Service

Moderator: Rick P. **Reporter:** Laura J.

In this workshop, the topic of “Tomorrow’s World” was introduced, including suggested guidelines on sharing. Five questions were proposed. After voting, two were selected for discussion. The questions selected were: “What drives your enthusiasm in service?” and “How do we look to the future with enthusiasm and vigilance about diversity and inclusivity in service?”

Attendees were passionate about the topics. The sense of the meeting was that carrying the message; bringing new technology into Twelve-Step work; striving to be inclusive and vigilant about the welfare of all our members; and demonstrating self-sacrifice is what drives enthusiasm in service.

How to Generate Interest in Service and Service Work

Moderator: Cynthia B. **Reporter:** Edgar L.

Two questions were posed during this workshop and, in response, members shared their thoughts and experiences. The first question, “How does sponsorship play a role in service?” elicited the response of participants who shared that “Sponsorship is on the front line of service, from regular sponsors and service sponsors.” Members shared that the feeling of having a sponsor who is already a part of service brought value to their recovery, leading them to service on various levels. Many shared that being in service was important in how they began to feel better — “being in service actually benefits one’s own self.”

The second question was: “How do we bring about a change in the views of the oldtimers as far as service?” This seemed to be a concern for almost all that were present. Suggestions ranged from practicing love and tolerance from them, while others suggested challenging or

engaging the elder members to become involved or to return to service. It was also suggested that members seek out the oldtimers and invite them to be a part of service. Lastly, it was suggested that members educate oldtimers on the purpose and value of being of service in Alcoholics Anonymous.

8:05-9pm

Supporting La Viña: From Your Story to Service

Moderator/Reporter: Irene D. AA Grapevine, Inc. La Viña Editor

The workshop discussion was held in Spanish and focused on many questions pertinent to La Viña and its audience.

There was shared experience about motivating members to contribute to the magazine, by sharing their stories and making announcements at the district level and area assemblies to help in the increase of subscriptions.

Members at the workshop participated in a Q&A with Irene D., La Viña editor, and discussed topics about website updates, editorial processes, and ideas to encourage interest in the LV magazine.

Irene gave updates about the current efforts on improving the subscription-buying process on the La Viña Website. Members also discussed the themes that they were interested in reading and expressed their intention of sending stories about topics relevant to them.

Circles of Love & Service

Using quotes from A.A. literature as a guide and to begin discussion, A.A. members in this roundtable discussion shared on varied topics. Workshop participants considered Bill W.'s comment in *As Bill Sees It* (p. 271): "All A.A. progress can be reckoned in terms of just two words: humility and responsibility. Our whole spiritual development can be accurately measured by our degree of adherence to these magnificent standards." Members also commented on a quote from the *A.A. Service Manual Combined with the Twelve Concepts for World Service* (S17): "Keeping a balance between ultimate authority and responsibility and active day to day functioning of world services means there must be constant communication among all elements of the structure."

When discussing how “all of A.A. progress can be reckoned in terms of just two words: humility and responsibility. . . “ one member shared, “If I’m capable of living our 36 principles, it will be seen to work — strength to be a humble servant.” Another member commented, “If you don’t find humility in A.A., it will come looking for you. When I’m in humility, what other people say is better. My responsibility is how to move toward an informed group conscience.”

The group also shared their thoughts and experience on rotation — the spiritual principle of sharing the responsibility for A.A. through changing leadership. One member referred to “a treasurer for life” at a home group, and suggested that training could help another person take over the position. Another member agreed, and said that it was a good idea to “open the window and let a new breeze in.” The member continued that with new leadership comes new ideas, experiences, and commented that we are like food “sell by” dates — “we stink if we are around too long.” One A.A. reminded all that “your phone and email still work for people rotated out of office” and help and guidance were available. Workshop members also addressed the issue of members not getting elected to their chosen position. Most agreed that eventually they arrive at acceptance: “It was just not my turn.” Finally, in reference to shared responsibility, an A.A. noted that “we rise by lifting each other.”

Fostering Participation in A.A.: Who’s Not in the Room?

Moderator: Russ R. **Reporter:** Jan V.

The moderator opened the workshop with the Serenity Prayer. After introductions, the moderator read three questions put forth by this workshop:

1. Our Third Tradition: Do we welcome everyone?
2. Are we reaching out to all who want it and what more can we do?
3. What is a courageous conversation we are not having about inclusion in A.A.?

The sharing of personal experience allowed these three questions to flow into one discussion. The sharing in the room indicated that any issue or problem with welcoming or reaching out to all who want A.A. lies with all of us. It is our responsibility and we are relying too much on the newcomer to figure this out. As members we should take the newcomers’ phone numbers and call them. It is best to be welcoming and not judgmental. Finally, if we try to go against the grain, we can do it with love and tolerance.

Singleness of Purpose

Moderator: Ron S. **Reporter:** Bruce C.

In this workshop addressing singleness of purpose, members were asked to consider A.A. history. For instance, the experience of the Washingtonians taught us lessons about singleness of purpose. Within A.A., we tell our own story (we are storytellers). In keeping with singleness of purpose, we can use identification and we can “Keep it Simple.” We can also ask, “Are you an alcoholic?” Our Fifth Tradition outlines our single purpose and we admit we are alcoholics.

One question posed was, “How do we deal with N.A., C.A., etc?” In response, it was shared that only alcoholics speak at meetings; taking a group conscience is utilized for issues; we can ask a question: “Do you know where N.A. or C.A. is in your community?” In addition, many home groups have their own guidelines in dealing with other fellowships. It was also mentioned that some members refer persons to N.A. if they are an addict. Finally, it was shared that sponsorship was an important element in.

Leadership

Moderator: Sara P.-P. **Reporter:** Katherine H.

In this workshop, A.A. members discussed and shared their experience regarding the qualities and attributes of good leadership.

1. Members were asked to consider the question: “What constitutes a leader and/or what are good qualities of a leader?” A.A.s shared that those who have a willingness to act in service, those who have the time to serve, are willing to learn and share, be vulnerable and willing to expose faults are all qualities of good leadership. In addition, those A.A.s who encourage others, who study the Concepts, who “stand against the storm,” who facilitate issues and are open-minded, dependable, accountable, humble and obedient would make good leaders. The list goes on to include those who overcome adversity, who include newcomers, are accountable, do not “brow-beat,” who keep their ego out, who listen and finally, those who do no “politicking” would make great leaders, according to workshop members.

2. Members were also asked, “How can our leaders make use of our Traditions, Concepts, and parliamentary procedures so that our leaders can use these tools to avoid chaos? In response, sharing reflected a myriad of ways in which to maintain control:
 - a. Use right of decision and minority opinion;
 - b. Follow what God puts in your heart;
 - c. Print out basic meeting guidelines for new people;
 - d. Use a format that works!
 - e. Introduce the concept that love and tolerance is our code;
 - f. When we avoid chaos, it's living in fear. Instead, encourage participation;
 - g. Practice Concept Three: Right of Decision;
 - h. Remember: Format is your friend;
 - i. Everybody needs to be heard; and
 - j. Practice and use common courtesy.

PAST TRUSTEES SHARING

Don W., East Central Regional Trustee, 1993-1997

I would like to encourage people (if they are here for the first time) to do this: When you go back to your groups, encourage more people to come to our next regional forum in Cleveland in November of 2021. In this Fellowship we can sit in a room all weekend and talk about the things we need to do to carry our message to someone else, but we also share our laughter and our friendship with others in the room, regardless of whether they've got 48 years, a couple of years, or even only one day. We can encourage the new person to come. Please keep coming. That's the important thing about this Fellowship — that we keep coming. We do that by carrying the message.

People used to ask, "What are you going to do now that you've rotated out as regional trustee?" I'd say, "I'm going to do the same things I've been doing: I'm going to unlock the door, I'm going to make sure the literature is on the table, I'm going to take care of my home group." I am the treasurer of my home group. I have a key to the front door, I help get the literature out I and set up coffee. I go back to my grass roots. I walked in the door one day and someone handed me a broom and said, "Here, go sweep the floor. It might help your disposition — it might help you like yourself." Well, I'm still learning. I'm still learning to like myself, to be part of the Fellowship and to accept what is going on around me because things change.

It's a pleasure to watch people grow. I go to a prison down in Coldwater. The other day, a young man that used to come to our meetings and sit in the back with his hat on and his coat collar turned up was there. He never said much except for who he was, that he was an alcoholic and that he was sad he was in prison. But last Thursday night, that same young man came into the group and he was smiling. He walked around the room, shook everyone's hand and then he gave us volunteers a hug. He said, "Thank you for coming. You saved my life." To me, that is what Alcoholics Anonymous is all about. That, and the sharing one-on-one with each other. It's about continuing to carry the message and looking for the new person out there who needs us. As long as there is someone out there who needs us, I hope that my Higher Power continues to bless me with good health, encouragement and strength to do

things for Alcoholics Anonymous. It saved my life and gave me a lot of enjoyment and fellowship. These are things that I needed in my life when I came through those doors. Thank you.

Dorothy M., East Central Regional Trustee, 2001-2005

I was trying to figure out what I was going to say today and I had no idea, so I'm going to let God say it for me. I stood for trustee four years before the time I was actually chosen. My name went into the hat but it wasn't pulled out. I was kind of disappointed because every service position in Alcoholics Anonymous that I had ever stood for, I got. However, I was thrilled with the person who became the East Central Regional trustee. I watched him and the things he did. Three years later, going into the fourth year, I was asked if I was going to stand again. You know, I have this sweet loveable personality, but if I didn't get it then, why did I think I would get it now? So I talked to my Higher Power and some other people and decided to put my name in for consideration. I'll never forget when the delegate called me — my name came out of the hat. I was going to be able to serve the East Central Region as their trustee. It was a great honor for me and I knew I had to do and be the best I could. I knew the region did not expect me to be perfect, just to show up when I was supposed to show up and enjoy what I was doing. I learned so much through service and by being the trustee — that I am just a small little part of a great whole.

When I came to Alcoholics Anonymous, it was the greatest day for my mom, and when I had one year in Alcoholics Anonymous, she figured that I was going to stay. When she passed away, several years ago, we had become very close and she loved me as a daughter. I wasn't the rebellious you-know-what that I had been. I was there for her in her last years of life. I will never forget that because I had always said that I couldn't go on without my mom there; I just wouldn't be able to handle her death. But at the funeral, I had a brother on either side, and I was able to look at her in the coffin and thank her once more for believing in me and for always being there for me. I would not have had that opportunity if I had not been in Alcoholics Anonymous. I would have been dead long ago from my drinking. So, I am always willing to do whatever I can for Alcoholics Anonymous.

I have three meetings a week that I do not want to miss. I attend those and have seven ladies that I sponsor, so they keep my busy and on my toes. It's during a time that I need other people, because I am retired from working and I need people in my life to help fill the day for me. When I came here five years ago, I chose not to share. But this year I chose to share. I don't know what the difference is — sometimes I want to and sometimes I don't. But there is one thing that is always consistent. I always go to my meetings, I always meet with my sponsees, I always ask my Higher Power in the morning to help keep me sober and I always thank Him at night. I have such a great love for Alcoholics Anonymous and for my life. Thank you.

Jack W., East Central Regional Trustee, 1985-1989

By the grace of God, this Fellowship and you people I had a choice not to take a drink today. I was a 24/7 drinker, especially an early morning drinker, so I couldn't leave my house without a drink. It's an honor to be here. Every time I get up at a function like this, I realize that I am speaking to the choir because most everyone here is service-oriented. My area, Area 32, sends about 10 or 15 people here. We sponsor them to come here and get exposed to what this is all about. I've been listening to what people were saying, and from participating this weekend we've had a spiritual experience. If you listen to people you can tell — we feel it in our gut. It's nice to have that feeling, but now we have a responsibility to tell other people and carry the message. That is not always an easy task, because a lot of people will say, "Oh, service. That's those political people." They aren't oriented to it, so we must make it attractive and carry it outside of these doors.

I have a problem, and it is of recent origin. In all my A.A. career, I was able to look out and see my wife, Judy. Some of you may know her or remember her. She passed away three years ago. She was active in service. We met in the Fellowship and married. We were the first couple to ever serve on the General Service Board as a married couple. You may clap now, but I remember a time when I wouldn't have clapped! It was the toughest two years I ever had. Those of you who know us, understand. We did not meet on eHarmony.com and I trudged the road of Happy Destiny! I miss seeing her, and it has been one of those voyages that take time, especially when I come to A.A. functions because she was such a part of it.

A.A. has survived despite me. I am awed by the way our Fellowship operates. It is important to me that we keep that passion for A.A. in our gut. For me, the problem with these type of things is that I am gung-ho and ready to go, baby. I'm 87 years old. How much get up and go do you get? I'm on the short list. My daughter keeps saying, "Dad, you're going to live a long time." I say, "That may be so, but I've got my bags packed!" God bless and I'll see you the next time around.

John K., General Service Trustee, 2001-2005

They say that God speaks to us through other people, so do pay close attention [laughter]...to anything you hear at an A.A. function. I drank and spit up from one end of this state to the other. You can throw in a number of other states and countries, as well. That's basically my story. Then I came to A.A. and I didn't do that anymore. Then I became a trustee, and now I'm not any more. That's basically what it was like, what happened, and what it is like now.

I spent a lot of time up at Stepping Stones where Bill W. had his study and thought of the Traditions and Concepts, and so on. All the early members were fond of William James' book, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. He says, and I'm paraphrasing, when spiritual movements become 100 years old, they tend to morph into something different; they begin to spend a lot of time looking inward, instead of continuing to look outward, in order to preserve the institution. Someone once said, "It's the man, the message, the movement, and then the monument." And that becomes a problem; we have to keep focusing on the message and on the movement. If we turn into the monument, then we begin to just preserve ourselves. And that would be unfortunate. It would be completely at odds with the Ninth Tradition. It is important that we don't confuse our effort to become very efficient with our service structures. There is nothing wrong with efficiency, but let that desire, order and organization seep into our spiritual movement. I don't think organizations go to bed one night as spiritual movements and wake up the next morning as organized corporate "whatever." It happens incrementally. Also, it doesn't happen because of someone with bad motives or because someone is trying to sabotage A.A. — it happens because we are inattentive or indifferent to things like the Ninth Tradition.

If you are just starting out, this can be a tremendous adventure. It has been for me. I started in 1981 and along the way encountered what some people call “mountain top” experiences. We have an International Convention coming up and if you’ve never been to one, you have to. My first IC was in 1985 and I was 3 or 4 years sober. Lois W. and Dr. Bob’s son, Smitty, were down on the stage, and all the trustees and the general manager were there. The group I had gone with had gotten there really late. We were so far up into the second deck of the stadium that a few more rows and we would have been back out on the street. Somebody said to me, “John, where do you want to sit?” And, kind of like Babe Ruth, I randomly pointed down on the stage and said, “I want to be down there.” Fifteen years later, I was a trustee. But I never got down there. I became a trustee in 2001 and I cycled off in April 2005, entirely between two conventions. So, that’s the irony of it. I hope that some of you have the opportunity to sit down there someday. But that’s not the point of service — the point of service is to be of service.

Another high point of service was being on the trustees’ committee that put together the Fourth Edition of the Big Book. I never expected that. It was a lot of work and tremendously rewarding. Another high point happened when I was relatively new. Lois was still alive, and she used to come down from Stepping Stones to attend the Bill W. Dinner. There were about 2,000 people there. She would read Bill’s last words. And my sponsor’s sponsor was the general manager of New York Intergroup. Lois was in a wheelchair by that time, so she would have lifters lift her wheelchair up the back of the stage and rolled forward to the dais so she could read Bill’s words. For a couple of years running, I was one of those lifters. I would like to tell you that we formed this warm bond and discussed the philosophy of the Twelve Step movement, but we didn’t. She was a good sitter, I was a good lifter, and that was the extent of our relationship. Finally, I had the privilege of driving Nell Wing back and forth to Stepping Stones. She wrote a book called *Grateful to Have Been There* and I am, indeed, grateful to have been here.

Bill F., East Central Regional Trustee, 2013-2017

This is kind of my “after-trustee” report. I am a member of a home group where I chair meetings, make coffee, put the books out and put signs out so people can find us. I sponsor people, I sit quietly, I attend our area assemblies, I attend district picnics and all sorts of activities. I enjoy every minute of it. On Monday evenings, I go to the Washington County jail

and try to carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers. I begin the meeting by reminding the inmates to turn off their cell phones or put them on vibrate so as not to disturb the meeting. Thank God for Alcoholics Anonymous. They call me “Jail Preacher” and “Old Man.” The great thing is that when I’m at the local gas station or convenience store, people come up to me, shake my hand and thank me saying, “You were the only person who visited me when I was in jail.” And I love every minute of it. I always tell those guys, “You’re the bright spot in my life and it is not because you are wearing orange uniforms.” They really are, that’s what it’s all about.

I’m looking forward to the Ohio State Convention in August 2019 and our International Convention here in Detroit. Jack mentioned “preaching to the choir,” and it is true. I also remember a past trustee talking about “invisible trusted servants.” When I go back to my home group, members say, “You were off somewhere. Tell us about it.” It is a great thing to be part of that. I used to tell everyone at my favorite watering hole/bar, “Enjoy me while you can, I’ll be dead by 30.” But here I am. And this is the best thing that has ever happened in my life.

Lastly, a couple of weeks ago, I was going into the jail, and one of the C.O.s greeted me before he gave me the wand that they pass over you so you don’t bring any contraband in. I had my Grapevines in one hand and Conference-approved literature in the other, so I could leave them with the inmates. He said to me, “Old timer, how long have you been doing this?” I told him. He said, “How long have you been dry?” And I told him. He looked at me and said, “You know, you’ve been dry longer than I’ve been alive.” It didn’t sting too much. Then he said, “Why do you do this?” I said, “I do this because it helps me.” He said, “As far as I’m concerned, you can stay here all night if you like.”

Bob M., East Central Regional Trustee, 2005-2009

About 22 years ago I sat in a room just like this one. It was my first forum. It was one of those deals where you just get in the car and go. For us, it was like 500 miles from the upper peninsula of Michigan. I said, “Wow, this is an awesome experience.” It still is an awesome experience, but there is no way I ever thought I would be standing up here 22 years later. So, one of you out there will probably one day be sitting up here.

I was thinking about what to say this morning, and I was thinking about why I was going to say what I'm going to say, so I took some notes along the way and listened to everything this weekend. When I sobered up, I did so in a part of Michigan where there were more deer than people. I didn't really want to sober up and stop drinking. I didn't really think alcohol was my problem. I thought everyone else was my problem. Just like many of you. I spent some time in a facility to get sober. That didn't work. I went to A.A. meetings. That didn't work. I kept hearing people say weird things, like "Can't sober up a horse thief. . ." I thought, what does a sober horse thief got to do with staying sober? I heard, "You can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink." I thought, what has that got to do with this? Then there were all these little acronyms and sayings people said. I thought, what does that have to do with any of this? But after about five years I sorted all that out and realized I was the horse thief *and* the horse.

We talk a lot about our differences in A.A., and when I went to A.A., I felt different. I was different because I wasn't one of you. Everyone else was happy and had families. I was divorced and a single parent raising my son. The list went on and on and I kept feeling different. Never a part of, just different. Then, this serious old man, Missouri Mike, took me down to the cafe, sat me down across from him and asked me questions with the Big Book open. "Would you do anything to stay sober?" he asked. I didn't have anything else to do except stay sober, so I said, "Yes, I will." He said, "Good. I have a plan for you." I did whatever that man suggested and I did what I saw other people do in meetings. Little by little, feeling different fell away.

Five years into it, I was feeling really good, and then service came along. The first thing I heard in service was, "Service isn't about being a "do-gooder." There are no "do-gooders" in A.A. You are in it for yourself; to stay sober. That's why you do service. If you think you are a do-gooder, then you haven't finished drinking yet." I said, "Okay, so I'm not a do-gooder." But then I thought, I can do this better — I can change A.A. But they reminded me with one of their old sayings: "A.A. doesn't need changing, Bob does." So I had to start learning that Bob needs to change — not A.A. I heard that in the rooms this weekend. Some folks mentioned that we are adjusting A.A. to fit everyone — we are changing A.A. I was told, "No. You don't do that." I respect the people who told me that because they had years and years of sobriety.

So, I carried that message in my thoughts and into service, along with Twelve Step work and going through the Big Book with guys. That was why I was into service, to keep A.A. as it was when I came through the door. Thank you.

“WE’LL GET BACK TO YOU”

Unanswered Ask-it-Basket Questions

1. **Where in our literature does it mention “service sponsor”? What’s the emphasis behind this and why a service sponsor over a regular sponsor?**

Thank you for the question. The Conference-approved pamphlet “Questions and Answers on Sponsorship,” is an excellent resource for questions related to A.A. sponsorship. In summarizing sponsorship in general, it is noted that “most present members of Alcoholics Anonymous owe their sobriety to the fact that someone else took a special interest in them and was willing to share a great gift with them. Sponsorship is merely another way of describing the continuing special interest of a seasoned member that can mean so much to a newcomer turning to A.A. for help.”

In the section which begins on page 25, entitled “Service Sponsorship,” it is suggested that a “service sponsor is usually someone who is knowledgeable in A.A. history and has a strong background in the service structure. The A.A. member Isa introduced to a new language.... become familiar with the Traditions, Concepts and Warranties, as well as *The A.A. Service Manual/Twelve Concepts for World Service*, *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age* and the service piece “Sponsorship – A Vital Stepping-Stone to Service & Sobriety” (SMF-110).

2. **How can someone find locations of international meetings?**

Thank you for the question. As a resource to the A.A. member travelling outside the U.S./Canada, the General Service Office publishes the International AA Directory (a confidential directory available to members of Alcoholics Anonymous). This directory lists English-speaking groups located in non-English speaking countries. The directory also lists English-speaking groups located in English-speaking countries where there is no General Service Office to provide this service. A.A. members travelling internationally should contact the International assignment at the General Service Office at: international@aa.org.

3. There used to be a “Daily Reflection” flip desk calendar. Is there any way we can have it again?

Thank you for the question. The “Daily Reflection” desk calendar was published as a limited special souvenir item for the 2000 International Convention (Minneapolis, Minnesota). Accordingly, this item has not been reprinted.

CLOSING REMARKS

Michele Grinberg, Class A (nonalcoholic) General Service Board chairperson

This is, absolutely, the largest forum I have been to so far. I've made a few notes; you've all seen me typing away this weekend. I am not sending emails or posting on social media; I am taking my notes. This is a true bilingual event with one basic language that I am learning to say, "El lenguaje del corazón." I always hear an unofficial theme emerge from every regional forum that I go to. At this forum, for me, it was breaking through the barriers so we can share the language of the heart with those who need us **and** do it in a safe space. Thank you.

So, as you've learned, I am Michele Grinberg. I am another Class A trustee. The "A" stands for amateur. I am here because I love you. This is a love affair for me. I love you and I am honored and privileged to serve you. I've had an absolutely wonderful time this weekend; I hope you have, as well. My heart has been touched many times — I cannot tell you how many times. But never before have I sat through a general sharing questions at the mike and felt the tears leaking out of the corners of my eyes. You have really touched my heart.

There was some terrific sharing going on in the workshops, too. I kind of dipped in and out and took some notes—there is powerful stuff going on, and I look forward to seeing the report. I have already told you what I thought the unofficial theme was, how we are breaking barriers so we can share the language of the heart with those who need us. I am so impressed with the good spirit that I feel in this room. Here are just a few of the many things that I heard from the incredible delegate presentations, from the sharing on the floor from the workshops, and from our wonderful past trustees, some of whom are also past general managers. Please never hesitate to reach out to them and let them share their wisdom and their stories with you, they are wonderful people and I love them dearly. So, some of the few things that I heard from the excellent presentations:

- Identifying our remote communities and reaching out the hand of AA. And related to this, from the floor, a hope that someday our remote Hispanic women, African American, and

other communities will no longer be remote. It was not the first or the last time that tears were brought to my eyes.

- From the workshop of the whole, in ensuring that A.A. will be there tomorrow, here is what I heard that really resonated with me: We are all responsible for the perpetuation, growth and health of our Fellowship.
- I've heard lots of kindness expressed from the floor. I also heard lots of calls for help to open our hearts and let us each be of service in order to help break down those barriers — whatever they are. As an aside, I don't think our Accessibilities Committee has ever been more important than it is right now that we recognized that there are barriers, whether we like it or not. We don't live in a fairytale, we live amongst each other and we bring a lot of things to the table. Some of those ideas, notions, languages and body parts create barriers. We want to break those down, whether someone speaks another language—we heard about the efforts happening at the General Service Office to offer materials in as many different languages as there is need—to offering materials to the community that cannot hear—there is that new wonderful version of the Big Book in American Sign Language. I agree with many of you, if you know where they are, you can just follow along by watching the love. It's a beautiful language.
- And how do we reach those in institutions? I was overwhelmed by a gentleman who started out by saying that Corrections Correspondence Service worked for him. He has now been serving on the Corrections Correspondence Service for some thirty-odd years. In Corrections Correspondence—writing to inmates—there is always a need, particularly for men, and particularly for the Spanish-speaking men in this group. You don't have to be a great writer. You are not going to do anything except share your experience, strength, and hope in writing. Or it can even be orally now; some prisons are now allowing phone calls. Some prisons are now allowing the Internet. I know this because I know someone who has been in Corrections Correspondence for years as a servant and I have seen it. It is wonderful and it is breaking down more barriers. How many inmates cannot read or write? I bet it is an unusually high number, compared to the population as a whole. So, once we open the doors of being able to do it by telephone, it will be wonderful. The opportunity is there. So, if you are looking for a way to be of service, consider that, please.

I hope you heard something about how we even need to provide the Big Book in other languages here, within our service structure, in the U.S. and Canada. We had to produce the Big Book in Punjabi because there is a big population here that needs access to the Big Book. Hopefully, you've also heard that we've licensed the Big Book CD in Arabic, in Russian, in Navajo. I had the incredible privilege to stand at the mike and give that CD set to the president of the Navajo Nation, and watched how that man's face changed—it went to that spiritual space. He got it. it was amazing. You know what? That is your dollar in the basket. We are spreading the language of the heart.

And, you know, we are very privileged people. Many of us can afford to put at least a dollar in the basket, maybe five. But there are so many folks out there, in our service structure, who do not have a penny to their name, and they do need recovery. I am in awe of all of your efforts to reach those folks. And what we do, at the General Service Office and on the board, is try to help you do that work. So let us know what you need, put those dollars in the basket, and we'll do our darnedest to meet those needs and to help you. As George said, "This is a one-on-one program of recovery. There is always other stuff going on to help you do that well, so that someone else might live." As you can tell, I'm passionate about this.

I am trying to process everything that I heard, everything that I hear at regional forums. I do come away with some questions that I want to leave you with: What more can each of us do to communicate that A.A. is welcoming to everyone? And how do we communicate with each other and encourage more folks to come in to our wonderful service structure? That's the challenge that I see.

I saw some great ideas here, I saw some great stuff, and I will tell you that this regional forum reflected great inclusion. But, of course, as someone said, one of the magic things about A.A. is that we are never done, we are never finished. What more can we do? This regional forum is for anyone and everyone that wants A.A. to be here tomorrow. So, I hope there will be maybe 1500 of you in Las Vegas in 2020. I want to close with something that Bill W. wrote, and I love it. I guess I would say it is my theme: "Honesty with ourselves and others gets us sober, but it is tolerance that keeps us that way."