

**FINAL REPORT  
EAST CENTRAL “ADDITIONAL”  
REGIONAL FORUM  
AUGUST 10-12, 2012  
MT. VERNON, IL**

Dear A.A. Friends,

Please mark your calendar for the next East Central Regional Forum, which will take place in Fort Wayne, Indiana at the Hilton Ft. Wayne/Grand Wayne Convention Center the weekend of November 15-17, 2013.

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

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## INTRODUCTION

The 2012 East Central “Additional” Regional Forum was held in Mt. Vernon, IL. Registration for this Forum topped at 233. This included 117 members attending their very first Forum—several who were welcomed at the Forum Orientation on Friday evening. Sunday morning included a session for first-time forum attendees, followed by sharing from past trustees.

## WORKSHOP REPORTS

### **Carrying the A.A. Message in Rural Communities (Moderator: Dean S./Reporter: Carl M.)**

*How do we carry the A.A. message to rural communities?* By riding together to meetings; taking road trips to other meetings; and making it easier for members to ask for rides. One member reported that he/she would drive 20 miles to a keg party so they could drive 20 miles to a meeting. Sponsorship and forming a close Fellowship outside of meetings; older members getting newer members into Fellowship and service; giving a meeting list with our names and phone numbers to police stations and churches; cooperate with neighboring districts and D.C.M. visiting groups; speaker exchange, A.A. newsletter; rotate district meeting; invite members onto Facebook or on-line meetings; read *A Vision for You* in the Big Book; what are you willing to do to *Carry the A.A. message*? Address the challenge of anonymity and illiteracy; invite outlying groups to potlucks and picnics; and have a message with a positive attitude.

### **The Grapevine/La Viña Representation: A Wonderful Service Opportunity (Moderator: Jeanne F./Reporter: Nancy H.)**

*What are ways to create awareness of the Grapevine?* Give newcomers the Grapevine; carry Grapevines and Big Books in the trunk of our cars to hand out to newcomers; collect old Grapevines to reuse in 12<sup>th</sup> Step work; order packs of back issues with other groups and districts to obtain a discount (be sure to remove any subscription card inserts as they may be obsolete information); give Grapevine subscriptions as an incentive door prize; group subscribe to the Grapevine and once a month give to the newest person at the meeting; wear purple; collect donations with a “Purple Can” and when get enough for a subscription give it to the group member having a 1-year anniversary or raffle it off; create oversized copies of covers to display and banners with aa-grapevine-inc engraved; design a Grapevine website for people to play with on their laptops; and give a Grapevine report. *How to get Grapevine Representatives?* Sponsors can appoint sponsee to this new job; and it’s a good job for newcomers.

### **Tradition One: Our Common Welfare (Moderator: Marty L./Reporter: Mary Jo R.)**

*What are the challenges and problems that result from lack of adherence to the Principles of Primary Purpose and Group Conscience?* We can do together what we can’t do alone; being “all things” to “all people” is a disservice to them, to A.A. and to the Fellowship that could help them; it is our responsibility to study and pass on the Traditions (sponsorship); be prepared to speak-up as silence can be the voice of complacency and being responsible often times feels uncomfortable; complacency can result in the breakdown of a group; it is very important to put the group’s welfare first; causing conflicts wrecks it for newcomers; unity provides stability; stability enables long-term sobriety which attracts newcomers; consistent verbiage in our literature is important; concern that “signing attendance cards” introduces A.A. as a

punishment; changes to a group format should not be a whim but the result of an informed group conscience; and the minority voice should always be heard.

**The Home Group—The Heartbeat of A.A. (Moderator: Warren J./Reporter: Richard I.)** *Why do we need a homegroup?* We need a homegroup so we are accountable to a group to attend a regular meeting schedule on the same day and time; we have responsibility to the group and members; we need structure with rules; the group is more important than anyone member; and we need a homegroup because we cannot do it on our own. *How does a home group function?* We have connection tolerance with members who attend; we elect members in service positions so we work together; we are comforting without judging making newcomers feel comfortable; we have the option to change our homegroup if needed taking a group conscience; the group conscience is an important part of a homegroup.

**Sponsorship—Passing It On (Moderator: Gary B./Reporter: Kenny B.)** *How do you choose a sponsor?* I picked someone I wanted to be like; my sponsor spoke to the program and walked it; I picked my first sponsor because she seemed happy and knew how to laugh; I admired my sponsor and his way of life; sponsorship saved my life; my first sponsor picked me; I want to be just like my sponsor when I grow up; my sponsor is always there when I need him; and sponsorship is a God thing. I never told anyone I wouldn't sponsor them; I feel like I need to have a sponsor to be a sponsor; any sponsor is better than none; age may have something to do with it; and the quality I like in a sponsor is that they go to meetings that I attend. *Is there a time to let a sponsee go?* My job is to make sure my sponsee does not go back and drink again; it is difficult to let them go because my sponsor didn't give up on me; you can learn from a sponsee; be patient; go beyond the call of duty; try not to be rigid; we are not drill instructors; help a sponsee find someone to work within your homegroup; and my sponsor said to get inside the circle. However, some people are not sincere as I was; when they stop calling I stop calling them; don't put more effort into recovery than the sponsee.

**A.A. Grapevine—Today! (Moderator: Albin Z./Reporter: Laurie B.)** *Do we continue with the print version of the Grapevine?* The print version can be held, traveled with and shared; it can be used in other committees such as corrections and other institutions where electronic options are not available; the print version can be used as a sponsor-sponsee tool; there is a need to convey this feeling of ownership to the Fellowship at large; other publications may distract from the purchase; the current vocabulary is more understandable; and the magazine looks better than ever. The challenge is to increase subscriptions and thus support the Grapevine; we don't want to see the print version disappearing. The ability to share the print magazine and to win it is an important piece of our mutual recovery.

**Tradition Five: Out Primary Purpose (Moderator: Art M./Reporter: Becky S.)** *How do we deal with other issues other than alcohol (e.g., drugs, gambling, etc)?* We all suffer from the same thing; we use sponsors to full extent; we seek outside help when needed; we focus on our Primary Purpose; we help each other without singling one person out; we use our Higher Power. *What is our Singleness of Purpose?* Each group becoming a spiritual entity, building a new life using the Primary Purpose.

**Rotation in A.A.: Principles before Personalities (Moderator: Rich H. /Reporter: Kelly L.)** *What do we do when no one is willing to stand for an open position after rotation? Let them serve again?* A lot depends on the availability of A.A. members; if there isn't anyone available

then the same person should hold the position again; if there are enough members then they should rotate every two years; the two year rotation is to protect the members from becoming power driven; rotation is good for new faces and new ideas; it is called the Spirit of Rotation; at the group level the position should remain open but at the district area level it is different; leave the position open so someone will be able to stand later. *What does your service structure do to prepare for group rotation?* It is the chair's responsibility to train a replacement; sponsor people into the position; remind members prior to the election; have the group take an inventory; start cleaning house in the group; have an assembly that prepares members for election workshops; hold service workshops; and stress the spiritual entity.

**A.A. in Prison—Carrying the Message behind the Walls (Moderator: Fred C. /Reporter: Dennis H.)** *How can we communicate to corrections volunteers on how to conduct themselves when, carrying a meeting inside a correctional facility?* We must remind them that they are guests and that they must follow the facility rules; using corrections manual and literature; through seminars and workshops; use area newsletter to communicate with volunteers. *How do you get involved as a corrections volunteer if you don't have a correctional facility in your district/area?* Communicate with the area corrections committee to find where meetings are going to be carried in facilities; get involved in corrections correspondence through G.S.O.; get involved in corrections pre-release through area corrections committees; and get facility contact information to inquire if a meeting is possible and desired.

**The General Service Representative (G.S.R.): Linking the Group with A.A. as a Whole (Moderator: David C./Reporter: Chuck C.)** *How to increase participation and G.S.R. responsibility?* Get a service sponsor to help you learn; sponsor people into service; service buys sober time; share Box 4-5-9 and other service information sources; more education and participation at district and area levels; ask district committee members to visit groups with packets explaining service; invite G.S.R.s to district dinners to relight dark districts; hold G.S.R. school introducing new G.S.R.s to their duties; explain what G.S.O. does for A.A. as a whole and group; stress the importance of the vote and voice of the G.S.R.; explain about A.A.; teach the jargon; keep your report short (2 min max); be a conduit of information; and lead with enthusiasm.

## PRESENTATIONS

**Spiritual Anonymity:** Rich H., Delegate Panel 62, Area 20 Northern Illinois

My name is Rich, and I am an alcoholic. When Julio contacted me about this discussion panel, the topic of "Spiritual Anonymity" immediately came to mind. Though I have not found anything on this specific topic in our literature, there are some great examples scattered throughout. The only people I have really talked to about it have been my sponsor, guys that I sponsor, and close friends. I have found it best to try to be an example of what I believe. Before I start to talk on this topic, let me give you some examples of what it is *not*.

"I am the Chairperson of this committee, and this is how we are going to do it." "I have been coming to this group longer than any of you and I know what is best." "That big party we did last week? That was my idea." Funny behavior, yes, but I am sure we all can put a familiar face to some of these examples.

When I talk about the topic of "Spiritual Anonymity," I'm talking about the ability to be nameless and faceless in the work we do here in Alcoholics Anonymous. To have the immediate desire to give of myself whenever possible, without any thought of me. Doing the work we are supposed to be doing, without having any thoughts, expectations, or desires of recognition. Caring more about what we are doing and less about attaching our names to it.

For the current delegates in the room who were at the 62<sup>nd</sup> General Service Conference, and for those of you whose names we don't yet know, who will be joining us at the 63<sup>rd</sup> General Service Conference: How can we best do the work of guaranteeing the future of Alcoholics Anonymous, if our primary concerns are of how we will appear to others or making sure our names are said and our voices are heard? This can be a very difficult task for people like us, especially when we know that we have acquired certain knowledge along the way to get here.

The short form of Tradition Twelve reads: "Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities." This tells me that anonymity and spirituality can and should be found in all of our traditions.

Here are a few simple examples:

Tradition One: Do I really believe I am just a small part of a great whole within my group? Or do I believe that only my beliefs must be heard? The health of the group being of the utmost importance, we must all work together, without any personal motivations. The group will better function when there is no individual ownership. There can be no individual desires. Our thoughts must always concern everyone.

Tradition Two: Do I think that our group conscience is a debate that I must win, or do I express the facts that I know, and let God be the ultimate authority? In our group discussion, we should kindly give our views on the topic at hand, and listen to the thoughts of others. Raising our hand, in representation of our beliefs, without concern of how others cast their vote.

Tradition Seven: Do I make a big deal to make sure others know that I am putting in or how much I am putting into the basket? Or is this my own anonymous spiritual connection to my group and to Alcoholics Anonymous? I can say that I have gotten very mechanical with my

contribution to the basket. I now take a moment to consider what my contribution means to the still-suffering as my hand touches the basket.

Tradition Nine; Rotation is one of our greatest spiritual principles. Silently moving from my past position, giving the next person the same opportunity to have his or her own experience, just as I had. And while we hold our positions, making sure that we are giving our complete attention, and setting aside any desires for future positions.

The long form of Tradition Twelve reads, and I now believe we should always refer to the long form, “And finally, we of Alcoholics Anonymous believe that the principle of anonymity has an immense spiritual significance. It reminds us that we are to place principles before personalities; that we are actually to practice a genuine humility. This to the end that our great blessings may never spoil us; that we shall forever live in thankful contemplation of Him who presides over us all.” This tells me me that without humility there can be no true anonymity, and without anonymity there can be no true humility. Therefore, without anonymity and humility we cannot act with true responsibility to Alcoholics Anonymous. Anything that I have within me today has been given to me because of the time others have given to me. I must always have the desire to give that time to someone who needs it.

I don't want to really get into social networking and personal Web sites because I believe someone else will be covering this. But, what about those of us who insist that we must post a daily quote from our literature, or put our daily personal thought of so-called growth or achievement up for all the world to see? How spiritual or how anonymous do we really think we are?

I had told Julio that I did not intend to write anything, but to get up here and wing it. I have to say that writing this presentation was a great opportunity to take inventory on my relationship with all of you. I look forward to the next year and a half, as we do this spiritual work together, to anonymously work towards guaranteeing the future of this thing that saved our lives.

### **Attracting More Participation in Service: Kenny K., Panel 62, Area 34, Western Michigan**

Service is one of my favorite topics. I even have a personalized plate on my motorcycle that reads “SRVCE.”

What is service in Alcoholics Anonymous? I performed a search on “service” in the Grapevine Digital Archives and it brought back 3,973 articles pertaining to this topic, and 719 of those were pertaining to both service *and* Bill W.! Then I typed “service” into Dictionary.com and the definition was: *An act of helpful activity; to help, or aid.*

In *The Language of the Heart* Bill W. explains our Third Legacy thusly:

“Our Twelfth Step—carrying the message—is the basic service that A.A.’s Fellowship gives; this is our principal aim and the main reason for our existence. Therefore, A.A. is more than a set of principles; it is a Society of alcoholics in action. We must carry the message, else we ourselves can wither and those who haven’t been given the truth will die. Hence an A.A. service is anything whatever that helps us to reach a fellow sufferer—ranging

all the way from the Twelfth Step itself to a ten-cent phone call and a cup of coffee, and to A.A.'s General Service Office."

I spent most of the first year of my sobriety incarcerated. An A.A. volunteer carried the message to me behind the walls and encouraged me to work our Twelve Steps, during which I had a spiritual awakening. I came to know a "New Freedom, and a New Happiness" while I was still locked up. Early in my second year of sobriety I moved to Kalamazoo, MI, and found a home group. Shortly thereafter I volunteered as coffeemaker for that group. It was only meant to be a two-week commitment, but the person I was covering for never came back and it lasted for two and a half years. I realized early on that there are additional rewards in my recovery for being of service; it made me a part of that group, a part of the Fellowship. I eventually rotated on to General Service Representative (G.S.R.) for that group. As I look back, the Twelve Steps were but a beginning of my journey; it was time for me to embrace our Twelve Traditions, as well as our Twelve Concepts for World Service. Gratefully, I've been active in some form of service ever since.

After several years of General Service at both the district area levels, I started looking down on others that weren't participating in some form of service, and I let my views be known. A good friend of mine at the time formed a rather healthy resentment towards me for always spouting off that more A.A.'s needed to get involved. He pulled me aside one evening and shared his feelings. After we talked, I saw the error in my ways and I made amends. Shortly after, my friend volunteered to come down to the weekly prison meetings I attend and helped to carry the message behind the walls with me for over two years! The lesson I learned was to try and show my love and gratitude for Alcoholics Anonymous and all three of our legacies, "Recovery, Unity, & Service," as well as try to encourage and inspire others to get involved with a service commitment.

Just as our bodies and minds need exercise and stimulation so that we avoid becoming lazy and complacent, I've watched people come into A.A. and work the steps but that's where it ends for them. They don't get active and they don't give back; they become complacent and have a greater tendency to go back out. I looked around in my early sobriety and all the people who had what I wanted were active in service.

One form of service is giving back to our General Service Board through the birthday plan. The projected outlook of our finances over the next couple years is bleak, and with less than half of the groups making donations we now realize that our founder's vision of self-support may never be a reality. And yet! We as individual A.A. members can make a difference by sending in a contribution on our A.A. anniversaries. It's as simple as going online to [aa.org](http://aa.org) and making a donation, or by using the birthday envelopes provided by the General Service Office.

Here's another example of how service has improved my recovery: I attended my first International Convention in 2005 in Toronto, Canada, and it was an amazing experience. Then I went to my second International Convention two years ago in San Antonio, where I volunteered to be a greeter. It was by far one of the most incredible experiences I've had in my sobriety. I got to spend some time meeting people from all over the world, sharing their love for Alcoholics Anonymous and their gratitude for this Fellowship.

So how *do* I get this across to others? How do we encourage more participation in service? One way is to set a good example; this helps others see how attractive it is, by showing my enthusiasm as well as the rewards I receive through service. There are many ways we can encourage A.A.'s to get involved with service: through Conference-approved literature, stories



in the Grapevine, sharing at meetings, good sponsorship or being a service sponsor, or at forums, workshops, conventions and the like.

I always need to remember what my life was like before sobriety, the hell and horror I lived until I embraced our Twelve Steps, and then I became of Service! From my first pot of coffee for the Comstock Group, to attending my first General Service Conference just a few short months ago. This is only the beginning of my journey, and though my debt continues to grow, through giving back the rewards are limitless! Service! Woo hoo!!!

Thank you for allowing me to be of service today.

**Service is the Secret:** Fariba M., Delegate Panel 61, Area 21, Southern Illinois

This is quite surreal, me giving a talk on service to this group. My higher power continues to reveal his sense of humor to me!

It might be difficult for you to imagine, but I was kind of a spoiled princess growing up. I was given much of what I wanted and had little responsibility. My aunt who lived with us did everything for us kids. That was her way of showing love to us. So you can imagine my shock and disgust at the suggestion of my first sponsor to make coffee, clean the meeting room, and even wash curtains! What? Excuse me? Do you not know who I am? I smiled but I didn't take most of her suggestions. Amazingly, things didn't change. Much like all the other A,A, steps and suggestions, I didn't understand it and I didn't like it. What does making coffee have to do with solving my problems for goodness sake?! Of course I said all this in my head. I thought she was getting old and senile, and honestly I was frustrated with her. She just didn't understand! Looking back, I am very impressed with the patience of my sponsor.

Of course pain is the ultimate persuader. I came here because my life wasn't working, because I was depressed and suicidal. Now I've learned that I can be those things in A.A. too, but only for so long. You either grow or you go. I had to sit through a lot of meetings to hear this message: If I do what I've always done, I will get what I always got. Go ahead do it your way, see how it works; my way didn't work. So I started behaving differently by taking some suggestions.

My first service position was G.S.R. for my group. I had no clue what that was. The group said I should do it and elected me into the position. I cluelessly went to my first district meeting and I didn't like it. Something to do with personalities I am sure. So I quit! So, if you have ever quit a service position, you might end up being elected delegate! A few years later I became alternate G.S.R. as an amends to bailing on the job the first time, and this time was different. It is so important for us to make service attractive. I remember the laughter at the district meeting and this time I stayed.

I then came up against my next service hurdle: the area assembly. All day on a Sunday? And it is two hours away? What? Are you kidding? That is ridiculous! I went along, internally kicking and screaming. I was shocked to find the road trips were always adventures: I either got to visit with people, deepen friendships, and share stories, or the times that I drove by myself, I had some magnificent drives through the Southern Illinois country. I stayed involved at the district level for eight years and became delegate last year.

Although I didn't follow everything at first at the area assemblies, I was moved to see all these people, the older men especially, with their little pads of paper and pens, giving up their Sundays and tending to the business of A.A. I saw their love for the program, and their dedication to service. Area assemblies are still spiritual experiences for me invariably, whether I feel like going or not on that particular day.

Of course there have been other undeniable examples of love and service that you have demonstrated to me, some that are etched in my mind. I remember going to a meeting early on a cold winter night. The man who was chairing had just gotten there, straight from work, still in his dress pants and tie. He looked tired, but he cheerfully put on the coffee while chatting with me, and vacuumed the carpet in preparation for the meeting. Somehow, these simple examples of love and service are undeniable.

A wise Quaker woman once told me it is easy to leave a place when you don't have a job to do there. For a very long time I was driven either by what I wanted to do or did not want to do. The commitment, regardless of how minute it may be, keeps me coming back and keeps me connected. When I am down, when I want to isolate, when I want to ignore certain people, if I have a commitment it makes me show up in spite of what I feel like doing. I get to connect, to feel useful and be a part of again, which I so desperately need. Ah, what a relief! I need breaks from me. Service provides an opportunity for me to feel a part of and to feel good about myself, as I connect with you and feel like I am contributing.

I'd like to talk a little about our triangle of recovery, unity, and service. I finally realize that this is an equilateral triangle—there are 3 equal sides. This didn't happen by mistake or accident; if recovery was intended be the primary focus with unity and service being less important, then a different shape would have been more appropriate. A line with two stubs at the end, perhaps. Or maybe a triangle with one solid line and two dotted lines to indicate "Optional." However, that is not what we have. Therefore, I need to give the same weight to recovery, unity, and service.

I heard the following quote from mother Teresa at the General Service Conference this year: "We can't all do great things but we can do small things with great love." You have demonstrated this to me over and over again in your acts of service. Alas, you have brought me to happy, joyous, and free in spite of myself, and I thank you for it.

**Anonymity on the Internet:** Mark E., Delegate Panel 62, Area 56 Southwest Ohio

I am someone who usually uses my first and last names in A.A. meetings, so I am not generally paranoid that someone might actually know who I am. I feel generally safe in our physical rooms as I can see all who are present, but on the Internet, things are quite different. I usually include a signature line on all of my e-mails and it reads, in part, "I do not trust third party services to respect or protect my privacy." What that means is that usually any free service is not truly free. They almost always sell advertising and/or use the information from their users to fund their business.

I got interested in how a free service operates when my daughter sent me an e-mail telling me to log on to a “free” site and download a movie of my granddaughter. I went to that site and found that I had to register to get access to the movie. In the registration process there was a long “user agreement,” set in small print, which I was required to read and then accept to become a registered user. All of us have come across these things, and we usually just click “agree” without a thorough reading of the contract. Well, for some unknown reason, I bothered to read the agreement this time and found that any images posted to that site became the property of the site operator and that they could use any image as they saw fit.

I was totally upset that the images of my lovely granddaughter might be used in some commercial, ad, or the like without any input or control by my daughter, her husband, or my granddaughter. Now, nothing has happened so far as we know, but that is the price we pay for “free” services.

So what does this have to do with anonymity on the Internet? Well, I have learned that I need to be extremely careful not only with my anonymity, but with yours as well. A couple of years ago I attended an Intergroup-sponsored dinner and one individual was going around taking photos of many of the assembled guests. Now almost all of us in attendance were members of our Fellowship, and many were glad to have their photos taken by this individual. The next day he posted all of the photos on a site and included A.A. logos as well as full-face photos of many people without their agreement or permission. The photographer assumed it was okay because he thought that the site was not well known and therefore almost private. He was not aware of our Eleventh Tradition and thought he was doing a service, rather than a disservice, to the Intergroup.

E-mail is a wonderful form of communication and a great way to get information to many people with very little time or cost. E-mail is also a potentially dangerous tool if I am not careful about how I use it. I’ll mention some of my most favorite anonymity issues in e-mail. First, consider my friend Joe S., who loves to protect his anonymity in and out of the rooms. Joe uses e-mail at his work to save money, and his work email is jsmith@company.com. Now it doesn’t take a rocket scientist to figure out his last name is Smith; so much for anonymity! Probably much more important than that is Joe’s company probably has an Internet Technology department which stores and possibly even reviews e-mails for all sorts of company reasons. Joe could well be exposing many A.A. members to his company, and possibly breaking his anonymity as well. Joe would do much better to get a private Internet service provider at home or via his cell phone for e-mails. My email address is mark@go-concepts.com, and I also have grandpopmark@yahoo.com and delegate@aaarea56.org. None of these addresses expose my full name. Oh yes, and since one service I use is a “free” service, I do not store my address book or anything else on their site since I want to protect your anonymity as well as mine. I only use that online site for occasions where I want extra anonymity over my home address.

To help protect your anonymity I almost always use the BCC line in place of TO or CC when sending emails to more than one individual. I never know what any recipient might do with my e-mail to him or her. If they forward it on, the only address exposed is mine, not yours or anyone else.

So, what about chat sites and social networking sites? I know the popularity of these sites is exploding and hardly a week goes by that I read about a breach of security, loss of millions of passwords, or other problems with popular sites. I worked in technology for most of my life and I know that whatever man can put together, man can tear apart. Security just makes it more difficult to break in, and I suggest that if I want to protect my anonymity, then I shouldn't participate in the first place. I doubt that too many will follow my way of using these services, so if others must use these sites, then I suggest the use of some common sense and not simply trust these services to do for me what I can do for myself.

Posting photos of friends and identifying them as a member of A.A. is something which is in conflict with Tradition Eleven. I am quite careful when discussing A.A. business electronically to restrict, as best I can, the posting to a limited group that needs to be a part of the discussion. I have to be extremely careful to protect the anonymity of my friends from others, in and out of our Fellowship, in group messages—you might not know that Fred is a new member and Fred might want to tell you directly. Again, I have to protect and respect everyone else's anonymity.

I've been a member of an online A.A. group for almost twenty years now, and we have been quite vigilant in protecting the anonymity of our members. We used a list server for years and now simply use BCC to post messages to the group. We have discussed using any number of online services to host our group, and yet we remain a simple e-mail group, even though nearly all of our members use one kind of online social network or another for other reasons. New members are introduced by current ones so that all members are known as true A.A. members and it remains a truly closed A.A. meeting. I am not paranoid, but I am cautious and I enjoy a line from a Buddhist monk friend of mine: "Trust but Verify."

In closing, I am reminded that anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all of our principles. While I might think that I am important or special, our Fellowship is so much more important than just one member and principles must come way before personalities. I am a recovering alcoholic (principles) and my name is Mark (personalities).

**How Does An Item Get On The G.S.C. Agenda?:** Michael H., Delegate Panel 61, Area 19, Chicago

Any member, group, district, area, committee, or service entity of Alcoholics Anonymous can send in an item to be added to the next Conference Agenda. The deadline is usually around January 15, but the item should be sent in to the General Service Office as early as possible to allow time for the vetting process. Your sponsor, group, district, area, delegate, and G.S.O. are good resources to use in gathering information and history to support your proposal.

Once the item is received, it's checked by A.A. staff for previous Conference actions. Suggestions, information, and history are then sent to the Trustees Conference Committee to determine the most appropriate way of distributing the item. Complete details of how the selection process works can be found in *The A.A. Service Manual* page S-55.

This process is said to be a tried-and-true procedure for placing an item on the agenda. Even so, the 2010 General Service Conference had concerns about this process. Delegates to that

Conference discussed it in workshops and produced an agenda item. As members of the 61<sup>st</sup> Conference Agenda Committee, we received agenda item (E):“Consider a request that the Trustees’ Conference Committee meet annually with the Conference Committee on Agenda and the Conference Committee on Policy/Admission to address matters concerning the Conference Agenda and Conference Policy.” This item—along with thirty-three pages of background material—made its way through the selection process to our Committee.

The Agenda Committee Chair does meet with the Conference Committee at its January meeting, but only as an observer. This request was asking for the Agenda Committee to be allowed to participate in the selection process of agenda items a long with the Trustees’ Conference Committee.

Since the first General Service Conference in 1951, the Conference Committee on Agenda has held the responsibility to select issues for consideration by the Conference at its final meeting. Today, the Trustees’ Conference Committee has that responsibility.

The Conference Committee on Agenda consists of seven delegates and a staff secretary. We meet three times during the Conference. Sunday we meet with two members of the Trustees’ Conference Committee. Monday and Tuesday we meet for three hours a day as a committee. This request caused our committee to meet for an extra session to complete our work. It was the first time that we discussed the item as a committee. Better communication between Conference Committee members from the time that we receive agenda items until we meet at the Conference would be helpful. This request might have changed Policy and given more participation in the selection process to the Conference Agenda Committee.

Finally, our committee voted to send the item to the Conference as an additional consideration, not as a recommendation. This is what we sent: “Following a lengthy discussion, the committee requested that the Trustees’ Committee on Conference meet/confer with the Conference Committee on Agenda prior to the winter quarterly Board meeting to address matters concerning the Conference week agenda.” So far no action has been taken on this item. However, since the item went through the tried-and-true procedures and reached the Conference Committee on Agenda, it can be said the process worked. Some may disagree with the outcome, but the item can always be presented again.

Thank you.

**Self-support—What It Means To Me:** Nancy H., Delegate Panel 61, Area 75, Southern Wisconsin

When I started to think about the topic of self-support I decided I needed to make it personal. I needed to take a look at what self-support means to me.

The long form of our Seventh Tradition states: “The A.A. groups themselves ought to be fully supported by the voluntary contributions of their own members. We think that each group should soon achieve this ideal; that any public solicitation of funds using the name of Alcoholics Anonymous is highly dangerous, whether by groups, clubs, hospitals or other outside agencies; that acceptance of large gifts from any source, or of contributions carrying

any obligation whatever, is unwise. Then too, we view with much concern those A.A. treasuries which continue, beyond prudent reserves, to accumulate funds for no stated A.A. purpose. Experience has often warned us that nothing can so surely destroy our spiritual heritage as futile disputes over property, money, and authority.”

The first thing I need to look at is what my voluntary contributions should be. How much can I honestly afford? How can I ever repay what A.A. has given me? When I came through the doors of A.A. in 1983 it was traditional to put a buck in the basket. I could also go out for coffee and fellowship after a meeting, and with a tip it would probably cost me a buck. Recently I was in a restaurant in a metropolitan area and a cup of coffee was \$4.50 plus tax and tip. What should I be putting in the basket today? I decided that in my home group I needed to increase what I was putting in the basket each week. I always managed to find money to purchase my booze in the past so I should be able to put the price of my favorite coffee drink in the basket, even if it means I need to occasionally forgo having that treat.

The next area I needed to look at is whether my home group and other groups I attend regularly are being self-supporting. Do we accept outside contributions? One group I attend meets in the community room of a bank and the bank does not require a rental amount. The group gives money to the bank each month as a donation for use of the room so that we can be self-supporting. Does the group receive regular treasurer’s reports? After group expenses are paid and a prudent reserve is kept, does the group contribute to ensure Twelfth Step work can continue in the district, in the area, and in A.A. as a whole?

I know that in my home district all groups do not contribute to the district, area, or G.S.O. In some cases it is because they do not have any excess funds above the group expenses. Why is that? Is it because members do not have the funds to contribute or is it because members are not aware that they need to contribute more to help the group carry it’s share of support for the district, local central office, area, and G.S.O.?

At the general service level 42.4 percent of the registered groups contributed to G.S.O. in 2011. That is less than half of the registered groups. The percentage was only 44.9 percent in 2010. I know that my home group was part of that percentage, but what about the other (almost) 58 percent? The cost of service per member per year was \$6.32 in 2011. If we round up that is \$7 per member per year. If every member would give that much, our Fellowship would be entirely self-supporting.

The question that is continuously raised is: Should G.S.O. be self-supporting? Should we continue to rely on literature sales to cover the short fall of contributions? We are the only ones who can answer that question. Until contributions from groups and members cover the cost of the services we require to carry the message to the still suffering alcoholic, G.S.O. will need to subsidize its income from literature sales.

I know that I have raised more questions than answers. I need to do my part and contribute what I can. I trust that the answers will come. Are you doing your part?

## PAST TRUSTEES' SHARING

**Jack O.**, past regional trustee, 1997-2001

Two funeral directors – both alcoholics -- were taking a body across the desert to bury it. Halfway across, one of them said, “We ought to stop and get a drink.” They pulled into a place, took the corpse in with them, sat it down, and asked for a drink. The bartender asked, “Who’s going to pay for these drinks?” “He will,” they said, “when he wakes up.” After a few rounds, one undertaker says, “Let’s go across the street for a few more.” They go, leaving the corpse behind. While they were gone, the bartender shouts at the corpse, “Hey, are you going to pay for these drinks?” When he pushed the corpse to wake him, he fell off the barstool. Just then, the undertakers came back in. “Hey! You killed him!” they said. “It wasn’t my fault,” the bartender said. “He hit me first!”

I like that joke -- I am an ex-bartender/bouncer. I came to Alcoholics Anonymous quite a few years ago; I celebrated 38 years in June [2012]. I’m 81 years old. My wife is 81 years old. We met in the first grade and we were in the same homeroom in high school. We got married right out of high school, had kids right away and we lived in a little cottage. Life was good to me and I took a second job as a bouncer. The job I had didn’t pay enough for my drinking. For five years I stumbled around in an A.A. club. Eventually, I began to do service work; I became GSR and president of the club. Old timers were watching me, got me on a committee, and then I went to Area Assembly. The area chair shot himself and I took over his term. Then I got my own term and then became delegate for the area. Service is the way to go – if I can become delegate, you certainly can, too. Once in a while, I get out to a meeting and a bunch of guys come over for a meeting. It’s a great program. Keep coming back.

**Bob M.**, past regional trustee, 2005-2009

I’d like to talk about the “rest of the story.” Many of us in service work like to work through and see everything finished—we like to have our hands in it. Many of us don’t want to sit back and let go, we want to help manage, manipulate and make sure it’s done exactly the way it’s supposed to. At the 2009 Conference there was discussion about where the Additional Forum would be held. I got a few phone calls from delegates about it, no one knew what was going to happen; it was all new because we had just passed the Additional Regional Forum concept at the 2006 Conference. Dean S., your delegate at the time, called me. He had this great idea about a forum in rural America. He put together a bang-up presentation and brought it to the delegates-and-trustees-only luncheon—and everybody loved the idea. So we passed it and then passed the information on to the coordinator for the International Convention and Regional Forums. And here we are, four years later. It really does work—sometimes you sow the seed and someone else will pick it up and help it grow. A good example of an elder statesman is to sit back, let it go and let it happen. That’s the part I’m still working on. That’s the rest of the story.

Also, if you are a past delegate and you are thinking about serving as trustee, go for it. You will grow in ways you never imagined. Don’t be scared, God is in control and good things will happen.

## **Don W.**, past regional trustee, 1993-1997

I came into the program in 1970; I had my last drink in 1971. Back then, we had the Big Book, the Twelve and Twelve, and the A.A. Service Manual. We also had a lot of folks sitting around the table who knew what Alcoholics Anonymous was like when it first started. Today, we have service manuals to help us do the work we need to do. That's what the General Service Office does. The General Service Conference decides what they would like to have—by your request, i.e. what do you think you need to do service work? And, if it's feasible, it gets done. If you are a new person in service work or you've been in service work and you don't quite understand the structure yet, A.A. has a number of history books. We have A.A. Comes of Age and Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers. I was impressed by Friday night's general sharing session. I don't think I've ever been to a Forum where people got into what the difference is between a regional trustee and a general service trustee. What is their importance as a whole? What do they do? It was nice to see people with so much interest. Some of those questions are answered in the history books.

I served from April of 1993 to April of 1997. It's very important for me to remember that I would not have done anything in A.A. if I hadn't been willing to work the Steps, turn my life over to a God as I understand him, and turn my life over to the people sitting around the tables who knew what they were talking about. Instead of being the person I was, a person who whatever I was told to do I was going to do the opposite, I was able to change my personality. By the grace of God I am able to stand in front of you and say I am grateful I am an alcoholic and I am here. Thank you for being here; I have enjoyed myself.

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

I'd like to talk about some of my experience in service work. When the opportunity for trustee-at-large/U.S. came, I talked to my husband, my sponsor, and our regional trustee about it. Whenever I heard a trustee-at-large report, my heart would flutter. We went to Area Assembly, and they said, "Would anyone like to put their name in for trustee-at-large/U.S.?" No one said anything. I didn't either. My mind said, "You have other things to do." I bowed my head and said, "God, if this is what you want me to do; I am willing to do it." I was catapulted out of my chair, and I put my resume in. I thought, what are my chances? I'm not qualified, I only have a high school education, I am the mother of nine children and the stepmother to seven. When I got the phone call from my delegate, he said, "Congratulations. You are the new trustee-at-large/U.S." I said, "Are you kidding?" So if you are sitting out there thinking, I'm not qualified, remember, God doesn't choose the qualified, God qualifies the chosen. We each have something to do in this Fellowship; each of us has a place. What is important is that we follow through and take our place.

In my travels, I've learned that it isn't very important *what* we give, but it is important *that* we give. When I was in Turkey, Chris C., the director of publications for A.A.W.S. was there, too. As we were getting ready to leave, one of the board members in Turkey gave Chris seventy-five dollars. He said, "I know this isn't very much, but we want to be a part of the big whole, and this is all that we have." At my first World Service Meeting in Ireland, the delegate from the Ukraine talked about how they didn't have any money. Doug R. was the coordinator at that time. When he got back to his room, he found an envelope. In it were two ten-dollar bills and a note that read, "We can't give much, but we want to be a part of this." I learned that if we want



to be a part of, we be a part of. Julio E. and I went to Hungary. Someone there said, "We are so glad you came, because now we know that you care." You never know who you are going to touch. By being at places like this, we have the opportunity to touch people.

## **"CLOSING REMARKS"**

**Pam R.**, East Central Regional trustee, current.

I can't thank you enough. As everyone has said, you can't imagine the experiences, all the growth and the thrill this gives. When I was a GSR, my first sponsor said, "The greatest joy you will ever know is to be of service to another alcoholic." I have never forgotten that, and it has been my great pleasure to be of service to you. Thank you. "I am Responsible. When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A. always to be there. And for that: I am responsible."

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