

FINAL REPORT

WEST CENTRAL REGIONAL FORUM

SEPTEMBER 8~10, 2017
SIOUX FALLS, SD

**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 West Central Regional Forum, which will take place in Grand Forks, North Dakota May August 16-18, 2019 at the Alerus Center.

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INTRODUCTION

The 2017 West Central Regional Forum was held in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Registration for the Forum was **281**. This included **127** members attending their very first Forum—many were welcomed at the Forum Orientation on Friday evening. In addition, the West Central Regional Forum marked the **204th** Regional Forum since their inception in 1975.

UNANSWERED ASK-IT BASKET QUESTIONS

1. What are changes in staff assignments do you envision as AA “dips its toe” into social media and gradually becomes more involved with someone to monitor or review the social media? Will you add new staff for this?

We have added a Communications desk to the A.A. Staff assignments, anticipating the move in this direction. I would guess (only a guess at this point) that we might at some point need an additional worker dedicated to social media, depending on how “deep” we dip our toe.

2. Please describe what it would look like for AA if we were fully self-supporting. Would the literature be free? How much does it take on an individual or group level for AA to be fully self-supporting? \$10 per year per member? \$100 per group per year?

This is a complex question, not answerable in this format. But I can say that A.A.W.S. Board (which is responsible for literature pricing) is studying the effects and the pros and cons of raising or lowering literature pricing. We’re not at this moment looking at “free” literature. The finance report is the source of the estimate of how much it costs for the office to provide support, per member and per group: \$7.27/member and \$149.31/group.

WORKSHOP REPORTS

7:00—9:00 p.m.

“Supporting Grapevine: From Your Story to Service” (Moderator: Ami B. Executive Editor/Publisher/Reporter: Kim H.)

Workshop members were asked to create an imaginary edition of the West Central Regional Grapevine/La Viña. Topics for stories were discussed and members shared ideas around the room, such as:

After A.A.;
Carrying the Message as a Trucker;
I Wish You Desperation;
The Health Aspects of Drinking;
Nearly Dying in the Rooms of A.A.;
Friendship;
Spiritual Experience;
A Family Disease;
First International Conference;
Advance (Retreat) and the Whisper Walk;
Carrying the Message Over the Road;
Gift Of Desperation (God);
Experience with Spirituality;
Crisis of Faith;
My Experience As A Two-Time La Viña Author;
Getting Sober in the U.S.A. [and]
How Service Changed My Life

“American Sign Language Accessibility” (Moderator: Kelli M./Reporter: Teresa K.)

The workshop attendees discussed the topic “American Sign Language Accessibility.” Some attendees were hearing and some were deaf. All shared their experience. Although experience was varied, one factor remained constant: In order to provide an ASL interpreter, groups not only had to come up with funds to pay for the ASL interpreter, but they also had to provide education regarding confidentiality and the strict code of professional ethics ASL interpreters must adhere to.

One hearing member shared a story about the realization her group had when the group realized that a deaf member was paying for an interpreter out of his own pocket. The group members realized, at a business meeting, that contributions from *all* members had to be increased.

Another hearing member shared a similar story about how his group increased 7th Tradition contributions to reflect the group’s desire to support the ASL interpretation service. “In fact,” he stated, “the group now contributes more money to various other service entities.” The member reiterated what another member shared: “We all benefit from the full participation of our deaf members. ASL access isn’t a “favor” that hearing members provide for deaf

members. It is a tool that makes possible the mutual sharing of our experience, strength, and hope.” Hearing members shared about “Green Can funds” — where some groups use contributions into a “Green Can” to fully or partially fund ASL interpreters. One member shared that the “Green Can” now provides \$130 per week for 2 interpreters at one A.A. meeting in his district. In addition, due to increased deaf membership, the same district (District 8) was working on a pilot program to add two more ASL-interpreted meetings within their district.

One member recounted how she needed more meetings than the two ASL interpreted meetings provided in her area, so she started asking many groups to provide an ASL interpreter. She recounted that some were gracious and helpful while others were not. After 2 to 3 years of requests and groups working to provide an interpreter, there was finally an ASL interpreted meeting every day of the week. The member shared, “Meetings are one thing, but access to events is also important. When planning your events and creating your flyers, be sure to include: “If you need an ASL interpreter, please contact us.”

Deaf workshop members also shared experience, strength, and hope in response to a number of questions about ASL accessibility. One question asked, “What do we need to do to be helpful?” In response, members shared:

- Get in touch with deaf members in your community;
- When planning events, be mindful of our deaf and hard-of-hearing members;
- Include a line item in your budget for ASL;
- List the option for ASL on your event flyers.

Another question asked about how to go about providing an ASL interpreter for a monthly speaker meeting and what the cost would be. In response, deaf members shared, “It is important to use a nationally certified ASL interpreter; one with some training on specialized A.A. language and concepts is also helpful. Don’t use college students, interns, or A.A. members who know some ASL. Definitely don’t ask a deaf member’s family to interpret. The cost depends on the interpreter, because they set their rates. One home group pays \$60 per meeting. Another home group pays their interpreter \$80 per meeting. Neither price is the full professional rate.”

Participation in Twelfth Step work was also approached – how does the Twelfth Step work if some members are hearing and others are not? In response, attendees shared that it is the same process with deaf members as it is with all others – if one alcoholic isn’t fluent in ASL, “we figure out how to make it work.”

“What is Implied Affiliation?” (Moderator: Shirlee H./Reporter: Anne F.)

The workshop attendees discussed a question: “How can we keep A.A. and clubs separate? How can we keep A.A. separate from other 12 Step groups?”

Members suggested reading the long form of Tradition Six. Some members also thought social media facilitated implied affiliation. One member agreed that the club should have its own bylaws and board. Furthermore, the A.A. name shouldn’t be used on events, publicity, etc. of recovery/other groups. Workshop members stated that there is a need to clearly communicate what is A.A.: For example, A.A. and Al-Anon are separate/different purposes, and A.A. and treatment are different. In closing, workshop members shared that the dangers of applied affiliation are many, including the blurring of A.A.’s singleness of purpose.

“Challenges We Face Maintaining Unity” (Moderator: Kathi C./Reporter: Laurie J.)

The workshop attendees discussed two questions regarding the challenges we face maintaining unity. The first question: “How to address drugs in A.A.?” met with such responses as “Have open and honest communication about Traditions.” Members noted Tradition One (Our common welfare), Tradition Three (the only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking), Tradition Five (singleness of purpose), and Tradition Ten (No outside issues) should be brought up in a kind, loving, gentle, tolerant manner. Members shared that it was helpful to “stress being inclusive, not exclusive. Make it clear that we are going to talk about alcoholism.” Others offered: “Educate on the malady, not the addiction” and use “Sponsorship on Traditions.” Others continued, “View it as an opportunity rather than a threat; educate the public with information; don’t get upset – we are a self-cleansing organization.” It was suggested that A.A. members help addicts set up N.A. meetings: “Help them help themselves.”

The second question asked: “How can we attract people into service and the Fellowship?” In response, members shared about “attraction, not promotion.” In addition, members shared that it is helpful to “watch our behavior” and “be attractive.” In addition, Rule 62 was helpful — “don’t take yourself too damn seriously.” Workshop members shared additional thoughts, mostly encouraging members to see that new A.A.s or potential members feel welcomed, wanted, and needed:

- Don’t assume people understand what we’re talking about;
- Let others in and listen to them. Give them the right of participation;
- Be inclusive — not exclusive. Invite people!
- Make people feel wanted and cared about;
- Give people a reason to come;
- Talk from the heart;
- Sponsorship: sponsor people into service;
- Lead by example;
- Trust God. Rotate out and trust God to fill the position — don’t let your ego convince you that you are the only one who can do the job.

“Developing Servant-Leaders: How Does it Work?” (Moderator: Curt W./Reporter: Twila J.)

Workshop attendees shared their experience, strength and hope on the topic: “How do servant leaders get members involved in service?”

- Having a service sponsor is important;
- Sponsors should suggest service work: “Get in the car!”
- Suggest DCMs connect with GSRs to ensure they understand their role and offer support;
- Use “education moments” to talk about service opportunities;
- Get people in where they fit in. In other words, find out what people’s talents are;
- Lead by example — show that you are “putting some feet to it;”
- Read and review *The A.A. Service Manual/Twelve Concepts for World Service* at the home group and the district meeting, as well as Traditions and Concept meetings;
- Make service events (like regional conferences and forums) sound exciting!

- Don't overwhelm the newcomer or someone who is not willing or able to fulfill a service commitment;
- Recommended reading: *A.A. Comes of Age*
- Understand whether it is apathy or ignorance you are dealing with: we can't change apathy, but we can educate ignorance;
- Service is the secret!

“Friendly With Our Friends: The How and Why of It” (Moderator: MaryAnn G./Reporter: Sheryl F.)

The workshop attendees discussed being “friendly with our friends” and opened the workshop with the 1958 Grapevine article by Bill W.: “Let's Be Friendly With Our Friends.” As a result, two questions were discussed:

1. *What is the most effective way to remedy misinformation among professionals?* Examples of misinformation were:

- One professional stated that members couldn't take meds.
- Parole officers told members that they can't have problems other than alcohol.
- A woman was told she shouldn't take children to A.A. events.

In response to such misinformation, workshop members offered solutions: “We should educate professionals about what A.A. is and what A.A. isn't. We can explain the importance of identification with alcoholism. We can go to professionals and talk about what we *do* and what we *don't* do. Finally, we can make use the tool “Sponsor your professional.”

Workshop attendees also came up with some ideas for “warm handoffs” with professionals, such as perhaps using intergroup to take the calls; handing out meeting schedules with phone numbers; handing out a business card for intergroup; utilizing the program “Bridging the Gap;” working with family drug courts and have the professional conference call with the patient and an A.A. member.

Though the ideas for correcting misinformation about A.A. were plentiful, members also stressed that A.A.s must be consistent with these organizations (like with Bridging the Gap). When reaching out, we need to ask them how they want to reach us — sometimes we have to use our full names. Finally, taking A.A.W.S. informational pamphlets into correctional facilities and other institutions or professional spaces was encouraged.

“Technology: Tool or Trouble?” (Moderator: Kat S./Reporter: Mel W.)

Workshop attendees were asked to discuss: “What is appropriate in regards to social media?” and “What are the principles governing social media?”

Members presented many ideas. Some members reported that, among some, A.A. is perceived as inferior, and anonymity is a perceived as a personal choice. To resolve this, it was suggested that members refer to Traditions 11 and 12. Others acknowledged that there are dangers on the worldwide web, and we must be proactive and protect others' anonymity. “Social media is dangerous,” stated another. Discussions are ongoing about an A.A. presence on social media. Workshop members agreed that A.A. should be in control of its presence on social media. Others wondered, “Have there been discussions about how A.A. protects its anonymity on social media?” Others acknowledged: “My ego doesn't need to be present on social media or Facebook.”

While many sounded warnings, others noted that Warranty Five allows for mistakes. Still, amidst the questions and concerns, a member brought up A.A.'s Traditions, saying, "The Traditions applied properly make this issue very clear."

A.A. has an online presence and web pages are good tools — as long as they are used properly.

Members stated awareness that "nothing on the web is [truly] anonymous." To help members use social media responsibly, one workshop attendee suggested that we clarify and understand our intentions. To do this, we can begin by asking ourselves, "What is the reason for using social media?" We can use guidelines and the experience, strength, and hope garnered through C.P.C. work as an example.

"Who Sets the Agenda?" (Moderator: Ray P./Reporter: Rob B.)

Group members discussed three questions regarding "Who sets the agenda?" First, "Why is agenda-setting an important concept?" Attendees shared that it is important because it sets the tone and guidelines as to its importance. Also, does the person setting the agenda have an agenda? It is important to keep track of progress.

Second, attendees considered the question: "Who sets the agenda for the General Service Conference? What is the procedure to get there?" It was answered that the topic comes from the trustees' general service committee. The trustees look at what came out of last year and "additional considerations" — some things need to be brought back to the meeting. In addition, there was a comment about trustees making the agenda, delegate input, and the resulting tension.

Third, group members considered, "Who gets to set the agenda?" A statement was made by a workshop member, who, in effect, said that in their area the DCM sets it. And after it gets emailed, they have to vote on it. They wanted to know better ways. One smaller group passes a paper. The larger the group, the more structure may be needed. Finally, in response to "agenda setting," it was said there are no "hard and set rules."

"What is a True Fellowship?" (Moderator: Katie B./Reporter: Joan G.)

Workshop participants shared experience, strength and hope in response to the question: "What is a true fellowship?" Members responded in two parts. First, Within the Fellowship, are we friend or sponsor — and how do we navigate that? In response, members shared that sometimes a sponsor can be a friend, too. However, this is possible only if they are also able to pass on the program and provide accountability when needed. Good friends are great for bringing you to meetings, but they probably should pass you off to a different person to sponsor. It was also pointed out that sponsorship leads to fellowship.

Members were also considered answers to: "What do we mean by fellowship?" in response, members shared:

- A group that tells you the truth;
- Getting in a car with your sponsor and their sponsor;
- A group of people with shared interest;
- We teach each other — we do not sell each other this way of life;
- Fellowship of people and a fellowship of spirit;
- Having a sense of belonging;

- A place to feel safe;
- A place I am responsible to.

“Traditions: A Guide Not a Club” (Moderator: Paul L./Reporter: Carol W.)

The workshop addressed learning how to approach other A.A. members in relation to following the Traditions and sharing the Traditions. One member asked “Clarify the word ‘Club’.” Another member suggested having a literature meeting and using the Traditions Checklist. In addition, a dedicated Traditions meeting can be scheduled into the group’s meeting schedule. The member also suggested listening to the Traditions on the CD from A.A.W.S. and then using the Traditions Checklist in order to teach others the value and import of A.A.’s Traditions.

A member from Area 24 suggested discussing any items that might violate the Traditions at a business meeting. In discussing Traditions, or suggesting that they be followed, a member shared, “Use diplomacy, and speak from the heart. Speak from your own experience.” Also, “Honor our Traditions,” offered another. Incorporate the Traditions with personal experience — not trying to get own way, thereby using it as a club. Instead, use it as a tool to bring people together.

Still another said, “Some people don’t want to hear about the Traditions, and they don’t want to change. Be an example, be gentle, work with people. Encourage and allow people to come to their own conclusions. Present ideas which are palatable to be heard and accepted.”

One member from Area 36 suggested, “Share the Traditions with sponsees” while another suggested that “the group look at the Traditions.” Still another mentioned having a Traditions workshop relating to anonymity on social media. It was pointed out the “Traditions are as important to the group as the steps are to the individual.”

One past delegate suggested, “Sponsor in the Traditions.” The past delegate continued, “I share my experiences without condemning, especially if you are consistent. The G.S.O. will assist in a loving way with how to repair a Traditions violation.” Another past delegated shared that he “needed all Twelve Steps to protect me from my alcoholism. Using the Traditions protects A.A. from the individual. There is a solution.”

Finally, one group member pointed out that if we follow the Traditions in our own lives, then we are better able to talk to others about them.

“Our Connection to Veterans” (Moderator: Ross H./Reporter: Dave G.)

Workshop members stated that the military is closed society and making inroads may be difficult. Perhaps we can use the same approach as treatment centers and jails. A question was asked, “What challenges are there in reaching out to veterans?” Some veterans have PTSD and use alcohol to treat it. The veterans may not be aware that they are alcoholics. Furthermore, some treatment professionals treat PTSD and don’t recognize alcoholism. Because of the very different experiences, many A.A. members can’t relate to veterans who have PTSD. However, A.A. members *can* relate to veterans’ alcoholism and can help. We can offer to do A.A. information meetings for VA hospitals and they may be open to having literature and Grapevine magazines sent to them. Our Class A trustees could communicate with VA on a national level. We can do Bridge the Gap work with alcoholic veterans leaving VA hospitals. It would be very helpful if we could line up A.A. veterans to talk to newcomer veterans.

One veteran said that maybe veterans should not be treated any different than other A.A.s. Another suggestion was made to find a veteran already in A.A. to contact newcomer veterans. One attendee commented that we are ill-equipped to treat PTSD with A.A. Another said that “there is a problem about how to get the message to veterans because they don’t trust us. Veterans do better when working with other A.A. veterans.” Many agreed that it would be helpful if A.A. veterans could put themselves out there to be available to veterans.

Question 2: Is anyone using Grapevine or La Viña at VA hospitals? A gift subscription can be sent to veterans at VA hospitals. The VA has both hospitals and living centers. It may be a good idea to put an A.A. literature rack in VA administration office or the chaplain’s office. This could be good resource. Some A.A. groups have collected old Grapevine magazines and sent them to deployed military through the VA.

“Increasing Contributions” (Moderator: Christine G. /Reporter: Melissa A.)

Workshop attendees were asked to share on the following questions:

1. “How can we do electronic contributions at the group level?”
2. “What are people’s experiences with groups having a tax ID number?”
3. “How do we get people to contribute without sounding like we always need more money and that we are not nagging?”
4. “How do we get group contributions to increase without affiliating with outside issues?”

In response to the first question about electronic contributions, workshop members shared that some groups have a “cube” that is sent around. People swipe their cards and it goes right into the group’s bank account. In response to whether or not there were issues about privacy and bank information, members said that only last four of debit card showed – another area set up a PayPal account, but reported that it was under utilized. Workshop members cited the need to accept electronic contributions — people are carrying cash less and less. In general, members thought that having the cube increased their contributions.

In response to the 2nd question, “What are people’s experiences with groups having a tax ID number?” workshop members noted that the pamphlet and the website contains information about what to do if a group decides to have a tax ID number. Members did share input about not taking the decision lightly and making the decision only if you plan on keeping the group around for “life”. Members also thought the question or topic was “state specific,” and therefore required the services of a CPA or attorney for fielding specific questions.

Third, the workshop members shared experience on the following question:

“How do we get people to contribute without sounding like we always need more money and that we are not nagging?”

Many members contributed ideas, such as:

- “One of the methods that I always appreciate is when the treasurer gets up and says how much it costs for each person to sit in the chair.”
- Birthday plan — and using the packet provided by G.S.O. as opposed to just talking about it.
- One home group reminds members of the importance of contributions in their opening statement — and they pass the can during it.

- One member noted that A.A.s only use one slogan: “A buck in the basket” and said, “Let’s try to make it fun because something has got to change. How about ‘throwing \$10 in the tub’?”

Finally, in response to the final question, “How do we get group contributions to increase without affiliating outside issues?” group members described many avenues they have taken to avoid affiliation with outside issues:

- Show breakdown of what area provides and then further break it down to what the cost of it is. When one area did this, it increased the amount of contributions. Some trusted servants reported that they share with group and other A.A. members that if they “want to see more service then we need to give more.”
- Sponsees follow their sponsors’ lead – lead by example.
- It’s not just about what we put into the basket, it’s also about if our meetings support the service entities. Also, are we doing anything to carry the message to the meetings that don’t?
- A member shared that in his or her area, they were working on revising finance guidelines regarding the section on self-support and what the role is for members. Each DCM of an area would receive list of group contribution amounts in order to see where to set new goals.

FULL FORUM PRESENTATION/WORKSHOP

The Attached String: Responsibility and Accountability—Trent G., Delegate Panel 66, Area 41 (Presentation)

The theme of this workshop is “The Attached String: Responsibility and Accountability.” It comes from page 280 in *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, which is part of the chapter entitled “The Individual, A.A., and Society.” This section comprises a compilation of talks given by Bernard B. Smith, Chairman of the General Service Board, at the first six General Service Conferences. While the entire chapter is relevant, there are three paragraphs in particular that are the basis for today’s workshop.

“It is because we know of the tremendous impact that A.A. can have on generations that will follow us that we have been so painstaking in building a structure of service of A.A. in the General Service Board, the General Service Conference, and the many service agencies that perform the essential daily tasks of carrying the A.A. message throughout the world. It is with good reason that Bill has described this structure of service as a legacy, deserving of the same attention and understanding accorded the First Legacy of the Twelve Steps and the Second Legacy of Twelve Traditions.

“But this Third Legacy of Service has a string to it. And the string is that we are granted the use of this legacy for our lifetime upon the condition that we will not only look after it but increase its spiritual content for the generations that will follow us. Each succeeding generation, as it receives this legacy, must similarly protect it if they wish to employ it and gain life by it and pass it on to the next generation with an enriched spiritual content.”

Today we want to ask the question of what that string really means. I can tell you what it means to me, as I’m sure each of us has ideas of what it means to us. The fact is that it doesn’t really matter what it means to me or what it means to you. What matters most is what it *means*.

Have you ever heard someone in a meeting say there are no “musts” in the Big Book? I’ve heard it, and I always have to resist the urge to tell the person to read the book. There are plenty in there. I was struck by the “must” in the last sentence I read. “Each succeeding generation, as it receives this legacy, *must* similarly protect it if they wish to employ it and gain life by it and pass it on to the next generation with an enriched spiritual content.” *We must* protect this Third Legacy of Service, and pass it on with an enriched spiritual content.

The string is that we look after this Third Legacy of Service and increase its spiritual content. *Increase* its spiritual content. Have we been doing that since this sentence was written more than 60 years ago? I think about A.A. and money—its lack thereof, or its attempts to get more. I think about how in our principles there are no secrets. We have a Fifth Step in our First Legacy in which we rid ourselves of secrets. We have Tradition Nine in our Second Legacy, which tells us that trusted servants are directly responsible to (not for) those they serve, which

implies no secrets. And that leads me to think about accountability, and the difficulty there can be in getting straight answers.

I've thought about these things, and I've come to the conclusion that the attached string is merely hanging on by a thread.

To continue with Bernard B. Smith's talk from page 280: "The General Service Conference of A.A. is, of course, the practical instrument for preserving, enhancing, and administering this great Third Legacy of Service. The concept of the Conference from the beginning has been simple and compelling. It is grounded in the belief that all of us who have been associated with A.A. during its early growth and development owe an obligation to society. That obligation is to insure that this fellowship survives, that this flame of faith, this beacon light of hope for the world, must never be extinguished."

And back to the string . . .

"And the string is that we are granted the use of this legacy for our lifetime upon the condition that we will not only look after it but increase its spiritual content for the generations that will follow us."

The questions we should consider today include:

- What does an "increased spiritual content" look like? How do we achieve an increased spiritual content from one rotation to the next?
- Do we still owe an obligation to insure that this fellowship survives? If so, are we demonstrating that?
 - How can we strengthen the string today?
 - Have I, as a participant in the Third Legacy of Service, enriched its spiritual content for those who follow me?

Thank you. The microphones are open.

"The Attached String: Responsibility and Accountability" (Moderator: Tom A. / Reporter: Kathi C.) (Workshop)

During the Full Forum Workshop, forum members were asked to consider four questions on the topic, "The Attached String – Responsibility and Accountability."

The first question, "What does an "increased spiritual content" look like? How do we achieve an increased spiritual content from one rotation to the next?" garnered many responses from members, such as:

- "Teach and bring into the fold. Stay to train. Don't walk away."
- Members offered, "My spiritual content is different than others — it is not all black and white."
- Still others said, "Do not walk away after rotation, as there is an "institutional memory" to pass on."
- Increased spiritual content can be achieved through a "free and equal exchange of ideas" as well as by "sharing and listening" and using "tolerance."
- Others said that we have an "accountability TO, not FOR."
- Another member commented, "Spirituality and money mix in the hat."

The second question: "Do we still owe an obligation to insure this Fellowship survives? If so, are we demonstrating that?" received affirmative responses from attendees such as, "Yes, we

need to be out there — not in here,” and “It is no longer about me, but the alcoholic coming into the door.” Still another mentioned that “sponsorship in all 3 legacies” was important.

Members answered the third question: “How can we strengthen the string today?” with comments about sponsorship and service: “My gratitude is performed through service” and “teach and share experience, strength and hope.”

The final question, “Have I, as a participant in the Third Legacy of Service, enriched its spiritual content for those who follow me?” received many comments from workshop attendees. Several answered the question with self-examining queries: “Have I, am I, showing respect and humility?” and “Does my service work look like a spiritual program?” and, finally, “What is the message I am carrying?” One member shared: “I got here through desperation and need. I have been attracted to service by hearing servants share their transformed desperation and need.” Not all comments expressed success, however. One member expressed “frustration” in “accessing the A.A. message [for] all persons with accessibility issues.”

PRESENTATIONS

Spiritual Growth and Service Work—Gerry R., Delegate Panel 67, Area 40 Montana

My first attempt to consciously work a Step of the program of Alcoholics Anonymous was a selfish one. I was seeking relief from the terrible guilt I felt about harm I had caused someone, so I decided to try my hand at one of those Ninth Step amends I had heard about. I had no sponsor, had only successfully completed Step One prior to this and had yet to crack open the Big Book. My logic was that if I could just make this person understand how bad I felt, then I would feel better. Needless to say, neither one of us was smiling at the end of my efforts.

I had prayed for help as I drove the 100-plus miles to the meeting and again as I drove home afterward, feeling disheartened and confused. However, during both trips, I was unsure about who or what—if anything—I was praying to, and I was nearly convinced that it was pointless to even try. My prayer went something like this: “I don’t know if you’re even there, but I need help. I’m trying my best, but I need to know if I’m heading down the right road with this.”

I had about given up and was scanning the road ahead, looking for a gap between the guardrail and the ditch, when I saw a man walking toward me on the opposite side of the road. I noticed right away that he was dragging a cross made out of two small pine trees with the bark still on. We drew closer to each other, and I saw that he had long hair and a beard and he wore a white tunic with a rope tied around his waist. Closer yet, and it dawned on me that he was real.

I shook off my disbelief, pulled over and trotted back to the man. His eyes opened wide with caution as I approached and he kept the cross between us. I don’t blame him; I’m sure I looked pretty desperate. I can’t recall if I asked or if he just felt a need to explain, but he said, “I’m just a local guy, and God places it on my heart from time to time to pick up this cross and walk this road.” My throat tightened when I replied, “Well, I know why he did that today.”

Through my tears, I shared my story with him, and he did his best to give me comfort. There’s no doubt that what he was wearing—and dragging—had caught my attention, but it was his kind words and actions that truly left an impression on me. He accepted me where I was, as harmful as my actions had been, and he gave me hope that things would get better if I continued following the path I had recently started down.

I remember feeling hopeful when we parted ways, but, as powerful a feeling as that was for me, it seemed to pale in comparison to what my anonymous friend was feeling. He continued on his way, walking down the road, singing at the top of his lungs and with great gratitude to the God of his understanding.

It’s taken me many years to even begin to understand the true impact of that experience. At first I thought it was all about how it affected me. It wasn’t until much later that I began to realize the effect that it had on that kind-hearted man. You see, I had certainly been helped, and I felt great relief as a result of that, but he had helped another person in need, and what

he felt was clearly beyond words. I found later that a good song helps to express it, but you do have to sing it out loud.

I realized after that meeting that I was not at Step Nine but, in fact, at Step Two, and I had much work in front of me. Now, I would love to say that I raced through the rest of the Steps, but I can't. I've continued to move forward, however—sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly, and at some of them I did indeed balk. Often, I trudged.

I take heart in the fact that even Bill W. found himself, some six months after his white light experience at Towns Hospital, still torn between the enticing sounds that floated from a friendly bar and the 300-pound phone on the other side of the lobby of the Mayflower Hotel.

What he did in that situation is what we are each taught to do when it seems like every defect of character in us taunts, jeers and demands that we go back to our old ways: He took a small step toward the phone. That step symbolizes every action I've learned to take in sobriety. It acknowledges my inability to manage my own life as well as my willingness to follow an idea that is not my own, and it confirms my commitment to serve a cause greater than myself.

The most remarkable thing about that first step that Bill took, and those first steps that each of us have taken, is that it was taken on nothing but faith. Not the high-soaring, confident and assured kind of faith that we see from the pulpit, but an abject, hopeless and downtrodden faith, one that hears all those taunts, jeers and demands that remind us what a failure we are for having to perform this humbling act. The *negative narrative*, as I've come to call it. *Fear* is another word that fits.

I know Bill felt it, and I'm sure the guy I met on the road felt it as well. I could see it in his eyes as I approached him that day. Still, they both stepped forward, despite a reasonable fear that told them this might not end well. Clinging to a shaky faith, they reached toward someone who seemed to be at a place in life that was lower than their own in an effort to serve a cause that seemed higher than their own.

I don't believe any of us begin with such a noble purpose in our hearts. We seem to grow into it. For instance, the first time I made coffee for my home group, I was terrified that people would hate it. Being a greeter was nothing less than an excruciating ordeal. I felt completely unprepared when I went on my first Twelfth Step call and when I was first asked to be someone's sponsor. I visibly shook the first time I chaired a meeting, and I shook even worse when I raised my hand to stand for G.S.R. In fact, I've felt terribly underqualified for any service position I've started. There was a time when, given the option, I would rather have chewed glass than have stood up to talk in front of a group of actual, breathing people.

I have learned, though, from the examples of those two men and so many other men and women in this program whom I've witnessed reaching out to others in need, that this is how I am able to enlarge my spiritual life. In the moment, each of these efforts I've made has become my one small step toward the phone, or past the cross—my opportunity to grow in faith as I grow in service.

Now, I've been told that Bill had to walk about three-and-a-half miles across town to his meeting with Dr. Bob in Akron. I doubt that he walked back to the hotel afterward, but I still like to picture him doing so, head back and singing at the top of his lungs.

Disintegration or Over-Integration in Alcoholics Anonymous—Kelly D.,

Delegate Panel 66, Area 35 Northern Minnesota

“[W]e need it to protect A.A. against disintegration, while preventing over-integration . . .”

—*Why We Need a Conference*, Bernard Smith

What was the message that Bernard was trying to carry to us in this portion of his statement? Let’s look at disintegration first. The definition of *disintegration* is the process of losing cohesion or strength. *Cohesion* is often described as the action or fact of forming a united whole. Bernard apparently saw the potential for a “fracturing” or a loss of unity within Alcoholics Anonymous and was inviting us to be mindful of it.

Let’s ask ourselves this: Do we identify as one people having the same condition, or do we identify as distinctly different people who are having a similar experience? The literature we have produced over recent decades answers this question. We have pamphlets for the gay and lesbian, the native North American, special needs, the black and African American, the older alcoholic and the young people—to name a few. These pamphlets focus on the differences before they focus on the *common illness*.

Is it important for us to “move as of one mind,” or is it better to “move in the same direction from differing perspectives”? Do we attempt to ensure that everyone thinks alike, or is having a common goal the better approach? Is our tradition of autonomy providing a wide spectrum of experience, or is it being misused as a breaking ground for “anarchy and chaos”? Has the lack of a “common malady called *alcoholism*” moved us to a place in which the phrase “except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole” no longer applies due to lack of cohesion and a loss of our singleness of purpose? Has this alleged autonomy become self-determination, which is really just a disguised avoidance of God reliance?

A review of the Conference Advisory Actions and the attitudes that seem to underlie them would make a strong case that Alcoholics Anonymous has migrated from providing a program to assist in finding a Higher Power and become an association of groups acting as their own Higher Power. *Groups*, in this reference, means both A.A. groups and ethnic, professional or life-experience groups within A.A. Are these the signs of the disintegration that Bernard was talking about?

Now let’s look at over-integration. The definition of *integration* is the act or process of uniting different things. *Over-integration* appears to be a phrase coined by Bernard himself; therefore, we will need to clarify what he was attempting to illustrate. The term *over* tends to imply to most of us that it is “beyond” or “in excess of.” The term would seem to apply best to the A.A. members themselves, especially since the most common usage of the term *integration* is applied to individuals rather than anything else. *Diversity* is the inclusion of different types of people (as people of different races or cultures) in a group or organization. Therefore, it is reasonable to believe that Bernard was pointing to a desire to include more or different people than was originally intended in the creation of the society of Alcoholics Anonymous, or to do so in a way that would be injurious to A.A. Let’s look at scenarios in which this might be possible.

Bill and the early A.A.s came to fully understand the dire consequences of attempting to make more of A.A. than God intended it to be. Time and time again those types of efforts turned

disastrous for those involved. They also learned the disastrous impact of trying to “make anything happen” based on what they thought should occur. This had to be in Bernard’s mind as he wrote about over-integration.

Promotion can be defined as attempting to drive an individual to take a certain action (what marketers today have termed a *call to action*) or to create a specific scenario or event. Bernard, even more so than Bill, was adherent of the idea that everything will occur in its own time and through its own process. His sense appears to have been that God has His own timing and purpose in bringing this to fruition. This is very clear in his several talks.

Therefore, with an eye on the definition of *diversity* one can readily suggest that Bernard was proposing that Alcoholics Anonymous ought never encourage or drive inclusion of anyone by means other than their own desire to stop drinking, but rather to be accepting of those alcoholics who wish to be part of Alcoholics Anonymous and its program. The first approach (driving and encouraging) suggests the idea of power; the second approach (accepting) is derived from humility.

The question before us then becomes, is this what Bernard was warning us against? Also referencing Bill’s writing from *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age* it states, “In something of the same fashion this idea began to work out with other kinds of prospects. In the beginning we could not sober up women. They were different, they said. But when they saw other women get well, they slowly followed suit. The derelict, the rich man, the socialite—all these once thought AA was not for them. So did certain people of other races and tongues and creeds. But when they clearly saw the alcoholic tragedy for which they were headed, they could forget their differences and join AA. As these new trends came into full view, we were overjoyed. Today more than half of AA’s membership consists of mild cases and those who once thought they were ‘different.’”

Let’s look again at integration. *Integration* is properly defined as “incorporation as equals into a society or an organization of individuals of different groups.” The mere adding of a group or class of people into a large body of people does *not* equate to integration. The process of integration must always begin with the identifying group wishing to be integrated becoming willing to set aside its differences with the larger body. It does not forego them. The differences merely become secondary to the vital common element that can bind the groups. In our case, the common element is alcoholism.

Therefore, were we to be truly committed to integration of those who come to us, our responsibility to them would be to help them understand that, while they have individual attributes vitally important to them in their personal lives, in Alcoholics Anonymous the truly saving grace is that we are simply just alcoholics. Again, our literature’s approach for the last few decades has shown this not to be our perspective.

Bernard knew very well what the Big Book points out—that alcoholics are extremists. Therefore, it seems he wanted to point us to the extremes we ought to avoid, as we might be susceptible to these extremes.

Let’s look at disintegration and over-integration from that perspective. Bluntly stated, disintegration is illustrative of an attitude of apathy, or let’s say disinterest, by the body of

people concerned; that is one extreme. Over-integration is, at its core, an attitude of arrogance, or self-power, in its attempt to “make something happen.” Clearly these are attitudes based on the extreme of too little concern or its opposing attitude of too much concern. Our Big Book is very diligent in reminding us about the approach of “letting God set our ideal” for us. Could Bernard have been pointing us to that tried-and-true approach as a society?

One final point our Big Book uses (on two occasions) is the illustration of “laying the kit of spiritual tools at their feet.” It is not difficult to arrive at an understanding that we are not to place our message as a hurdle to overcome or a list of conditions to be met. Conversely, it also becomes clear that we are not to use our message as side barriers, funneling those who may have an interest in us into a membership they did not intend, or are not ready, to establish. And certainly, these things ought not be done in order to meet some self-determined set of membership numbers or monetary goals.

Let’s ask ourselves this final question: Are we trying to maintain our Fellowship on more of an intellectual level rather than a spiritual service level? Let’s not forget this statement in the Foreword to the Third Edition: “Recovery begins when one alcoholic talks to another alcoholic, sharing experience, strength, and hope.”

Servants or Senators—Scott M., Delegate Panel 67, Area 52 North Dakota

When I was lovingly invited to do a presentation on “Servants or Senators,” I hadn’t yet read the wonderful piece titled “Are We Servants or Senators?” by Carl B. After reading it I wanted to plagiarize it completely. The piece describes so well the difference between being a servant and being a senator. I quote from the second paragraph, “The fact is: ‘I am a servant if I am responsible “to” those I serve. I am a senator if I assume responsibility “for” those I serve.’” This clearly defines for me the role I must assume when performing service to the Fellowship. I say “assume” because it means I must practice a level of humility, responsibility and sacrifice that does not come naturally to me.

This theme is seen throughout our literature pertaining to the lessons learned in the formation of Alcoholics Anonymous and its Steps, Traditions and Concepts. In reading a little deeper I was struck with the fact that the problem described here really comes down to “our common welfare,” or unity. It’s seen when Bill W. went through the experience with his group in which he contemplated becoming a “paid lay therapist,” from page 98 of *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*. “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.*” He talks further about how the Traditions ask each of us for personal as well as group sacrifice. “For the sake of the welfare of our entire society, the Traditions ask that every individual and every group and every area in A.A. shall lay aside all desires, ambitions, and untoward actions that could bring serious division among us or lose for us the confidence of the world at large.”

In my mind, nothing will bring about more disunity and division within the Fellowship than a trusted servant acting unilaterally. And Bill W.’s experience bears this out. Ask any second-year G.S.R. at a district meeting if he or she can vote on some new recommendation that may well affect their group without being able to take it back to the group, knowing how the group conscience meeting will go when they report back. The right of decision is a useful tool for any trusted servant, one to be used in extraordinary situations or when new information is learned; but it can also be the source of disunity because it bypasses A.A.’s long-held foundation of mutual trust and thus creates an “us against them” mentality.

The Carl B. piece talks about how, after years of service, “it’s easy to lose perspective on the practice of genuine humility at the World Service level. Attempting to act in our ‘best interests,’ we sometimes marginalize AA’s ultimate authority: the Fellowship’s collective conscience.” I believe this applies to all levels of A.A. service—G.S.R., D.C.M., area chair, delegate or trustee. As a trusted servant, am I fostering a well-informed group conscience? One with a well-heard minority? Allowing a loving God to express Himself? Can I accept, from *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age* page 99, “the now proven fact that the conscience of the group, when properly informed of the facts and issues and principles involved, was often wiser than any leader”?

Developing the type and kind of humility, responsibility and sacrifice required to put personal feelings or ideas of what I think is right for A.A. aside and assuming the responsibility to serve the Fellowship has been, for me, a lesson in learning from the very beginning of my service. In fact, I got into service because I was so worried about members “rocking the boat” of my

home group. In the beginning, I wasn't full of any great wisdom or insight of tradition or service. I just didn't want my group to fall apart, leaving me with nowhere to turn. Ultimately, what I learned from that experience is that there were people who held positions within A.A. who quoted weird rules (Traditions) when I asked them what I could do about what was going on. What I found was that they were relying on the "clear cut obligations," which I'm paraphrasing from the *Language of the Heart* page 340, showing me they possessed a level of humility and obedience to the hard-won lessons of the past (again, the Traditions) that allowed them to be great arbiters to my group's problems. Had these people come in and told our group what we must do without the type of democracy found in A.A., it would have spelled disaster for my group. Instead, they showed us that these "clear cut obligations" hold us up to the very essence of right being and right doing. It is by them that we are enabled to find a way to do God's will.

In this small example of leadership in A.A. I was shown something to still strive for every day. For to be a trusted servant and not a senator I must practice genuine humility so I don't clothe myself with arbitrary personal authority and to remember I hold only an authorization to serve—not an authority to govern. Taken from the last line in the Carl B. piece: "As illustrated in the Fellowship's spiritual roots, the practice of genuine humility is critical to facilitating our legacies of Recovery, Unity and Service, and the preservation of AA's message for generations yet to come. For to be a servant one has to be humble, and to be trusted one has to be obedient."

A.A. World Services: What a Concept—Curt K., Delegate Panel 67, Area 36 Southern Minnesota

Concept I (Long Form): “The final responsibility and ultimate authority for A.A. world services should always reside in the collective conscience of our whole Fellowship.”

Among the many privileges and responsibilities I have obtained as the delegate from Area 36, Southern Minnesota, I am asked by each of the two intergroup offices in the Twin Cities to submit monthly articles to their newsletters. Each month one of these articles is specifically focused on the Twelve Concepts, and this exercise has been a great motivator to get me reading and researching the Twelve Concepts and the principles that are expressed in them.

In his introduction to *Twelve Concepts for World Service* (in combination with *The A.A. Service Manual*), Bill W. says he wrote the Concepts “to record the ‘why’ of our service structure.” But before we dig into the “why” of the Concepts, I want to spend a little time talking about what world services are. The Concepts are titled *Twelve Concepts for World Service*, so there must be something significant about those services.

Prior to beginning my term as delegate, I had the idea that our General Service Board and our General Service Office existed primarily to serve the A.A. groups—that the flow of service went heavily in the direction of the groups. And with this understanding, I may have picked up an attitude over the years that one of our roles as groups, districts and areas was to critique the board and G.S.O. and keep them on task as they serve us. But as I started reading and writing about the Concepts this year, my eyes opened to a very different view of the roles of our General Service Board, G.S.O. and even our General Service Conference.

At the beginning of the *Service Manual*, in the preface “A.A.’s Legacy of Service,” our co-founder Bill W. describes world services as “the most vital, yet least understood, group of services . . . those that enable us to function as a whole, namely: the General Service Office, A.A. World Services, Inc., The A.A. Grapevine, Inc., and our board of trustees.”

As I read more of Bill’s essays about the Twelve Concepts, I see more and more references to Bill’s understanding of our world services. The way Bill describes them, our General Service Board, the corporate boards and the General Service Conference are the channels for our groups to push service out and into the world. The focus is much more outward-facing and not so much about the board, office and Conference serving us. These entities perform many services that groups could not otherwise do on their own, such as producing literature, providing public information on a broad scale, helping new groups form and publishing a national magazine, the Grapevine and La Viña. It’s all about us getting our service done through them. In his writing, Bill describes the long list of important activities as:

- “the writing of uniform A.A. literature”
- “a sound public relations policy”
- “large numbers of pleas for help”
- “aiding new groups to form”
- “need for a monthly magazine”
- “translations of our literature”

With this shift in my understanding, I have a new appreciation for the general service structure and its importance in funneling our group conscience and our group services out into the

world. The Twelve Concepts are not only the “why” of the Conference, they appear to be all about entrusting this set of world services to the Fellowship.

As Bill W. and Dr. Bob aged, it became clear that their role as the primary advisors to the trustees of the Alcoholic Foundation (the original corporate name for our organization) would naturally come to a close. The process of turning over the responsibility for our world services (the job of keeping them going) and turning over the authority for these services (the right to make decisions about them) was a very big deal for A.A.

With the longevity of the Fellowship of A.A. in mind, Bill envisioned a structure that would allow the A.A. groups to take over and play the role of advisors to the trustees once he and Dr. Bob were gone. The blueprint Bill developed for the Conference became a succession plan for our two founding members. In his essay on Concept I in *The A.A. Service Manual*, Bill shares his realization that the “fact had to be faced that A.A.’s founders were perishable. When Dr. Bob and I had gone, who would then advise the Trustees; who could link our little-known Board to our thousands of groups? For the first time it was seen that only a representative conference could take the place of Dr. Bob and me.”

So we can see that the immediate “why” for creating the general service structure was the fact that Dr. Bob had become gravely ill and passed away. Designing the General Service Conference and later writing the Twelve Concepts became the succession plan for our founders. But there is a big-picture, long-term “why” contained in the Twelve Concepts as well.

Bill writes specifically in his essay on Concept I about the importance of our “collective conscience.” He refers often to Tradition Two, which lays out that “there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience.” By turning our world services over to the collective conscience of our *whole* Fellowship, A.A. ensures that the most powerful expression of God comes through its most inclusive collective—our whole Fellowship represented by our thousands of groups made up of our millions of members. While Bill and Dr. Bob were influential and inspirational as our founders, the General Service Conference and the Twelve Concepts turned our world services over to the one group that could be even more effective than our founders at keeping A.A. alive and thriving: the entire Fellowship.

The Conference structure that Bill laid out became the channel for the group conscience as described in Concept I and Tradition Two—the place where God shows up in the activities of our membership. If our general service structure is how our Fellowship puts its service into action, then there must be some way to take the conscience of so many groups and funnel it into action. In Concepts II and III, Bill describes how, out of necessity, our A.A. groups have delegated authority and responsibility for our world services to the General Service Conference. A.A. is just too large (well over 100,000 groups) and is too far-flung (it covers all of the U.S. and Canada) to function effectively unless the practical management of our services is delegated to a smaller, more manageable number of trusted servants.

Bill points out that having “the final responsibility and the ultimate authority” does not translate into actually managing or conducting our world services. Expecting the vast number of A.A. groups in the U.S. and Canada to do the day-to-day work of or to closely control those world services is not practical or effective. Nothing could be accomplished. To be effective, A.A.

needed to have a system to *delegate* the operational authority to carefully chosen representatives. These representatives would be entrusted to speak for the group conscience of the whole Fellowship. This was the motive for forming the General Service Conference, and it explains why those of us that represent the Fellowship at the Conference are called your *delegates*.

The Conference structure allows our many groups to exercise their “final responsibility and the ultimate authority for A.A. world services” by offering guidance to the General Service Board and the General Service Office. In principle and in practice, these bodies have always been and continue to be more than corporate entities. They are integrated with our Fellowship and are even made up mostly of members of our Fellowship.

As a practical matter, our General Service Board is incorporated as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization in the state of New York, which means that, in a strict sense, the General Service Board holds all the legal power for A.A. But because of our principles outlined in the Twelve Traditions and the Twelve Concepts, the groups have come to hold the ultimate authority. As has been the case throughout the Concepts, trust is at the core. Our general service structure, often illustrated as an upside-down triangle, places our groups as the largest and top layer of the triangle. Our General Service Board and its two corporate boards of A.A. World Services, Inc. and A.A. Grapevine, Inc. are at the bottom tip of the triangle. The entire structure is founded on the principles of trust and delegation.

Through discussion, debate and decisions at its annual meeting, the Conference strives to act at the policy level, providing guidance to the trustees of the board rather than involving itself directly in the day-to-day activities of the board or the General Service Office. The Conference process begins with the agenda items that are submitted throughout the year by groups, districts, areas, committees, trustees and even individual A.A. members. Any item that makes it onto the Conference agenda is first considered by one of the Conference committees. If a committee so chooses, it can forward an item to the full Conference body to be discussed and voted upon. If approved, these items become Advisory Actions—the group conscience of the entire Fellowship funneled into specific guidance to the General Service Board.

Our Advisory Actions are high-level guiding principles and suggestions that the Conference passes along to the trustees. Concept VI asks us to trust our trustees. We show our trust by allowing the trustees and, ultimately, the staff of the General Service Office to decide how to best carry out what we’ve asked them to do. We have asked them to do our service, but we respect them enough to allow them to decide best how to get things done.

By participating in the Conference, our groups have delegated their responsibility and authority, but they have not abdicated their responsibility and authority. As groups, we can and should continue to do our part to implement the Advisory Actions that the Conference adopts. The Conference, after all, is acting on our behalf to further our world services. And it does so by advising the General Service Board and General Service Office staff.

The relationship of the General Service Conference to the trustees of the General Service Board is working at its best when the Conference acts at the policy level. The Conference appropriately strives to set overarching policies that provide guidance to the trustees rather

than trying to directly handle day-to-day transactions or business practices. As is true throughout our service structure, and as communicated in Concepts III and IV, if we ask a person or a group to take on a certain task or perform a certain function, then we must naturally also give them adequate decision-making power and adequate freedom to do what they think is best to accomplish what we've asked them to do. Otherwise, we would paralyze our trusted servants by demanding they perform services for us without giving them the latitude to choose the best way to do so.

Empowering a small group of trusted servants with this much authority and responsibility can be frightening for some of our members. To ease the fear and build trust, we are very intentional about keeping lines of communication open between groups, districts, areas, regions, the General Service Conference and the General Service Board. The General Service Conference process that we prepare for and participate in throughout the year is designed specifically to facilitate this kind of communication.

Since being asked to write about the Concepts, I have found a new appreciation for our A.A. world services and a new understanding that our general service structure is primarily set up to accomplish those services in the world. Because of the size and geographical spread of our Fellowship, groups delegate their responsibility and authority for our world services to smaller and more effective groups of trusted servants. The group conscience of A.A., which is how we decide what our service priorities are, is focused through the General Service Conference. As an advisory body, the Conference guides our General Service Board and our General Service Office in their work: work that we have asked these bodies to do on our behalf—work that we should remain engaged in. We're all in the Fellowship together and ensuring that our world services get done is one of our main purposes.

PAST TRUSTEES SHARING

Ken B.: *West Central Regional Trustee (past, 2008-2012)*

I was reading something the other day that was talking about our mission. It was published by A.A.W.S. I got to thinking about our mission, and I bet everyone here could come up with a close version of what A.A.'s mission is. Bill said "Shoemaker, stick to thy last." We do one thing and we do it well.

I'd like to introduce a new word into our vernacular; it's called Mission Creep — MC for short. We tend to have really good ideas, big hearts, and then we start to expand what we do into areas we probably ought not to go. I attend a meeting and I've been a regular for thirty years. And for thirty years I've been working on their understanding of primary purpose. You should have seen me when I noticed that the person who was opening the meeting — the chair — didn't identify himself even as a member of Alcoholics Anonymous. The funny thing was, when I spoke out, I discovered that I was the jerk and the one who was out of line for interrupting the poor guy. There is nothing sinister or bad in our intentions. We mean to make people feel welcome, but we act to our own detriment by our own good intentions. For example, I ran into some activity regarding C.P.C. within the past few years. It had to do with the VA hospital and outreach to it. The deal was this: We would be lined up to transport their clients to meetings. I thought, Great! That is, until I caught the details. The plan was this (and the fault isn't on the VA, it is on us): Area A.A.s would carpool and take the VA clients to whatever KIND of recovery meeting the client wanted to go to. It was more difficult to explain to our people what was wrong with that than to explain it to the VA people.

In the business end of A.A. it is the same thing. The Grapevine, two decades ago, had a wonderful plan. It would have increased subscriptions and put the Grapevine into the hands of some new people, it would have continued to carry the message of A.A. monthly to the new people. In effect, it was an arrangement to go into business with a treatment center directly east of here by a few miles. Wonderful plan, in all aspects, except that it put us in direct business with this organization and that it would be affiliation. Fortunately, the Conference dropped a brick on it. It violated Traditions. If all involved followed our Traditions, all these things could have been avoided.

"Mission Creep" is this: We take a wonderful idea and we extend it and extend it to where we can justify almost anything rather than remembering that our focus must always remain on the one thing we do well.

Dorothy W.: *Trustee-at-Large/U.S. (past, 2005-2009)*

As we get older, we have senior moments. I've been on senior vacations every once in a while, but it doesn't stop me from doing service work. One gentleman shared that he felt "inadequate." Any time I have ever served in a position, I have felt inadequate. I'd think, "Boy, what did I just get myself into?" Like it was just me that got me into that. So, if you are sitting out there and you are thinking, "I'd certainly be willing — but I don't have this or that..." Don't let it keep you from serving. In areas I was asked to serve, I would think, "How can I do this?"

I only have a high school education. Everyone else has all these letters behind their name!" So, I decided that my name is Dorothy W. — and the letters behind it are B.S.

My experience as trustee-at-large/U.S. was great — and the position, I think, is the greatest to serve in. I was able to carry the message to 15 different countries; do you know how we talk about not feeling like we are a part of? I was in Hungary and they said, "Thank you for coming. At least now we know somebody cares." I was only one person and yet I was able to take that message to another country that is hurting, and *they* said thank you, but it was really I who was privileged. Once, I was at a World Service Meeting (WSM) meeting in New York. There was a young man there. A.A.W.S. had just finished translating the Big Book into his language, so he was presented with the first book for his country. He looked at that book like it was a million dollars. We all cried. Sometimes we take what we have for granted. Anytime I am serving, I remember how grateful I feel to be "a part of" instead of "apart from."

I'd like to share how important the literature fund is. I was in Turkey one time and we went to check and see if maybe one country could publish another countries' literature so that they could get the literature. Many times the literature from the U.S. will be confiscated and the people won't get it. When we were ready to leave, our interpreter handed one of our G.S.O. staff members 75 dollars. He said, "I know it isn't much, but it makes us feel a part of that we can give you even 75 dollars for the literature fund."

I was in Ireland, at another WSM. At that meeting, one of the staff members found, pushed under his hotel room door, an envelope with two crisp ten-dollar bills. It came from the Ukraine. And the Ukraine delegate said, "We can't afford much, but we want to be a part of this great Fellowship." That 20 dollars was even more than some others were able to give.

Not everyone will be a trustee or a director, but everyone **can** be a member of good standing and carry the message of Alcoholics Anonymous wherever we are. We can let all know that we are here and we are ready and willing to help out in any area we can.

I was able to attend the first General Service Conference in Mongolia. When they carried their flag down, everyone cheered. Right then, I think I knew what Bill must have felt during our first General Service Conference. And me — a little 'ole drunk from North Dakota — I was able to be there by God's grace and be one of the many. So, if you are sitting out there and you don't feel qualified to serve, let the hand of God touch you; it is through him that I have been able to serve. He doesn't choose the qualified; he qualifies the chosen.

Chuck B.: *West Central Regional Trustee (past, 2004-2008)*

I want to thank everyone, especially the newcomers, for coming today. In Alcoholics Anonymous, we have three legacies of service, and the people I look up to are working all three legacies. There is balance.

Once, when I was trustee, I was at a board meeting and we were on a break. I was overwhelmed with all this trustee business — the General Service Board and the A.A.W.S. board. They are both like second jobs with their subcommittees, conference calls, interviews and other different things. I was feeling down and I was walking down Broadway. It was my dad's 90th birthday on that day. He was at home. Back when I left home, I did it because I

thought I hated my dad. And after I sobered up in A.A., he really changed! He became my best friend.

So, on that day, he was at home and since it was his 90th birthday I called him. My whole family was there. I've got 9 brothers and sisters and they were all there with their families. I wished him a happy birthday and I said, "I wish I could be there." He said, "Stay where you are at. You are in the right place." So, later on, I was thinking, "This is really, really affecting my recovery because I am not at my home group. I'm not sitting down, knee-to-knee, with my sponsees or my sponsor." I talked with my friend Tom from Western Canada and he said, "Chuck, service *is* recovery. They all go together. Recovery, Service and Unity."

There are some aspects of controversy that I do like. For instance, people are discussing this [Big Book] manuscript thing. I knew a little about it, but now I want to know more. But here is what I like: Rather than just form an opinion, I research it, talk to people and find out the facts. And that is how an informed group conscience comes about. That is why sometimes we have to be patient and wait for the results — If I don't know all the facts, I can't make a decision. The thing about the Concepts is this: we can agree to disagree and then go out for ice cream.

This service stuff is not work; it is an opportunity. It has allowed me to meet some of the best people in the world. I was told that there were two things I should worry about God: That there is one and I'm not it. I believe that God is in charge.

Ted S.: *West Central Regional Trustee (past, 2000-2004)*

My sponsor said that the most important person at any meeting is the newcomer, and from there we work our way up to nothing. And that is what has happened. If you are new and getting into service and you are overwhelmed and not sure what to do, there are a lot of people here who will help you along that road, but much of the learning is in the doing. I am convinced of that. The future leaders of A.A. are sitting in meetings like this. I learned early in A.A. that service is really gratitude made visible. And if I am grateful for what I've received, then it is important for me to educate the newcomer, make service interesting and keep them coming back. I must show them the responsibility that comes along with our sobriety and show them the good things that happen to us.

I was also told don't cheat yourself in Alcoholics Anonymous. Get active and stay active. It is a funny thing, but I've heard a lot of you say it: "The more I do, the more I want to do because of the good things that happen in my life." The actions I take in Alcoholics Anonymous have an impact on my life. I also heard, "My sponsor talked about living my way into right thinking." I heard a professional say that when we change our actions, we change our thinking. And when our thinking changes, our behavior changes. When that changes, our outcomes change. And that is *exactly* what my sponsor showed me through his own activity in Alcoholics Anonymous.

I think the real leaders in A.A. are the ones who show humility. I met one down here — I could sense the humility in her life, and the way she talked to me about some of the things we do in Alcoholics Anonymous — these are the great leaders. We learn this in A.A., though sometimes it is a little painful because we don't have a problem knocking people down to size in our groups. Humility, love and service is a fantastic combination — we get that in Alcoholics Anonymous and we learn it through great sponsorship and being "a part of."

Larry N.: *Trustee-at-Large/U.S. (past, 1993-1997)*

I really only like to talk about a few points in Alcoholics Anonymous and one of them is literature. Someone told me once, when I was in a bad mood, that A.A. was love and service. That was also what Dr. Bob said the A.A. program boiled down to. And if there is love in this room, it is back there in those books, in our literature. Here is a little story that happened when I was trustee-at-large/U.S.:

I went to the first Asia Oceanic meeting in Japan. When it was over, I had my bags packed and I was ready to go. I was walking down the street when I heard a voice say, "Larry is that you?" And it was Joe. I met Joe at my home group in San Diego. At that time, he was new. The group all went to coffee afterwards and we made sure that Joe and his friends went with us. I said, "This is a great coincidence." But what he had in his hand, to give me, was a history of the first twenty years in Japan of A.A. It was a great present, but I cannot read a word of it — it's in Japanese. But that is what happens to people who want to get sober in A.A. I

I went to Slovakia. We were in a very large room, and there were talks by Class A (nonalcoholic) trustee Dr. John Chapel of the University of Nevada, and a short talk by myself. At the end of that meeting, no one had asked me a question. And I was feeling a little bad about that — they had all wanted to talk to John. So, I thought about what I learned in A.A.: I should find a newcomer. And I should talk to him. So looked around for someone who looked scared and a little sweaty. Igor was a guy like that — so I went up to him. He spoke just a little bit of English. He told me his name and he told me he was soon leaving the treatment center. He also told me that that where he was going, there was no A.A.

I had the Czech Big Book in my hand. I don't read Czech, either, but he could. I wanted to show him, in "A Vision for You," where it describes hope and success for the alcoholic ".... Though you be but one man with this book in your hand. We believe and hope it contains all you will need to begin." I was not able to say that to him. But I did give him the book. A few years later I was there again. I went to a meeting in a halfway house. There was Igor, again, trying to get sober, but now the Big Book is available in the Czech language, the Slovak language, and 69 other translations. The literature is important, especially when you think of the love that is put in when people are translating it, and the love it brings when people can read our message, and begin to change their lives.

While trustee-at-large/U.S., the trustee-at-large/Canada and myself were invited to a convention in Brazil — the chair had asked us to come. Their symbol of an A.A. meeting was upside down whiskey glasses that looked like A.A. When we finally got down to the big meeting, there were thousands of people there. It was a huge stadium and we were asked to carry the flag of our country around. And I did, and the call for countries went in alphabetical order. When the call came for United States, they stood up, the whole stadium, and shouted and clapped and shouted and clapped and shouted. And I walked all the way around that stadium. But if it ever happens again, I think the U.S. and Canada should go around at the same time, because we are one General Service Office.

I owe my life to A.A. I was a horrible drunk and was described by my college advisors as a pathological liar and an alcoholic. I've probably written more bad checks than good ones, since my wife took over writing all the checks. I owe an endless debt of gratitude to A.A. I hope, by the grace of God, that I can continue being a servant of A.A. until my last breath is drawn.

Don W.: East Central Regional Trustee (Class B) (past, 1996-2000)

I was a delegate, panel 34. I served during 1984 and 1985. I thought when I got that done I was done, so I went back to my home group, started making coffee and got involved in prison work. What brought me to South Dakota today was the love and fellowship of the people in this room.

Litigation has been with Alcoholics Anonymous since it's beginning. If you really want to know about Alcoholics Anonymous, read *A.A. Comes of Age*. We tell the new person to read the Big Book, the "Twelve and Twelve," and if they stick around and show a spark of interest in Alcoholics Anonymous they should read *A.A. Comes of Age* because it is our history book. And I'll make a plug for *Al-Anon*: If you want to know what Alcoholics Anonymous can do, get *Lois Remembers*. That book tells you about the times they went out, riding around on their motorcycle and sidecar. It tells about getting stuck in the mud in Florida and other things. It tells how they handled situations and how they worked it and how they got through it. It tells about where they were and how they had nothing when the program started and how it helped them. It tells about the people who extended the hand of Fellowship to them.

There is a group in Grand Rapids, Michigan, called the "No Secret Meeting." They use *The A.A. Service Manual/Twelve Concepts for World Service* as their book. It is about 60 miles away from where I live, but I try to make their Monday night meeting at least once a month. It is awesome to watch them. I heard some folks here, during the sharing session, who said they tried to read the Service Manual and it was a little hard reading. But it's like anything in Alcoholics Anonymous, if you start doing it together and talk about it together, you start understanding it a little better. Hopefully we can get past delegates and trustees to attend those kinds of meetings and pass it on.

I heard someone say that they didn't feel qualified to serve A.A. in the position of trustees or delegates. I came into Alcoholics Anonymous when I was 27 years old. It was 1971. I had no education. I got my high school diploma when I was 30 years old. I didn't qualify, either, but by the grace of God and the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous, I stand here as a past trustee. I still ain't figured it out, but I'm grateful I was able to do it.

Carl B.: West Central Regional Trustee (past, 1996-2000)

In order to keep this thing on time, I am going to say: Time has passed and so shall I.

CLOSING REMARKS

Michele Grinberg, *Class A (nonalcoholic) General Service Board Chairperson*

I am your Class A trustee, and, as we all know, “A” stands for amateur. Just like you, I love and practice the principles of A.A. in all my affairs, to the best of my ability, and with the help of my Higher Power — one day at a time. I want to encourage those of you who have the service bug to get somebody who hasn’t been to one of these Forums, put them in the car, and bring them to North Dakota.

You might have seen me typing away on my iPad. I am not checking my email or surfing the Web, I’m taking notes — I like to take them with me on the plane. I am always learning from all of you. Like I’ve said, I’ve listened and taken notes the whole weekend, and I really loved when we had the workshop on the whole because you all become *a part* of this. I learned so much from that.

The variety of the workshops this weekend was great. My first reaction, when I saw all the workshops was, Good heavens! Why do we have this many workshops? But you all know what you are doing. And again, I learn. So, when I listened to all of you, I decided that the theme for this weekend was “Communication.” I heard a lot of different things about communication — maybe you didn’t use that word — but that is what I was receiving from all of you.

I want to share a couple of things that resonated with me: From the delegate presentations on Saturday, I heard a lot about communication about our spiritual nature, about how it infuses our service as trusted servants. I will take that with me. I also heard a discussion about incorporation, and how incorporation means that we are equals in our society. I really like that idea. I also heard a caution about how pride and fear can keep us away from our common welfare and we need to be mindful and aware of those traits.

I love that someone shared, “I understand that I need general services to carry our work and our services out in the world — it’s not about serving me.” Very spiritual; I stopped and thought about that. Of course, we heard about the “attached string.” I thought that was a great presentation. I heard about tapping into our Higher Power. Gaining the experience from those before, I certainly learned from the experience I heard at this table this morning. I heard about being responsible to share, that sharing is what we do. A.A. is about telling stories; it doesn’t work unless we share our stories. I also heard, “whatever I do, make it just a little bit better than when I received it.” I thought that was great, and I can tell you that is what your Board is trying to do.

I also heard about communication across existing boundaries (let’s not pretend they aren’t, they are there). Someone mentioned from the floor this morning about needing Arabic books in an Israeli meeting. There’s the boundary, and there is the book that crosses that boundary. For me, that was a bigger spiritual point, and question: What existing boundaries do we need to cross to get the message of recovery to those who are still suffering? That’s an inventory I think we can all work on.

So, from the floor and from the workshops we heard discussions about inclusion and about accessibility. Again, we are talking about boundaries and what communication tools do we have and what should we use to cross those boundaries? I heard something at one of the workshops —“Traditions: A Guide Not a Club.” Again, how do we communicate our Traditions as a guide, not a club?

I heard lots and lots of gratitude in your communication. Particularly, this morning: I chuckled because I heard somebody talking about lots of gratitude for the old guys and their teaching of the spiritual nature. Somebody leaned over and said to me, “Ok, so exactly who qualifies as an old guy?”

I started my participation in this Regional Forum on Friday night, referencing the theme of the 2018 General Service Conference, which is “A.A. — A Solution for All Generations.” I think this topic has two meanings. One is tolerance and acceptance of all who seek the A.A. solution, and as Bill wrote in “As Bill Sees It”: “Honesty with ourselves and others gets us sober, but it is tolerance that keeps us that way.”

The other meaning that I take away from “A.A. — A Solution for All Generations” is that A.A. is timeless and will be a solution for all generations to come, as long as God would have us do this work. So, that means it is up to all of us who care about A.A. (which is surely everybody in this room) to keep A.A. strong for those future generations. Listening to you, I know that A.A. is full of passionate and smart people who will work hard, do service, and keep the hand of A.A. out there. I cannot thank you enough for all that you do. Please, keep coming back.

