

HOLIDAY MESSAGE *from Bill*

December 1970

*Gratitude is just about the finest attribute
we can have, and how deeply we of AA
realize this at Christmastime.*

*Together, we count and ponder our
blessings of life, of service, of love.*

*In these distraught times, we have been
enabled to find an always-increasing
measure of peace within ourselves.*

*Together with all here at AA's General
Service Offices, Lois joins me in warmest
greetings to each and all of you, and we
share our confident faith that the year to
come will be counted among the best that
our Fellowship has ever known.*

Bill

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Mail address: P.O. Box 459, Grand Central Station
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■ Corrections Appointed Committee Member

The trustees' Committee on Corrections has an opening for an appointed committee member. We are searching for an appropriate individual to fill this position and would appreciate any recommendations.

Some of the qualities most desirable for this appointed committee member opening are:

- Active in A.A. service, especially strong experience in carrying the message into correctional facilities.
- Availability for meetings of this trustees' committee held during General Service Board weekends (usually the last weekend in January, July and October), as well as one meeting during the General Service Conference in April.
- At least five years of continuous sobriety.
- The ability to work within the committee structure.

In seeking applications for all vacancies in Alcoholics Anonymous, the Fellowship is committed to creating a large file of qualified applicants that reflects the inclusiveness and diversity of A.A. itself.

For more information please call the Corrections desk at G.S.O. (212) 870-3085, or e-mail corrections@aa.org. Deadline for applications is Nov. 15, 2012.

■ P.I. Appointed Committee Member

The trustees' Committee on Public Information has an opening for an appointed committee member (ACM). We are searching for an appropriate individual to fill this position and would appreciate any recommendations.

Some of the qualities most desirable for this appointed committee member opening are:

- Experience in A.A. service.
- Experience/skill in helping to develop public information videos.
- Professional expertise in social media/networking communications. The new ACM is needed by the committee for planning and projects related to online communications.
- Availability for meetings of this trustees' committee held during General Service Board weekends (usually the last weekend in January, July and October), as well as one meeting during the General Service Conference in April.
- At least five years of continuous sobriety.
- The ability to work within the committee structure.

In seeking applications for all vacancies in Alcoholics Anonymous, the Fellowship is committed to creating a large applicant file of qualified persons which reflects the inclusiveness and diversity of A.A. itself.

To obtain a résumé form for this opening please call the P.I. desk at G.S.O. (212) 870-3119, or e-mail publicinfo@aa.org. Deadline for applications is Nov. 15, 2012.

■ 2013 Regional Forums

Regional Forums strengthen the Fellowship's Three Legacies of Recovery, Unity and Service by providing an opportunity for A.A. groups and area representatives, as well as any interested A.A. members in a particular region, to share experience, strength and hope with representatives of the General Service Board and G.S.O. and Grapevine staff members. There is no registration fee for Regional Forums; they are hosted by the General Service Board and coordinated by G.S.O.

These weekend sharing sessions enhance and widen communication, and help spark new ideas in better carrying the message through service work.

Mailings regarding each Regional Forum are sent to area committee members, delegates, D.C.M.'s, and central offices and intergroups approximately six months ahead of time. Online registration is also available at www.aa.org.

The final Regional Forum in 2012 is in the Southeast Region, November 9-11, at Marriot Boca Raton, Boca Raton, Florida. In 2013 Regional Forums are planned as follows:

- *Northeast*—June 7-8, Crowne Plaza Cromwell Hotel, Cromwell, Connecticut
- *Southeast (Additional)*—August 16-18, Charleston House Holiday Inn, Charleston, West Virginia
- *West Central*—September 6-8, Sheraton Bloomington Hotel, Bloomington, Minnesota
- *Southwest*—October 11-13, Biltmore Hotel Oklahoma, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
- *East Central*—November 15-17, Hilton Ft. Wayne/Grand Wayne Convention Center, Ft. Wayne, Indiana.

■ November Is Gratitude Month: A Time for ‘Thankful Giving’

“One looks in one’s mirror to powder, shave or admire. But the good A.A. is apt to look deeper. Every morning he gives thanks for a sober countenance, he asks forgiveness for lingering resentment, he hopes for Grace to live the coming day well. At nightfall he takes another look, saying, ‘Well, my Friend, how did we do today?’”

“Thus the A.A.’s mirror reflects not rouge, but gratitude; not conceit, but humility; not froth, but reality. It reflects a priceless experience.”

Published in the November 1950 Grapevine under the title “Through the A.A. Looking Glass,” these words from A.A. co-founder Bill W. bring into focus a sentiment that sits at the heart of the A.A. experience: Gratitude. Gratitude for another day of sobriety; gratitude for the opportunity to be of service.

It is an emotion most A.A.s experience at one time or another, perhaps, as Bill suggests, while looking in the mirror — or maybe while walking down the street, having dinner with the family, or opening the door into another A.A. meeting. Many have referred to gratitude as “the aristocrat of the emotions,” a phrase often attributed to Mark Twain, and repeated in countless A.A. meetings around the world.

It has also been said in A.A. that gratitude is an “action” word, expressed in the responsibility each member has to carry the A.A. message of hope to the next suffering alcoholic, to share what has been so freely given, and to ensure that A.A. will be there for the next generation should they need it. “Gratitude should go forward, rather than backward” said Bill W. in a 1959 letter. “In other words,” he added, “if you carry the message to still others, you will be making the best possible repayment for the help given to you.”

For many A.A.s, self-support throughout the Fellowship, in the spirit of Tradition Seven, offers a satisfying means of moving gratitude forward, and for many decades the month of November has informally been designated as a time for A.A.s to express their collective gratitude for their individual sobriety.

An October 1953 letter to all groups from “A.A. Headquarters,” as the General Service Office (G.S.O.) was referred to back then, carried this appeal: “With the season of Thanksgiving upon us [October in Canada and November in the U.S.], our thoughts turn to the special meaning that this period has for all of us in A.A. We count our blessings ’midst the most bountiful of harvests — the golden opportunity to live useful, productive lives.

“Our gratitude is expressed in many ways — in family relationships, in Twelfth Step work within the local group and in our willingness to reach out to the unseen, unknown alcoholic anywhere in the world who may at any moment turn to A.A. for help.

“From the earliest days, our experience and our recovery program have been offered freely to all who sought it. Our willingness to share has been the measure of our

gratitude for the great gifts of sobriety.”

The letter goes on to detail the work of “Headquarters,” noting, “It started many years ago when the fellowship was swamped with requests — for the Big Book, for information about the handful of groups then in existence, for literature about specific phases of the program and for answers to quantities of personal correspondence.

“As we grew in numbers,” the letter continued, “the needs and opportunities for help also increased.”

To handle continued growth and to increase its ability to carry the message through new and evolving channels of communication, A.A. has always relied on its members for the support — both emotional and financial — to keep A.A. services functioning throughout the Fellowship. “Self-support begins with me,” says a member in the Conference-approved pamphlet “Self-Support: Where Money and Spirituality Mix,” “because I am part of us — the group. We pay our rent and utility bills, buy coffee, snacks and A.A. literature. We support our central office, our area committee, and our General Service Office. If it were not for these entities, many new people would never discover the miracles of A.A.”

Like a three-legged stool, A.A. is built on the Legacies of Recovery, Unity and Service. Yet, as Bill W. noted in a 1950 letter, the recovery aspect, as represented by the Steps, and the unity aspect found in the Traditions, are often well understood throughout the Fellowship. The service part, however, does not always come through quite so clearly.

“Alcoholics Anonymous has three principal supports: The Twelve Steps keep us alive and happy, the Twelve Traditions hold us in unity, and our ‘Services’ make it possible for A.A. to operate and grow. Eliminate the Recovery Steps and we die, eliminate the Traditions and we disintegrate, eliminate our Services and we shall fall into confusion and fail to function. It’s just like that.

“The Steps and Traditions are clear as daylight. But not everybody understands what ‘Services’ are, nor what they mean to our growth and full effectiveness. Meeting places, hospital hook-ups, pamphlets, books, newspapers, Intergroup Offices, Group directories, wide correspondence, translations, good foreign service, successful public relations; all these things, and more, we must have. Without A.A.’s Services we’d often fumble that new man just coming in the door; without our Services we’d certainly spoil the main chance of those millions who don’t yet know. If then, A.A. Services are so truly valuable, it is our clear duty to see that they are all well managed and financed — whether at Group, Intergroup, or Alcoholic Foundation [now the General Service Board] levels.

“A.A. Services cost money, but not a lot of money. They aren’t big business, they are small business. Yet they are important business; they are the veritable life lines of Alcoholics Anonymous, binding us together in action and reaching out into all the world.”

However, money has always been a thorny topic in A.A.

and self-support a moving target, with costs and expenses shifting from year to year. According to Bill W., in a 1966 message to the Fellowship — one of the annual or semi-annual appeals he wrote over a span of years urging the Fellowship's broad support of the General Service Office and the functions it performs — “The major problem is communication — real communication with A.A. members.”

Explaining how services taking place at the group level are supported is more readily understood by most A.A.s because those members can see and feel the effect of a local meeting or the impact of a local Twelfth Step job, while, as the service gets further and further away from the individual A.A. member — at the Intergroup level, say, or the level of World Service — it is harder for the individual member to know what his or her support truly means. And so there are many groups that don't recognize the need for support of G.S.O. Said Bill, “Though our World Center has communicated the A.A. message to the wide world... we still lack enough communication to guarantee the finances that will underwrite our A.A. future.”

Through his letters to the Fellowship, Bill hoped to keep the lines of communication open, to keep bridging the gap between local A.A.s and a far away service office, and to indicate the need for individual and group contributions to keep A.A.'s worldwide efforts moving forward.

In this effort, Bill enjoyed the help of the General Service Conference which, in 1955, in the hopes of helping A.A. members throughout the Fellowship express their gratitude, approved a contributions vehicle called the Birthday Plan, under which some members of the Fellowship send a dollar a year to G.S.O. for each year of sobriety they have in A.A. Others use a figure of \$3.65, a penny a day, for each year. Some give more, though the amount cannot exceed \$3,000 for any given year. In 1970, as an extension of the Birthday Plan, the General Service Conference recommended that “area and state committees supplement regular group contributions by sponsoring a Gratitude Month.”

Over the years, Gratitude Month has provided a tangible focus for members — if they know about it, that is, as one A.A. from British Columbia shared in the Grapevine. “At our last business meeting, it was suggested that we try to revive Gratitude Month in this district. Most of us didn't even know about this custom. It was decided that all monies collected at the first two meetings in November would be sent to the General Service Office.”

Other members appreciate the regular opportunity to show their gratitude. “The enclosed check is from my own pocket, to help groups in correctional facilities like mine. Some of us are struggling to turn our lives around.” Another A.A. adds, “Enclosed is a check for Gratitude Month, because I want A.A. to be there for all those who need it, just as I did.”

“Now that we are sober in A.A.,” says one contributor to “Self-Support: Where Money and Spirituality Mix,” “the word ‘support’ has to do with sharing, people, self-respect, gratitude, and what we are privileged to give — not take — in material terms.”

Bill W. put it this way in a June 1948 Grapevine article on Tradition Seven: “When reflecting on these things, why should not each of us tell himself: ‘Yes, we A.A.s were once a burden on everybody. We were “takers.” Now that we are sober, and by the grace of God have become responsible citizens of the world, why shouldn't we now about-face and become “thankful givers”! Yes, it is high time we did!”

As expressed by Bill W. in the article “Through the A.A. Looking Glass,” for many an alcoholic, gratitude is indeed the reflection of “a priceless experience,” the life-saving experience of finding sobriety — an experience for many of us that came just in the nick of time.

■ ‘Bag Lady’ of the Bronx

When Hermina J. got sober in the Bronx (a borough of New York City) she found herself with very little to do. Without the constant effort involved in pursuit of the next drink, Hermina had plenty of time on her hands — time she knew she had to fill up.

So, she went to her sponsor and some of the other old-timers who were around back then. “Meetings, meetings, meetings,” they urged, to which they added for good measure, “Get active and carry the message.”

It didn't take long for Hermina to work these suggestions into her life and as her first sober holiday season rolled around, she became acquainted with the Holiday Tips published every year in *Box 4-5-9*. They made such practical sense and were so helpful, Hermina made it her personal service mission to make sure that everyone in the Bronx, especially newcomers, were aware of these important pointers for staying sober through the holidays — and the rest of the year, for that matter.

Armed with black and white photocopies of the Holiday Tips and other A.A. literature tucked into a paper bag, Hermina made her way from meeting to meeting, doling out information and literature at each stop.

Another A.A. member, who remembers seeing Hermina on her rounds, referred to her as the “A.A. Bag Lady” from the Bronx, delivering the Holiday Tips and other A.A. material like a newly sober Santa Claus.

Still sober and active in service over thirty years later, Hermina has a soft spot in her heart for those Holiday Tips. “Those were things I hadn't thought about. They were very practical and made sense to me. Simple as they are, I've met many people along the way who thought they were okay and then went to a holiday party and ‘accidentally’ picked up a drink.

“So, when you get that information about staying sober through the holidays, you'll most likely keep it in your head or pass it on, because alcoholism doesn't take a vacation. There is no cure here and what we need is a psychic change — not only about our drinking, but also in our thinking.”

■ ‘Stepping Into the Future’: Two Longtime G.S.O. Employees to Retire

After many years of service to G.S.O. and to the Fellowship, two longtime G.S.O. employees will be retiring before the end of the year. Warren S., currently secretary to the trustees’ Nominating Committee, has been a G.S.O. staff member since 1997; Valerie O. came to G.S.O. as a staff member in 1990 and has served the last two and a half years as publications director.

While both of these A.A. members have been through numerous staff rotations, retirement provides a very different experience, offering, among other things, more time for family: Valerie with her daughter and grandchildren and Warren with his stepson Joshua, daughter Victoria, and wife, Mardia.

Introduced to G.S.O. in 1992 as an appointed committee member on the trustees’ Correctional Facilities Committee, Warren has served on eight different staff assignments at G.S.O. Sober since 1984, his first assignment was the Correctional Facilities desk, an assignment for which he was well qualified, having landed in a few correctional facilities himself during his drinking. “I tangled with the law, landed in prison, and began serving time on the installment plan,” he says of his years before finding A.A. “You might say I gave the revolving door a few quick turns.”

Once sobriety took hold, however, Warren got himself a B.A. degree, a job working in New York City’s Human Services Department and, ultimately, a master’s degree in social work before coming to G.S.O. “For a drunk like me, working at the General Service Office is the best job anybody could ever think of,” says Warren, adding with a grin that the view alone was a big improvement — “from bars on the windows to windows on the Hudson.”

Outside his work at G.S.O., as an individual A.A. member, Warren has been taking A.A. meetings into the Bedford Hills Maximum Security Prison for Women for over 20 years. “I can relate personally to the overwhelming fear and despair that alcoholic inmates feel,” says Warren. “By sharing what happened to me, I hope I can help even a few sick alcoholics to trust in the fact that A.A. opens the door to them, to a life that can be well-lived.”

Along with his participation at A.A. events around the world and serving as Conference and Regional Forums coordinator, one of the highlights of Warren’s time at G.S.O. may well have been the time spent as coordinator of the 21st World Service Meeting held in Mexico City, Mexico in October of 2010. The gathering featured fifty-three delegates from 32 countries, with Portugal and Estonia attending for the first time. “Seeing that many A.A.s and friends of A.A. together in one place, speaking different languages and having different experiences of A.A. in their own countries, yet all coming together over our basic principles is a powerful experience,” says Warren, “one that makes you

feel good about being in A.A.”

Retiring due to health concerns, Warren’s time at G.S.O. will come to an end on November 1, though his impact on the Fellowship will continue to reverberate for many years to come.

A transplanted Canadian, Valerie O. joined the G.S.O. staff in 1990. Born and raised in Toronto, Ontario, and sober since 1982, the Correctional Facilities desk was also her first assignment. “There’s so much to learn, so much to do,” said Valerie at the time of her hiring, “and when I walk into the reception area and see A.A. members from all over coming to visit or pick up literature for their groups, it’s a constant reminder of the healing power of service.”

More familiar now than ever with that healing power, when asked what were some of the greatest challenges — and joys—that she experienced in her 22 years at G.S.O., she observes that they were actually one and the same.

“Some of the greatest challenges and the greatest joys are the same. You know, working through a group conscience process,” she explains. “It’s actually like catching a wave. It’s that powerful. And it’s a unique experience to be doing it where business and spiritual principles meet.

“Like anybody who serves a group at whatever level, you have the opportunity to observe the basic principles of A.A. in action.”

One experience Valerie cites as a highlight of her tenure was acting as the coordinator for the 2000 International Convention in Minneapolis. “To be responsible for the safety and welfare of 40,000+ and their families was no small challenge. As we repeated the Responsibility Declaration together on Sunday morning in the stadium, I was overwhelmed by the realization that this incredible opportunity was now part of my G.S.O. history.”

As publications director, Valerie looked after a publications department responsible for distributing over one million Big Books and more than three million pamphlets a year, handling multiple translations and dealing with licensing agreements in some 47 different countries, among other things. Calling on her service experience and professional background in feature film production, Valerie was able to see and influence the process by which A.A. material gets developed in emerging A.A. communities, from the establishment of a need for a certain piece of A.A. literature within that community through the development and checking of translations, and ultimately to publication and distribution. “When a piece of literature is finally produced, the people in that A.A. community can really say ‘We did that.’”

On a personal level, Valerie has gained patience with the A.A. process and come to a greater faith in the Fellowship’s ability to “self-correct” — “To watch,” she says, “as A.A. stumbles into the future and to know that it will continue to work, because it has to.”

Leaving at the end of 2012, Valerie greatly appreciates her many years at G.S.O. and looks forward to the quietude that retirement will bring. “I’m ready,” she says. “I have no regrets.”

■ Eastern Canada's First Service Assembly

A Canadian "First" will happen in Area 87, February 22-24, 2013, when the Canadian Eastern Regional Alcoholics Anonymous Service Assembly meets. The Service Assembly is sponsored by the ten areas of the Eastern Canada Region, covering New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador, Ontario and Quebec.

It is a unique opportunity to meet with fellow A.A.s from all over Eastern Canada. The purpose of CERAASA is to develop greater unity among the members, groups and areas of the Eastern Canada Region, to encourage the exchange of ideas and experience, and to provide an opportunity for members to discuss pertinent aspects of A.A. The assembly tries to foster our Legacies of Recovery, Unity and Service. More specifically, the objective is for G.S.R.s, D.C.M.s, Area Committee members and A.A. members at large to discuss General Service Conference related issues and concerns affecting A.A. as a whole, as well as aspects of our Legacies common to the ten areas of the Eastern Canada Region.

Want to know more? Please visit the Web site at ceraasa.org

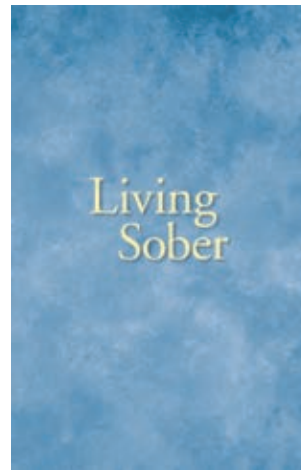
■ 22nd World Service Meeting

The 22nd World Service Meeting (WSM) met October 21-25 in Rye Brook, New York. Sixty-one delegates attended from 32 countries, as well as A.A. entities, such as Flemish-speaking Belgium, Northern and Southern Zones of South America and German-speaking and French-speaking Europe.

Since its beginnings in 1969 the WSM has served as a forum for the worldwide sharing of experience and ideas on ways to carry the A.A. message of recovery. The event alternates biennially between New York and other locations around the globe, and has convened in such diverse cities as Mexico City; Auckland, New Zealand; Cartagena, Colombia; Malahide, Ireland; and Helsinki, Finland.

The theme for the 2012 WSM was "Rotation: The Heartbeat of A.A.," and discussion topics included: Social Networking/Web sites and Anonymity; Working With Others in Law Enforcement; A.A. Literature Online; and A.A. Literature Translations. Mary Clare L., G.S.O. staff member on the International desk, was the coordinator of this event.

The WSM's success in bringing together A.A. worldwide service centers for biennial meetings during the past four decades reflects a final vision of A.A. co-founder Bill W., who believed there could be "one world of A.A." to assure that help will always be available for sick alcoholics, wherever they are or whatever language they speak.



The revision of the Living Sober booklet, approved by the 2012 General Service Conference, preserves the simple, almost folksy, examples of how A.A. members throughout the world live and stay sober one day at a time, while changing some of the out-dated terms and usage, and adding in some terms and usage (e.g. e-mail, online meetings) that have joined the language since the booklet was originally

published. In addition, the Twelve Steps have been added and referenced materials that have themselves been revised (the Appendix from "The A.A. Member: Medications and Other Drugs" were revised in the booklet).

■ 'About Those A.A. Group Problems'

Just past the middle of "The A.A. Group" pamphlet, at the end of a section titled "Principles Before Personalities," the A.A. member or group can find a few short paragraphs subtitled *About Those A.A. Group Problems*. That section, on pages 30 and 31, begins with what more than one A.A. member has found—at first glance—to be a somewhat strange statement. "Group problems are often evidence of a healthy, desirable diversity of opinion among the group members."

So group problems can be healthy and desirable? How can that be? That section goes on to share that "They give us a chance, in the words of Step Twelve, to 'practice these principles in all our affairs.'"

We also read that "Group problems may include such common A.A. questions as: What should the group do about members who return to drinking? How can we boost lagging attendance at meetings? How can we get more people to help with group chores? What can we do about one member's anonymity break, or another's attempts to attract the romantic interest of newcomers? How can we get out from under those old-timers who insist they know what's best for the group? And how can we get more of the old-timers to share their experience in resolving group dilemmas?"

"Almost every group problem can be solved through the process of an informed group conscience, A.A. principles, and our Twelve Traditions. Some groups find that their G.S.R. or D.C.M. can be helpful. For all involved, a good sense of humor, cooling-off periods, patience, courtesy, willingness to listen and to wait—plus a sense of fairness and trust in a 'Power greater than ourselves'—have

been found far more effective than legalistic arguments or personal accusations.”

Informed Group Conscience vs. Business Meeting

So if “almost every group problem can be solved through the process of an informed group conscience,” what exactly is that process and how does it differ from a business meeting? Perhaps not surprisingly, the same section on “Principles Before Personalities” in “The A.A. Group” includes subsections on *What is an Informed A.A. Group Conscience?* (pages 28-29) and *A.A. Business Meetings* (page 30), separated by another subsection on suggested questions for an *A.A. Group Inventory*.

Experience shared in the pamphlet and with the General Service Office through correspondence suggests that group practices vary widely. Some groups consider a business meeting and a group conscience meeting to be the same thing. Other groups hold business meetings for everyday group matters such as: rotation of trusted servants; budgets for group expenses such as rent, literature and coffee supplies; allocation of group funds to help carry the A.A. message in other A.A. entities (Intergroup, G.S.O.), etc. These everyday matters may be voted on using a simple majority vote to voice a yes or no decision.

A group conscience meeting may be chosen instead of a business meeting for whatever issues may face the group that may not easily be determined by the simple majority method. Examples of this may be: whether the group goes from an open to a closed meeting; changing the way that the group closes the meeting; or taking a scheduled group inventory.

The difficulty in separating the two approaches may be demonstrated in the pamphlet itself, which has a process for a ‘group conscience’ embedded right in the middle of the section on the business meetings.

Correspondence With G.S.O. About Group Problems

Once in a while an A.A. group reaches out to the General Service Office staff for some shared experience in order to resolve a group problem. Some of the issues at hand may have their roots in the history of A.A., and some arise out of current culture and technology.

An example of a question that has been asked frequently over time, and has resulted in a very thick folder of “shared experience” correspondence is the difference between “open” and “closed” A.A. meetings. Some A.A. members have shared their belief that an “open” A.A. meeting meant that anyone who showed up could speak about anything that came to mind, including problems with drugs and other addictions, and “closed” meetings were about recovery from alcoholism. When asked to respond, G.S.O. staff members will guide correspondents to the section of “The A.A. Group” pamphlet on page 13 that says: “*Closed meetings* are for A.A. members only, or

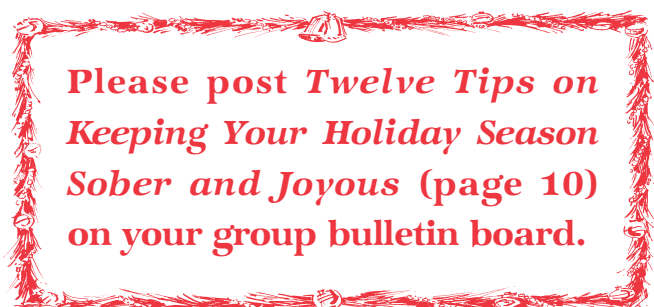
for those who have a drinking problem and ‘have a desire to stop drinking.’ *Open meetings* are available to anyone interested in Alcoholics Anonymous’ program of recovery from alcoholism. Nonalcoholics may attend open meetings as observers.

“At both types of meetings, the A.A. chairperson may request that participants confine their discussion to matters pertaining to recovery from alcoholism. Whether open or closed, A.A. group meetings are conducted by A.A. members who determine the format of their meetings.”

Liability insurance and additional challenges to opening group bank accounts are often new issues for groups, as they involve the often evolving relationship between the A.A. group and outside entities, such as their landlord and the local banking establishment. When these group problems may need additional shared experience from G.S.O. resources, the correspondent may be guided to the A.A. Guidelines on Finance. This service piece can be found on G.S.O.’s A.A. Web site and printed for use by all group members in a group conscience or business meeting.

In addition to shared experience on questions such as “How do we obtain a tax number for our group checking account?” and “Our landlord has asked us to provide our own liability insurance. Can G.S.O. help?,” the A.A. Guidelines on Finance contains typical responses to other group problems such as “Our treasurer just ran off with the money. What should we do?” Since A.A. Guidelines are service material, which can be added to when there is widespread sharing on some new aspect of group life, the contents of the Guidelines are a good reference for group problems of all sorts.

One common question that has been coming to G.S.O. for some years now, that has no wealth of collected experience from the Fellowship itself, is the issue of members needing to bring service dogs to A.A. meetings. Unlike guide dogs for the blind, which has been a commonly experienced sight for many of us in our lives, service dogs are less well understood. Service dogs help A.A. members with a wide variety of challenges, such as veterans with post traumatic stress disorder, and others with seizure disorders, hearing impairments, and diabetes, to name just a few. Calls and e-mails to staff members in the office indicate that there can be very lively “diversity of opinion” in A.A. groups about this question, which can involve allergies of other members in the group, etc. Any shared experience from groups who have struggled with and then



resolved this group problem would be welcome and can be sent to specialneeds@aa.org.

Love and Tolerance

Returning to the idea that one way to resolve group problems is “a good sense of humor, cooling-off periods, patience, courtesy, willingness to listen and to wait—plus a sense of fairness and trust in a ‘Power greater than ourselves,’” James S., a Manhattan A.A. member with over 30 years of sobriety, shares the following personal experiences:

“I’m amazed we’ve made it this long, I was at my home group last week,” he says, “and I looked around the room during the meeting. One guy was reading a newspaper in the back row. Two people were giggling and whispering back and forth during the speaker’s talk. A girl in the front row was busy tweeting or texting on her phone. A guy in the middle of the room was slurping soda through a straw and shaking the ice in the bottom of his cup. There was a lady with a small dog in her lap that would growl every so often at the person in the next seat.

“I was starting to feel that righteous indignation welling up inside of me that is almost always the precursor to a furious, power-driven diatribe, either real or taking place only in my mind, until I remembered the line from the Big Book (the chapter ‘Into Action’): ‘Love and tolerance of others is our code.’

“This calmed me down just long enough to see the guy in the back row peek out from behind his newspaper every so often to take in a particular point in the speaker’s story; to see the whisperers stop whispering and start listening to the meeting; to see the girl in the front row finally close her phone and return it to her pocket; to understand that sooner or later the ice would melt in the slurper’s cup; and to realize,

if nothing else, that the dog hadn’t bitten anybody — yet.”

Scenes like this are played out in groups across the U.S. and Canada on a nightly basis. Sometimes the concerns are more substantive and relate to the length or content of a person’s sharing, the use of crosstalk or profanity at meetings, members talking excessively about drug use, or other similar issues that people can find upsetting.

Yet, somehow A.A. has been able to transcend these kinds of difficulties over the years, with the recognition that “We alcoholics see that we must work together and hang together, else most of us will finally die alone,” as Bill W. notes in the introduction to the long form of the Traditions in the Big Book. We need each other, as the saying goes, “warts and all,” and A.A. unity ultimately trumps the peccadilloes that individual members bring to meetings.

It’s not a new problem, by any means, as Bill W. described the state of things within A.A. meetings circa 1946 with this description: “Moochers mooched, lonely hearts pined, committees quarreled, new clubs had unheard of headaches, orators held forth, groups split wide open, members turned professional, sometimes whole groups got drunk, and local public relations went haywire.” We alcoholics, it seems, can test the patience of just about anybody.

“I realize,” says James, “that I can’t compel the guy in the back row to put the newspaper down or legislate against the use of cell phones in meetings. But I can keep the focus on why I’m at the meeting in the first place. Trying to control people’s behavior has never worked well in A.A. and I don’t need to be a meeting monitor. I just need to follow the code. As noted in Tradition Nine, ‘Great suffering and great love are our only disciplinarians; we need no others.’”



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■ New from Grapevine



This collection of Grapevine stories shows the many ways members work the program of A.A. Written by men and women, young and old, with different lengths of sobriety, the articles in this book highlight how members practice the Twelve Steps, use our literature and slogans, and get into service, sponsorship and fellowship.

Soft cover GV28; \$10.99; e-book \$9.99.

Available for Kindle, Nook and Apple.

■ The Corrections Correspondence Service

Dear G.S.O.,

I am pleased to inform you that I have made contact with an outside A.A. volunteer. Thank you very much; I am most grateful for everything your agency has done for me. I am deeply honored to be connected with another alcoholic like myself.

For once in my life I have hope for my future. They say that we learn from our experience and I believe I've learned from mine. I really don't want to be a drunk anymore.

It's great to know that A.A. cares enough to implement the Corrections Correspondence Service (CCS), which allows us alcoholics, no matter where we are to come together as one.

Once again, thank you so much for all your help. I am grateful to A.A., and I can hardly wait to attend meetings in the free world upon my release. "One day at a time."

Sincerely yours,
Inmate

G.S.O. receives many letters of gratitude from A.A. members in correctional facilities after we find them a direct link to an "outside" member to share their experience, strength and hope. However, we often run short on available male A.A. members on the "outside" to correspond with the daily influx of requests from male inmates; they can wait weeks.

Please consider participating in this vital Twelfth Step service, especially if you are male. All A.A. members can assist by raising awareness of this opportunity for one-on-one service work. We also need Spanish-speaking male correspondents. Most correspondents use their home address, some use a P.O. Box, and others receive permission to use the group, area, or Intergroup P.O. Box.

G.S.O. Does Not Forward Mail. We link correspondents in the order received. To sign up for this service, download the Corrections Correspondence Service form online at aa.org or contact the Corrections desk at: G.S.O., P.O. Box 459, New York, NY 10163; corrections@aa.org or 212-870-3400.

■ Did You Ever Wonder...?

We are often asked "What is the difference between 'defects of character' in Step Six and 'shortcomings' in Step Seven?"

According to G.S.O.'s archives Bill W. commented about his use of "Defects of Character" and "Shortcomings" interchangeably in the Steps in a personal letter he wrote dated March 7, 1963.

Thanks for your inquiry, requesting to know the difference between 'defects of character' and 'shortcomings' — as those words appear in the Steps. Actually I don't remember any particular significance in these phrases. In my mind, the meaning is identical; I guess I just used two ways of expression, rather than to repeat myself. It's just as simple as that.

In another letter, dated November 16, 1965, Bill again responded to a similar inquiry. His letter read, in part:

When these Steps were being done, I didn't want to repeat the phrase 'character defects' twice in succession. Therefore in Step Seven, I substituted 'shortcomings', thereby equating 'shortcomings' with 'defects.'

When reading most people do equate that way and there seems to be no difficulty. I used them as though they both meant exactly the same thing — which they appear to many people.

I guess it's a problem in semantics, all right. For example, it is possible to say that each time you fall short of an ideal, to that extent is your character defective. Looking at it in the other way, 'shortcomings' can be read as a mere failure to do what should have been done. So I guess you have to take your pick.

Twelve Tips on Keeping Your Holiday Season Sober and Joyous

Holiday parties without liquid spirits may still seem a dreary prospect to new A.A.s. But many of us have enjoyed the happiest holidays of our lives sober—an idea we would never have dreamed of, wanted, or believed possible when drinking. Here are some tips for having an all-round ball without a drop of alcohol.

1



Line up extra A.A. activities for the holiday season. Arrange to take newcomers to meetings, answer the phones at a clubhouse or central office, speak, help with dishes, or visit the alcoholic ward at a hospital.

2



Be host to A.A. friends, especially newcomers. If you don't have a place where you can throw a formal party, take one person to a diner and spring for the coffee.

3



Keep your A.A. telephone list with you all the time. If a drinking urge or panic comes—postpone everything else until you've called an A.A.

4



Find out about the special holiday parties, meetings, or other celebrations

given by groups in your area, and go. If you're timid, take someone newer than you are.

5



Skip any drinking occasion you are nervous about. Remember how clever you were at excuses when drinking? Now put the talent to good use. No office party is as important as saving your life.

6



If you have to go to a drinking party and can't take an A.A. with you, keep some candy handy.

7



Don't think you have to stay late. Plan in advance an "important date" you have to keep.

8



Worship in your own way.

9



Don't sit around brooding. Catch up on those books, museums, walks, and letters.

10



Don't start now getting worked up about all those holiday temptations. Remember—"one day at a time."

11



Enjoy the true beauty of holiday love and joy. Maybe you cannot give material gifts—but this year, you can give love.

12



"Having had a . . ." No need to spell out the Twelfth Step here, since you already know it.

Calendar of Events

Events listed here are presented solely as a service to readers, not as an endorsement by the General Service Office. For any additional information, please use the addresses provided.

January

11-13—*Dodge City, Kansas*. 43rd SW Kansas Conf. Write: Ch., 2011 Campus Dr., Garden City, KS 67846

11-13—*Mahnomen, Minnesota*. 11th Wild Rice Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 203, Mahnomen, MN 56557; www.wildriceroundup.com

17-20—*Raleigh, North Carolina*. 46th Tar Heel Mid-Winter Conf. Write: Ch., Box 18412, Raleigh, NC 27619-8412; nconference@nc.rr.com

17-20—*Midland, Texas*. 43rd Mid-Winter Conf. Write: Ch., Box 2504, Midland, TX 79701; www.midwinterconference.net

18-20—*Annapolis, Maryland*. 2nd Annapolis Area Intergroup Conv. Write: Ch., Box 6186, Annapolis, MD 21402; www.annapolisareaintergroup.org

25-27—*Fresno, California*. 66th NCCAA Conf. Write: Ch., 2812 N. Blackstone Ave., Fresno, CA 93707; www.fresnoaa.org

25-27—*Springfield, Illinois*. The Journey Continues. Write: Ch., Box 10244, Springfield, IL 62791

25-27—*Hilton Head Island, South Carolina*. Hilton Head Mid-Winter Conf. Write: Ch., Box 6256, Hilton Head Island, SC 29938; www.hiltonheadmidwinterconference.com

25-27—*Tyler, Texas*. XXIX Reunión Zona Note de TX. Inf: Com. Org., Box 6182, Tyler, TX 75711

February

1-3—*San Antonio, Texas*. SWTA 68 Correctional Facilities Conf. Write: Ch., Box 33866, San Antonio, TX 78265; www.cfc@aa-swta.org

8-10—*North Little Rock, Arkansas*. 31st Winter Holiday Conv. Write: Ch., Box 26135, Little Rock, AR 72221-6135; winterholiday@live.com

15-17—*Lexington, Kentucky*. KY State Conv. Write: Ch., Box 22103, Lexington, KY 40522; www.kystateconvention.com

15-17—*Virginia Beach, Virginia*. 37th Oceanfront Conf. Write: Ch., Box 66173, Virginia Beach, VA 23466-6173

22-24—*Gulf Shores, Alabama*. Jubilee Conv. Write: Ch., 21920 Mahan Dr., Robertsdale, AL 36567; jubconv2013@yahoo.com

22-24—*Lancaster, Pennsylvania*. NERAASA. Write: Ch., Box 303, Langhorne, PA 19047; www.neraasa2013.org

22-24—*Montreal, Québec, Canada*. Canadian Eastern Reg. Svc Assembly. Write: Ch., 3920 Rachel St., Montreal, QC H1X 1Z3; www.ceraasa.org

March

1-3—*Trujillo, Peru*. V Conv. Nacional. Inf.: Com. Org., 627 Palermo, Trujillo; convencioaa2013@hotmail.com

8-10—*Houston, Texas*. 50th Houston Intergroup Assoc. Conv. Write: Ch., 4140 Directors Row, Ste D & E, Houston, TX 77092; www.aa.houston.org

8-10—*Houston, Texas*. 1^{er} Foro Estatal Hispano de TX. Inf.: Com. Org., 48—W. 34th St., Ste C-5, Houston, TX 77092

22-24—*Ames, Iowa*. Aim for Ames. Write: Ch., Box 2522, Ames, IA 50010

22-24—*Cherry Hill, New Jersey*. 49th Area 45 Gen. Svc. Conv. Write: Ch., Box 686, Mt. Laurel, NJ 08054-9998; www.snjaaconvention.org

28-30—*Managua, Nicaragua*. V Convención Nacional. Inf: aaosgdenicaragua@hotmail.com

28-30—*Masaya, Nicaragua*. Décimo Encuentro Centro Americano de Oficinas Centrales é Intergrupos. Inf: comitepasodoce@hotmail.com

April 2013

5-7—*Lafayette, Louisiana*. Seventh Fellowship of the Spirit South. Write: Ch., Box 53312, Lafayette, LA 70505; www.fotssouth.com

5-7—*Ripley, West Virginia*. Area 73 Spring Assembly. Write: Ch., 24 Spring St., Morgantown, WV 26501; www.aawv.org

12-14—*Cape May, New Jersey*. SE PA Intergroup Assoc. Roundup. Write: Ch., 444 N. 3rd St., Box A-2, Philadelphia, PA 19123; www.sepennaa.org

Planning a Future Event?

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

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

Date of event: from _____ to _____, 20____

Name of event: _____

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