



FINAL REPORT

WESTERN CANADA REGIONAL FORUM

FEBRUARY 21-23, 2014

WINNIPEG, MANITOBA

Dear A.A. Friends,

Please mark your calendar for the next Western Canada Regional Forum, which will take place in Whitehorse, Yukon, September 11-13, 2015 at the Westmark Hotel Whitehorse.

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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 2014 Western Canada Regional Forum was held in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Registration for the Forum was 247. This included 166 members attending their very first Forum—many were welcomed at the Forum Orientation on Friday evening. Sunday morning included a session for sharing from first-time forum attendees, followed by sharing from past trustees.

Everyone openly expressed gratitude and affection to Western Canada Regional trustee Marty W. for being with us and chairing the Forum with his characteristic humor and great love for A.A.

WORKSHOP REPORTS

“Remote Communities and Inactive Districts” (Moderator: Steve S. / Reporter: Tina G.) The workshop members discussed remote communities and inactive districts, and more specifically, some of the problems they encountered in carrying the message and what worked in carrying the message of A.A. Members were forthcoming with experiences. Members struggled with bringing the message to First Nations communities, citing issues with the Native Alcohol Drug Abuse Program (NADAP), cut funding and issues with Telehealth. Also, scars from residential schools still exist and impact the First Nations community. Workshop members requested help other than pamphlets from GSO and noted some slow improvement. Other barriers were language barriers – some members overcame this by giving away CDs in the Ojibwa language. Some Slavic language translations are also available. Other members cited success with Telehealth, the use of technology to reach remotes members and others with pamphlets and information. In addition, all cited the need for more support and commitment and the importance of not losing focus. Other helpful activities/practices were round-ups (Area 91), members donating literature, and building relationships with the communities. This helped improve attendance; also helpful was the practice of active districts mentoring inactive districts. Another member reported that the conference phone in his area’s central office was used regularly for meetings. Finally, workshop members stressed the success and importance of using the language of the heart to share A.A.’s message and to take care in the presentation of Alcoholics Anonymous. As Bill W. reached out, at a public level, we need to as well.

“The GSR: The Most Important Job in A.A.” (Moderator: Karen H. / Reporter: Amber McF.) The workshop attendees were asked: “Why is the GSR the most important job in A.A.?” The group members responded that a GSR is a vital link between group and “lower” levels on triangle; these are the “voices” of the group; they bring information to the group and committee from assemblies, forums, etc.; and finally, they help make other members aware of service work. Workshop attendees were also asked: “What are the duties of the GSR?” Members answered: To make service more attractive and to get the group interested; to vote at elections, assemblies, etc.; to be the “voice” of the group; to be a liaison between group and lower levels on a triangle; to possibly organize a group inventory session; and finally, to help make other A.A. members aware of service work and its importance.

“Group Inventory” (Moderator: Jennifer K. / Reporter: Dennis C.) The workshop attendees were asked to answer four questions, in depth, to emphasize the importance of a group inventory. The workshop began with a quick description from the A.A. Group pamphlet on the importance of having a group inventory, stating that any group, district, area, or GSC can have one to determine

how well they are fulfilling A.A.'s primary purpose. The group then discussed four questions: First, workshop attendees were asked: "Is it necessary to have a facilitator for your inventory?" Members responded with "yes," citing that having a facilitator is necessary to keep the inventory on track, identify the issues and get to the root of the problem, and also to direct discussion, not the group. Second, members of this workshop were asked: "Is it better to have an outside person do your group inventory or a member of the group?" Again, the members responded in kind, answering that an outside person is impartial and able to see the group from the outside, i.e. more objectively. This gives everyone in the room a voice. Not having an outside person running group inventory would be, like one member commented, "like doing a Fifth Step with myself." Third, the workshop members were presented with the following question: "How do you introduce the idea of having a group inventory to your group?" Members responded that they would introduce the idea at the business meeting, or perhaps suggest a potluck event to inform the group of the importance of group inventories. Finally, workshop attendees were asked: "What questions would a facilitator ask?" The group responded with: "What is working? What is not? Is the group growing? Are we following the Steps and Traditions? Are we carrying A.A.'s message?" In conclusion, the workshop members found that the whole purpose of a group inventory was to learn and grow, and to better carry the message of Alcoholics Anonymous to the still-suffering alcoholic.

“Generating Enthusiasm for Service Assemblies” (Moderator: Walter S. / Reporter: Heywood M.) The workshop members were asked to discuss the question: "How can we generate enthusiasm among A.A. members for Service Assemblies?" Workshop members shared the following ideas:

- Host an assembly to interest local members in following service
- Dress up topics for announcements and posters
- Suggest using something other than the word "workshop"
- Greet members attending the workshop—make them feel welcome
- Have an orientation session at the start of the workshop
- Consider using a new format. For example, one area uses a "Mini-Assembly" — a one day event in a district that isn't currently active in service
- Use service assembly to carry out a portion of Twelfth Step work
- Share our service story at the assembly and dispel the fear of "service"

Workshop members were then asked, "How do we continue to keep members interested and active in service events?" The discussion netted many ideas:

- Have interesting topics and speakers at service events
- Pick an A.A., active in service, to share about the benefits of being active in service and at service events (i.e. we learn a little about A.A. and we get some life skills that help our sobriety and our sober life)
- Giving hope back: "Something happens and a light goes on"
- One area is trying the "Committee System" as it has worked well in the neighboring A.A. area.
- Allow everyone to participate and use love in giving feedback back to members
- Give resource information (example: Service Manual)
- Ask participants to fill out feedback forms and be sure they are followed up
- Suggest getting service sponsors – explain what one is
- Share what we learn with other members / read service material together
- Watch the AAWS video "Markings on the Journey"
- Generate new ideas / think outside the box / have the courage to change/ brainstorm solutions

“Service Sponsorship” (Moderator: Ian R. / Reporter: Dana D.) The workshop attendees were asked: “Is it a good idea to have your recovery sponsor also be your service sponsor, or is it better to have two separate sponsors?” The workshop members pointed out that service IS part of recovery. They also noted that many A.A.s were not aware that there was a difference between the two types of sponsors. Workshop members agreed that even if our recovery sponsor has rotated out of service positions, having one sponsor presents no difficulty — if he or she had been in service. Of course, as members grow and change in recovery and in service, it is often desirable to connect with new sponsors in order to continue growing. They noted that it is difficult to get A.A. members active in service, and it was a good rule of thumb to always say “yes” to service. For those very active in service, members agreed that forgetting about or neglecting the home group was a pitfall, and to be aware of this. The second question of the workshop was: “Do you need to have your service sponsor be the same sex as you?” Workshop members responded that a sobriety sponsor should be the same sex as the sponsee. Furthermore, although it is probably best for the service sponsor and sponsee to be the same sex, there are some situations where it is not always possible. Since all sponsorships (even service sponsorships) are familiar in varying degrees, using care and good judgment is essential to the well being of all concerned.

“Grapevine: The Grapevine Rep and More—Bringing our Message of Hope to Alcoholics” (Moderator: Jon W. / Reporter: Denise D.) Jon W., senior editor at the Grapevine magazine, gave the workshop attendees an introduction. They were then presented with three questions. The first question, “How does the Grapevine choose articles and content for each issue?” was answered as follows: three A.A. members read each of the 150 stories submitted every month. Each of these stories is filed into a category and/or theme. The stories must have a problem with alcohol and the authors must have found a solution / hope in A.A. Stories can be either long or short, and address any of the different parts of the A.A. program. Second, the history of the A.A. Grapevine was discussed briefly. Where to find the complete Grapevine history was shared with workshop members (www.aagrapevine.org). Bill W.’s desire that the Grapevine mirror the A.A. Fellowship was also shared with workshop members. Third, workshop members were asked, “How can the Grapevine carry the A.A. message?” Members responded that it could be used in the clubroom or at the home group for all ages of members and all ages of sobriety. The stories can be read at meetings and the topics can be used for meetings. Print magazines can be used in a lending library. In addition, the Grapevine magazine or a subscription to any Grapevine media can be given as gifts. Finally, magazines can be given to professionals to better inform them about what A.A. is and for the message of hope and recovery that it carries.

“Friendly with our Friends in Today’s World” (Moderator: Chris S. / Reporter: Carolyn S.) The workshop members were first asked, “Are we doing enough to attract newcomers to our Fellowship through our friends outside of A.A.? Is that promotion or attraction?” Members responded that professionals still ask A.A. for guidance on how our Fellowship works and how to refer both patients and loved ones. Members also responded that we might be carrying the message in our A.A. group, but not outside the A.A. doors. Some ideas were to have more gatherings to connect with/keep our friendship with the professional community. Members were then asked, “Can we get more information out to more friends?” Members responded that more could be done to make professionals aware of the help A.A. offers. Some member ideas were to hold public information workshops and talk about Alcoholics Anonymous, and similarly, to invite our professional friends to information sessions. Members also believed there was a need to change misconceptions about our Fellowship and to dispel the fear some had about A.A. Workshop members also noted that we do not need “big” works make this happen, it can start by

each member talking to his or her doctor(s) or to other professional friends. Finally, workshop members noted that attraction involves our own spiritual experience and awakening — it cannot be given away if it does not exist.

“A.A. and the Courage to Change” (Moderator: Pam V-M. / Reporter: Diane S.) The workshop members were asked to discuss two questions. First, “Does courage to change require faith?” The members responded that on an organizational level, courage to change requires a leap of faith. On an individual level, members noted that courage to change came when they entered A.A.—they had to have faith in people in A.A. and they had to be open-minded and willing. Before A.A., members recalled that they trusted no one, but upon entering A.A. and doing Steps, members responded that they saw change and then found trust and faith—initially, however, they did not look at “changing” as requiring courage. Other member responses included: Where there is fear, there is no faith, but once fear was gone, there was faith. Another member didn’t believe fear and faith were opposites because fear moves a person to change. Other members responded that when you are sick and tired, you are sick and tired, so yes, faith is required to change. Also, faith is implied when it comes to finding the courage to change. Finally, members also responded that they didn’t really have faith at the beginning—it was more a sense of desperation. However, action and results brought faith.

Second, workshop members were asked, “What are we afraid of and what guides us through change?” Workshop members responded that they were afraid of change, others’ opinions, and sobriety. Members were also afraid of not being able to find the courage to change because of a powerful fear of rejection. Also, members were afraid of not finding the willingness to change. Workshop members brought up other fears, such as “what if the Steps ever get changed?” There was fear that we may stop practicing the principles of A.A. and carrying the message and A.A. would therefore cease to exist. Workshop members responded that many things guided them through change. They replied that it took faith in A.A., people, and God — Step Three. Members also answered that being “beat up” guided them toward change. They noted that fear can be healthy and push us through change. They responded that God guides us and gives us courage and strength. Workshop members were also guided through change by other A.A.s—God works through members. In addition, members said that The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions were a guide, as well as sponsorship, group conscience, and the Concepts for World Service. Workshop members responded that trust and faith that A.A. will stand the test of time because of a working group conscience guides them through any fear that the A.A. program will change. Workshop members discussed a fear of rotation in A.A., but were guided through the fear by literature and other A.A.s who reminded them that it is important to keep on learning.

“About Those Group Problems” (Moderator: Stuart S. / Reporter: Becky P.) The workshop members were asked to discuss two questions. First, “How can we maintain group unity when solving group problems?” The members responded that taking a group conscience, using tact, diplomacy, and giving everyone an opportunity to speak would help maintain group unity, as would having an informed chair who could keep his or her emotions separate from the group conscience. In addition, workshop members stressed adhering to the Traditions, as well as implementing Tradition study groups. Keeping principles before personalities, adhering to a right of appeal, and asking, “Am I listening for a solution?” were also answers shared by workshop members. Workshop members responded that using literature, such as “The A.A. Group — Where it All Begins” pamphlet and the Traditions Checklist would help to maintain group unity. Workshop members answered that having a group inventory (with food) as well as an outside

facilitator was a good idea. Members also responded that they thought it was important to invite A.A. group members to attend their inventory and share what they thought, as well as assuring them that no decisions or actions would be taken on that day. The second question posed to workshop members was: “How do we get more people involved in service positions?” Workshop members responded that showing enthusiasm and gratitude as a service person was far more effective than talking about it — attraction not promotion. Members could talk about the positive impact service has had on their life and sobriety. Also, workshop members noted that having a sponsor (active in service) and being a sponsor was important. Furthermore, there is a correlation between healthy groups and those members who are in service. Workshop members had other suggestions, like calling a position a “Service Opportunity” and creating little positions, like a “Birthday Chair” to help bring A.A.s into service. In addition, members also saw the merits of railroading or “volunteering” A.A.s into service — recognizing that some A.A.s were just scared to volunteer and would respond well to a direct instruction. Workshop members were also in favor of piquing the curiosity of A.A.s by telling them about the amazing voting process at assemblies. Finally, workshop members responded that taking someone to a meeting and getting them involved was always a very good way to induct someone into service.

PRESENTATIONS

“Sponsorship in Recovery and Service” Kim C., Delegate Panel 63, Area 91 Saskatchewan
Hello everyone. My name is Kim and I’m an alcoholic. Thank you for this opportunity to make speak on the topic “Sponsorship in Recovery and Service.” Making this presentation today is a privilege and a pleasure.

Our primary purpose in Alcoholics Anonymous is to carry the message to another alcoholic, whether they are just walking in the door or they have been around for a long time but are suffering. In the pamphlet “Questions and Answers on Sponsorship” the history of sponsorship is presented like this: When Bill had an urge to drink, he got the idea that he should talk to another alcoholic. He found Dr. Bob, who was trying to stay sober. And out of that need to talk to each other in order to stay sober, A.A. was born. Then Dr. Bob started sponsoring others to ensure his sobriety. Both of our founders knew that by talking to each other their lives could be enriched.

The message of A.A. is carried from one person to another. But it is also carried at all levels of our Fellowship—group to group, delegate to district, between G.S.O. and individual members of A.A., between the home groups and their area delegates, between G.S.O. and the delegates, and from country to country. As A.A.’s Legacy of Service states, “We must carry the message, else we ourselves can wither and those who haven’t been given the truth may die.” (*The A.A. Service Manual*, page S1) Therefore, I have a personal responsibility to the newcomer, to the suffering alcoholic who is no longer a newcomer, and to the service structure.

I came to the doorsteps of Alcoholics Anonymous by way of some people who were members of A.A. I met the first one through a woman who was a friend of my mom’s, named Vicki. I had moved in with Vicki after I moved away from home. She was divorced from an alcoholic in recovery, and my own home was riddled with chronic and violent alcoholism which was accompanied by some black-belt codependency. I needed to be out of my family home and I was very accustomed to blaming my parents for my own alcoholism. Vicki, however, determined she needed to introduce me to the Employee Assistance Program counselor, named Norm, at the

corporation where she worked. Over the next couple of years I would grace Norm's doorstep when I felt I needed someone to talk to. Then, in 1987, I spent my summer looking after three children while their parents worked full time. By this time the pot had completely boiled over and ruined the top of the stove. Gabrielle, the mother of the family, used to take the time to talk to me. As divine interference would have it, she knew Norm because they were members of the same home group. My alcoholism then elicited some major anxiety attacks. Gabrielle knew I was not a hotbed of mental health. One morning after she left for work, she called Norm. He phoned me at her house and asked, "Don't you think it's time you went to treatment?" My response was, "Yes it is. I don't care what you do to make that happen, just get me where I need to go."

So, Norm drove me down to the southern part of Saskatchewan to a place called Estevan. In Estevan there was the St. Joseph's hospital, which housed a very good treatment center. Along with the usual treatment center stuff, St. Joe's (as they called it) continually spoke to us about going to meetings, getting a sponsor, and reading the Big Book. I met a friend in treatment; Don was a sober alcoholic who thought he needed a start over in treatment. On Sundays we were allowed visitors and so two of his A.A. friends, Judith and Gary, came to visit. I was introduced to them and Judith insisted "Kim, when you come home, I am going to be your temporary sponsor. Give me your phone number. And here is my phone number." There was no sugar coating why I needed a sponsor. I didn't have a choice. She didn't say "Please," or "Would you mind," or "If you really want me to," or "I don't mean to tell you what to do but . . ." When I got out of treatment and a male A.A. member tried to thirteenth step me, guess who was at my side to walk me through that? Judith. Guess who provided me with my second introduction to the Steps? Judith. Guess who took me to my first home group? Judith. Guess who introduced me to a whole new group of people? Judith.

She was my introduction to sponsorship in my own personal recovery. Twenty-six years later, I have never been without a sponsor. Each of my sponsors has carried the message of recovery to me by using the Twelve Steps as a foundation. They also taught me some basic life skills in order to live life as a contributing member. They taught me how to accept responsibility for my actions, as well as how to work, how to go to school, how to love, how to move through divorce, how to be a good friend, and how to make decisions and learn new coping skills.

At about three or four months of sobriety, I had called up one of my home group members one night and lamented the fact that I was incredibly bored. I was only twenty-one years old and I got bored very easily. Margi told me to quit feeling sorry for myself and to come to a group "Gratitude Night" committee meeting that evening. "In fact, never mind," she said, "Harry and I are coming to pick you up." I said "Well, that's only an hour away and I'm not sure I can be ready in time." She said, "I don't care, you need to come with us. Do you have somewhere else to be?" That was my sponsorship into service, and I have been serving the Fellowship in some form or another ever since. I learned how to not be so opinionated in Alcoholics Anonymous. I learned what exactly it is that I belong to. I learned life skills like chairing meetings and balancing my finances from being the treasurer of my area. I also came to know that forums such as these were ways to carry the message to the still-suffering alcoholic whether you just walked in here this weekend, or whether you are hurting even though you have some or many days strung together. I learned that I do not have to have all the answers anymore and that there is a whole sea of members who serve the Fellowship and can help me when help is needed.

Al H., one of our long-timers in Saskatchewan and a past trustee from Saskatoon, said way back in 1978 that we sponsor the way we were sponsored. The two basic principles of sponsorship applied back in 1978, in 1987 when I came here, and today in 2014. Those principles are “Get one and be one.” What I came to see is that the people who went before me knew something I did not. I am direct and honest in my sponsorship because that was what I was taught. The reason I do not sugar-coat stuff is because when my sponsors were honest with me throughout the years, I knew that even if I didn’t like what they had to say, there was no doubt in my mind that they deeply cared about me and had my best interests at heart. When Judith said “I’m it,” and then followed through with being it when I left treatment, I knew I could count on her.]I learned how to allow another person to care about me. When Margi said “Stop feeling sorry for yourself” and I listened, I found out in a very short period of time that by involving me in service she knew that I would be better off than if I wasn’t involved. From the folks who have had the title of being my sponsor, I figured out that at any level of our Fellowship I no longer needed to live life on my own steam. I realized that I had to give back what was so freely given to me. For me to ultimately stay sober, I had to have a continued, real, and vested interest in other alcoholics.

“Welcoming the Newcomer” Michelle D., Delegate Panel 64, Area 78 Alberta/Northwest Territories

Hi, my name is Michelle D. and I am an alcoholic. I feel so honored and privileged to be serving Area 78, Alberta/Northwest Territories, as their Panel 64 Delegate to the General Service Conference. God continues to bless me with the gift of sobriety and provides me with more opportunities to serve this God-inspired fellowship.

Thank you to Area 80, Manitoba, for assisting our General Service Office in hosting this year’s Western Canada Regional Forum of Alcoholics Anonymous. This is my first official assignment as Area 78’s Panel 64 Delegate. My talk this evening is about “Welcoming the Newcomer.”

So what is a newcomer? Who qualifies to be a newcomer? One definition could be a person who may have short-term or long-term sobriety and is ready to practice the Twelfth Step of our recovery program by carrying the message to the still-suffering alcoholic. That person is then willing to begin giving back to other members by passing on the knowledge of the Big Book, and also by learning our service structure from our *The A.A. Service Manual* and other A.A. literature.

With a show of hands from the crowd, how many of you are here for your first Western Canada Regional Forum? Welcome to all the newcomers! We are all new at something at any given time. As we expand our horizons in sobriety, we become more confident and curious, and we hunger to help the still-suffering alcoholic. Our lives depend on it.

Our program encourages people to participate in service and this participation usually begins in the home group. This boils down to having good sponsorship, being led by example, and being shown enthusiasm for participation in A.A. Those who serve are in a position to make that work look attractive to newcomers by talking about the benefits of being active. Service work can be exciting and fun and those aspects of it need to be conveyed to others. Because rotation is vital, we need to work to get other newcomers especially involved in the work of A.A.

First of all, I believe it starts with a simple SMILE. When you smile, most people either think you're up to something or that you're a happy person—but it's also a sign of invitation and smiles are

contagious. The first letter in the word smile is “S.” *Showing* newcomers what service work is all about and *sponsoring* them into service by doing, not being. *Speaking about service* in meetings and during one-on-one time helps to generate interest in service. Our being supportive to the newcomer in service may help guide them spiritually. We understand they may be scared to serve, but by just showing them that being of sound mind can initiate a gentle, loving strength, and might give them confidence and strengthen their sobriety and serenity. By showing newcomers how to be selfless servants and how to overcome our selfishness, together we can become better examples of how this wonderful program works. This sometimes involves some silliness and fun.

The next letter in the word smile is “M”—meaning the joy of *meeting* other sober members of Alcoholics Anonymous. Meeting other fellows helps create strong bonds among those members, who work together for a cause or a purpose involving Twelfth Step work and sobriety. I always enjoy meeting newcomers at service assemblies and round-ups. When I was a newcomer attending my first forum or service assembly, I made it a point to try and meet the person who made some of the presentations. This can be an intimate time that the newcomer (along with myself) might find attractive in service. When newcomers meet other members from different groups, districts, or even areas, it helps to melt the awkwardness of service and warms the soul. These meetings in service create memories regarding service and restores confidence in the newcomer.

The letter “I” stands for the importance of making service work *informative, interesting, inspirational, and inviting* to the newcomer. It involves *intelligence* and *inclusiveness* of all members. The Western Canada Regional Forum is a great way for our General Service Office members to become intimate with us and it gives us all the sense that we belong and are a part of a whole. The circle of service begins with me and I need to be responsible in helping others find sobriety by showing them the program of recovery, as well as by doing service and giving back.

The letter “L” in the acronym SMILE stands for *listening, learning, loving, laughing*, and being blessed with having many *longtime friends for life*. But most importantly, the “L” also stands for *leadership*. Newcomers watch the members who are involved in service carefully and with curiosity. They watch our reactions and responses when they see us working and serving others. They learn to feel comfortable with those in service and are not afraid to lean on active members for support. They begin to understand that “Faith without works is dead.”

The last letter “E” stands for *enthusiasm, easy energy, and entertainment*. This service can be enlightening and sometimes exhausting if balance is not adhered to. This enthusiastic energy evolves into an efficacious existence in service. It gives us a purpose to serve and to practice our Twelfth Step.

This brings us back to the first part of my talk—a SMILE comes to our face when we see a newcomer find sobriety, or when a newcomer believes in a Higher Power for the first time, or when a newcomer sees the benefits of serving and feels warm inside and out, leaving them with a permanent smile on their heart and mind.

So keep it simple and remember, it's important to SMILE when serving in our fellowship. It provides relief, relaxation, and brings about another day of sobriety. A smile can go a mile. So let us all share many SMILEs this weekend by extending our hands and our hearts to our newcomers in service.

Welcome to Western Canada Regional Forum, my friends! A world of SMILEs awaits us as we all continue to learn, laugh, and love while serving this wonderful fellowship of Recovery, Unity, and Service. Please pass on your smiles with God's gentle grace and patience.

“Carrying the Message: Our Primary Purpose” Clint M., Delegate Panel 64, Area 80 Manitoba

I want to thank the General Service Office for sponsoring this forum and giving me the chance to share a bit on the topic of “Carrying the Message: Our Primary Purpose.”

The idea that we, as members of A.A., carry the message comes from the Twelfth Step in our program, which states “Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.”

There are many ways that we do this. Personally, I enjoy attending and sharing at my home group's meetings, chairing treatment facility meetings at a local hospital, and answering phones for our central office from time to time in addition to carrying out my duties as a delegate. For me, these are all examples of ways that I try to practice my Twelfth Step and carry the message to other alcoholics.

Other members get involved with service committee work, correction facilities meetings, representing their groups as G.S.R.s or intergroup representatives, opening clubrooms, chairing meetings, and performing many other service functions as part of their programs.

Carrying the message is a vital part of our program and our ability as individuals to remain sober and experience personal growth. Just as it says in our book *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, “It is the great paradox of A.A. that we know we can seldom keep the precious gift of sobriety unless we give it away.” And so as a fellowship, we unite around this singleness of purpose.

As individuals with lives outside of the Fellowship, we can feel free to get involved with other activities in related or unrelated fields such as counseling, psychiatry, or medicine. But when we look at ourselves as groups of A.A. members, Tradition Five tells us that “Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.”

The reason carrying the message is our primary, if not only, purpose is not exclusively because we have a moral obligation to share the solution we have found, but also to ensure our own survival and to ensure that we continue to be here for the still-suffering alcoholic and future generations of alcoholics.

In doing research on this topic, I came across a pamphlet published by A.A.W.S. entitled “Information on Alcoholics Anonymous.” In addition to providing general information for newcomers or anyone referring people to our program it describes what A.A. does and does not do.

Under the caption “What Does A.A. Do?” the pamphlet describes how members share their experience with anyone seeking help with a drinking problem, introduces our Twelve Step program, and talks about group meetings.

Under “What A.A. Does Not Do,” the pamphlet lists many more items, such as not keeping attendance records; not making medical or psychological diagnoses; or not providing housing, food, clothing, jobs, money, or any other welfare or social services to other members.

More frequently at my home group we notice some members dealing with and discussing problems other than alcohol at our regular meetings. For example, many introduce themselves as addicts or alcoholic-addicts and sometimes tend to discuss their other problems when sharing.

I’ve heard many concerns that our personal recovery, as alcoholics, is in jeopardy at times because of the amount of sharing on problems other than alcohol. Problems that, as alcoholics, we can’t always identify with.

I feel that when it comes to dealing with these outside problems, we, as members, have a responsibility to inform others about the primary purpose of our fellowship. There are many ways that we can do this, such as through sharing at meetings; holding Tradition meetings; encouraging sponsorship; and making literature available both within and outside our fellowship. My home group holds open meetings, where anyone who is interested can attend and learn more about our program of recovery. We are also currently running a Tradition meeting on Thursday evenings.

Our treatment facilities meetings provide an example of a meeting format where there is usually a mix of people who might describe themselves as alcoholics, addicts, both, or maybe even completely undecided. We conduct these meetings using essentially the same format that we would if it was an open meeting at our home group, and we stick to our primary purpose. Our hope is that the message will reach the still-suffering alcoholic regardless of the fact that there are others present and probably sharing on problems unrelated to alcohol. It is a real boost for our group to see a newcomer find their way to one of our regular meetings as a result of those hospital meetings.

As newcomers, it can take some time for the fog to clear enough and we are able to figure out whether we are in the right place or not. I personally didn’t understand much about our fellowship or the program of recovery when I first walked through the doors. I came in just hoping that I might find some kind of a solution. It was through the sharing of the group’s members that I was able to identify with others and understand enough to start feeling that I was in the right place and to start working our program of recovery.

Through the unique experience that each of us has had and our ability to identify with each other we will always, I believe, have the best solution for the alcoholic looking for an answer. As a fellowship we must remain united around our singleness of purpose, but we also have a responsibility to inform people both within and outside our membership of our primary purpose and what that means. Hopefully as sober alcoholics we can do this with love and tolerance for others. The responsibility rests with us.

“Spirit of Trust” Carolyn W., Delegate Panel 63, Area 79 British Columbia/Yukon

Hello friends! My name is Carolyn and I am an alcoholic. It is an honor and a privilege to serve as the Panel 63 Delegate for British Columbia/Yukon Area 79. It is truly a gift to be surrounded by everyone here this weekend.

Like most members, when I came to A.A. after being “beaten into a state of reasonableness,” I was led through our Twelve Steps and introduced to our Twelve Traditions. The inevitable result of this work was a spiritual awakening which has allowed me to learn, trust, and learn to be trustworthy.

It was first at my home group and then later as a General Service Representative that I learned to trust the process. At my first voting assembly the trust aspect of our program really came together. I had never seen people disagree so strongly and still be respectful of one another. It was the beginning of a deep trust in the process of the group conscience in Alcoholics Anonymous.

The short form of Tradition Two reads: “For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.” Therefore, God is in charge; God is loving; and God speaks to us through our group conscience. Our leaders are servants and do not govern, and we are to trust them with that responsibility. When it is our turn to be a leader we must be a servant and be trustworthy. It sounds simple enough, but there are challenges faced at every service level and thankfully we are provided much guidance through our Traditions and our Concepts.

At the end of the essay on Concept One, Bill wrote “Therefore we believe that we see in our Fellowship a spiritualized society characterized by enough enlightenment, enough responsibility and enough love of man and of God to insure that our democracy of world service will work under all conditions. We are confident that we can rely upon Tradition Two, our group conscience and its trusted servants.”

Sometimes when I am experiencing a crisis of trust I read that passage and am comforted to know that our founding members had enough faith in God and in A.A. to trust those newer than themselves to take responsibly for A.A.’s future. If they could do that, then I certainly can do the same.

This brings up an important point. The spirit of trust is not only about trusting our Conference, our General Service Board, our A.A.W.S. and A.A.G.V. boards, and the executives and staffs; it is equally important that we have trust and respect for *all* of our trusted servants—our G.S.R.s, our D.C.M.s, my group’s secretary, the folks who form our events committees, our friends at our intergroup offices, and my fellow A.A. members. Trust must travel both up and down our inverted triangle.

The “Right of Decision” in Concept Three speaks very specifically to trust at all levels of our service structure. It is here that we learn the difference between an order taker and a service leader. We learn that although we must consult widely to become informed, listen carefully to the group conscience, and report fully on our actions; we are equally responsible to consider all viewpoints and are called on to always act on what we truly believe to be best for A.A. as a whole.

We can again consult Bill's essays on the Concepts for some words of wisdom. He explains why we do not need to have any fear about relying on our trusted servants to use this Right of Decision: "There will always be plenty of ultimate authority to correct inefficiency, ineffectiveness, or abuse. . . . These remedies are ample and direct. But for so long as our world services function reasonably well—and there should always be charity for occasional mistakes—then 'trust' must be our watchword, otherwise we shall wind up leaderless. . . . The 'Right of Decision' that we offer them is not only the practical means by which they may act and lead effectively, but it is also the symbol of our implicit confidence."

This brings me to Concept Five, which states that: "Throughout our structure, a traditional 'Right of Appeal' ought to prevail, so that minority opinion will be heard and personal grievances receive careful consideration." It is much easier for me to *listen* to the minority voice than to *be* the minority voice. I can find it hard to express my views when I am in the minority. We learn in Concept Four about the "Right of Participation" and that "There are no 'superiors,' no 'inferiors,' and no 'advisers.'" But I sometimes feel that I shouldn't say anything in these situations. I know that this is really just my defects, my alcoholic pride, and my drive for security that makes me fear conflict and seek approval. I believe that each of us has not only the right but also the responsibility to speak up when we are in the minority, and to persist when we have questions that have not been answered.

Concept Nine talks about leadership in A.A. My experience is that to be an effective servant of A.A. I must not only walk in a spirit of trust, I must be trustworthy. It is much easier for me to have trust in you when I, myself, am trustworthy.

Finally, I would like to close with one more piece from Bill's essays on the Concepts. This is from Concept Twelve, Warranty Six; although he is speaking of the Conference I think that all of us can apply this to our service at every level, and I think it is beautiful: "Therefore we expect that our Conferences will always try to act in the spirit of mutual respect and love—one member for another. In turn, this sign signifies that mutual trust should prevail; that no action ought to be taken in anger, haste, or recklessness; that care will be observed to respect and protect all minorities; that no action should ever be personally punitive; . . . "To a man, we of A.A. believe that our freedom to serve is truly the freedom by which we live—the freedom in which we have our being."

Thank you so much for the opportunity to share with you and to participate in the Western Canada Regional Forum today.

PAST TRUSTEES' SHARING

Murray M., past trustee-at-large/Canada 2003-2007

My time serving as trustee-at-large has been a journey, and one that I can smile at. I've been thinking about my talk since I knew I was coming to this forum. But of course, there is the talk you think about, the talk you give, and then, after you've finished, the talk you wished you gave. We all have collections. Some of us collect dolls, shoes, cars, or maybe pictures. I have a collection of mementos as I travel in A.A. service. I have an assortment of nametags that identify where I've been. When I was drinking, I needed those kinds of reminders to tell me where I was — it's a hard habit to break. I have another collection that is my memories of A.A. service. One of them will be this. Today, I want to share with you two items from my collection. One is the day that I heard I was elected as trustee. On that day, I was sitting at my kitchen table with a sponsee of mine. The phone rang. I answered it, and it was our area delegate, Marie. She was at the Conference. She said, "Pack your bags, Murray; you are going to New York." Later, my sponsee said I went completely white.

I'd only put my name forward because I did not want our area to *not* have a nominee in the election. Since we already had a trustee from Area 85 who was elected as Eastern Canada Regional Trustee, I knew lightning would not strike twice, so I felt comfortable in putting forth my name. I knew I needed to talk to someone, so I went to see my sister. I was shaking and white, and I explained it to her. She said, "Well . . . isn't this a good thing?" I said, "Oh, yes, it's a wonderful thing." She said, "I know what is going on with you — you are scared. Your A.A. family just got so big, it's right around the world." I was afraid to face that kind of responsibility. I'd given up on what I'd learned in A.A., all I had to do was let go and let God. And A.A. would have a hand there to help me. And they did. Every time I went to attend a board meeting, other trustees would be there to orient me to what the duties were. Every time they said, you are going to Poland, Belarus, China, or wherever, I had to remember where I came from. I was a bar drunk who always dreamed of traveling. I liked to sit at the bar and dream of having wine on the Riviera. But the longest distance I ever traveled was from the bar stool to the floor. But in A.A., simply by doing what I was told, putting one foot in front of the other, trusting in the Fellowship, asking for help and getting into service, every position I ever took I worked myself into it by learning it. I did it all the same way: Trusting God, reaching out to the Fellowship, and doing the preparation.

The second memory I offer you is this: The international desk at G.S.O. told me that we had received an invitation to Belarus, one of the former Soviet countries, and I was going. I was told to make my own travel arrangements. At the time, it was still very much a police state. I got a contact name — Vladimir — and I emailed him. I had the name of the hotel and the dates of the event and I showed up to the airport. Somewhere over the Atlantic Ocean, I realized that I didn't know Vladimir's last name, I didn't know how to get from the airport to the hotel, and I didn't have any Russian money. Uh-oh, I thought. Here we go again. But when I landed in Minsk, there was a man holding up a piece of paper. And on that piece of paper was the circle and triangle of A.A. It has always been that way. Thank you.

Tom K., Western Canada region trustee, 2004-2008

I was privileged to serve as regional trustee from 2004 to 2008. My service experience began at a forum in Regina; I was about 3 years sober. I didn't have a home group, I had no service experience, and I just happened to be at work late one afternoon. One of my colleagues was a volunteer at that particular forum, and he happened to notice me and said, "Tom, what are you doing this weekend? We could sure use your help." If he'd had said, "It would be good for you if you went," I would like to think I would have gone, but I don't know. But, when he said that they needed my help, well, that was different. I thought, "Well, I'm not doing anything this weekend, I guess I can help out." So I went with them. I don't remember anything that was said. But I do remember the head table, where the servants of the day were dressed respectfully. I remember that there was sharing and I remember the spirit of that room — of the maybe 200 people there. By the time I had left that forum, the spirit in that room and my first glimpse of the depth and breadth of the Fellowship had changed my entire perception of what I belonged to. I went from a floater who attended meetings when it was convenient, to having this. It is no accident that many of you are here. Continue to put your hand up; don't bother about whether you know enough or what. The process will sort you out. Let a higher power working through you take care of it, because service is part and parcel of recovery. Put your hand up and you will be amazed at where it will take you and what it will give you to share with others. Don't stop inviting people and don't stop putting your hand out.

JoAnn L., trustee-at-large/Canada, 2007-2011

I know everyone here on the dais, but there are new faces I do not know, and I am happy I do not know them — because if I ever get to the place where I do not see new faces, then it will mean that we are not growing and moving forward. I was elected as trustee-at-large/Canada in 2007 and I served until 2011. Prior to that, I was a Panel 52 delegate from Manitoba. My sponsor is here today. After 42 years, she still goes to meetings. I want to thank her, because so many people come to A.A., get what they need, and then go away. And A.A. doesn't need that. New people in A.A. need those people who have experience staying sober to keep on coming to meetings. Someone mentioned our Class A trustees, they asked why we needed them and what they get out of their service. It brought an experience to mind. I was at a conference board weekend, and Bernard Smith's sister came to our dinner. She was quite elderly, but she went up to the microphone and began to thank us for making her brother a better person. For making her brother have more understanding than he ever would have if he hadn't met us. Isn't that wonderful? To know a family member of a Class A trustee feels that way about Alcoholics Anonymous?

When I was rotating in 2011, I was asked to attend a national convention in Mexico City and it was at the Aztec Stadium. In San Antonio, at the International Convention we had 52,000 people and there we had 80,000 Mexican people. And I'm walking in; a young girl meets me in order to walk me right into the middle of Aztec Stadium. She asks me how long I'd been sober. At the time, it was 26 years. And she said, "Oh. I'm not even 26 years old." And I went, "So, what?" And we had a little talk, and it was wonderful. Because then I asked her, "How long are you sober?" She said, "Three months." I said, "I was three months sober, once. Keep staying sober." And as we walked in, she looked around and she was so proud, because these were her people, and she was walking right into the middle of them. And when I got up there and introduced myself and sent greetings from the General Service Office of the United States and Canada, I was so proud to be your hand, your hug, because I was representing you. I was so proud to be the voice from (as they call it) "the land of Bill and Bob." I use the following with the

permission from the dear lady I first heard it from: My story is what it was like, what happened, and what I was wearing. Thank you for my sobriety and please keep coming back.

Vic P., Western Canada region trustee, 2008-2012

What I did to get up here — on this dais, you already know. But what it *took* me to get up here was ending up in a hopeless state of mind and body. That's a prerequisite for this. This weekend, I was watching the first-time forum attendees. They are the future trustees of Alcoholics Anonymous. Here, at these events, is where you develop a vision that is big enough to allow you to keep going in Alcoholics Anonymous. I think that's what I get out of this. I listen to Phyllis nearly choke up over the letter from Zimbabwe about someone who is blown away, emotionally, by a box of Daily Reflections. I also remember Elaine McDowell, who used to work for the U.S. State Department. Elaine used to get off a plane with a whole brigade of bodyguards. But then she'd fly to Cameroon for A.A. where someone picks her up in a jeep and drives her into the middle of the jungle in the middle of the night — for an A.A. meeting. I love the unity that we experience here. It is not the unity of a group, but the unity of feeling and sensing that we are part of a huge organization that creates miracles.

Every time we put money in the basket we are connecting ourselves to those things that are happening all around the world. That simple act of putting money in the basket is the most spiritual thing we can do, that gesture is one of connecting ourselves to others. And it is the easiest way to do it. I don't want to get into hockey and Canada and all of that — but there is something about watching Olympic hockey playoffs. And you know, it's the same kind of feeling I get when I go to A.A. events like this. I attend A.A. events all through the year, but the playoff feeling? Well, to me, that's the regional forum! My blood gets flowing and I feel like I am really connected to something — this is the premier moment in A.A. Thank you.

“CLOSING REMARKS”

Terry Bedient, Class A (nonalcoholic) Trustee, General Service Board chairperson:

We are in the presence of giants of A.A. I'm delighted and privileged to serve with all of you. It has been said that 18 million people in the U.S. and Canada suffer from a life-threatening problem. Not drinking is not the solution. The solution is spiritual growth and application of the Twelve Steps in all aspects of our lives. Former Class A trustee, George Valliant, wrote that service is linked to survival and survival to spirituality. It is not just a lonely guru on a mountaintop. Spirituality includes service. Your presence here this weekend demonstrates your commitment to service and to growth along spiritual lines. Dr. Bob said that it all comes down to love and service. I like that he put "love" first. This weekend, in Winnipeg, I think that we have all felt that love. The spirit of gratitude has been alive and well here this weekend. We have talked about the importance of sponsorship, the need for inclusiveness, and special needs communities. I've sensed the serenity that comes not from the absence of problems, but from the presence of a higher power.

I sense great enthusiasm with the electronic media initiatives of Grapevine and A.A.W.S. At the same time, I am reminded that fighting isolation is key to ongoing sobriety.

It is easy in today's world it is easy to buddy up with a laptop or a smart phone or a television instead of a real person. And that can be a challenge for all of us, just as we are challenged to effectively utilize technology to deliver our message of A.A. To deliver that message, A.A. must be a clear and authoritative voice that can be sorted out and heard in the midst of misinformation and uninformed personal opinion. We are Alcoholics Anonymous, not Alcoholics Invisible. In a Grapevine article called "A.A. Tomorrow," Bill W. wrote that "[We] of A.A. can never set any hampering limitation upon the ultimate destiny of ourselves and our Fellowship, nor any whatever upon God's love for us all. Individually and collectively, structurally and spiritually, we shall ever need to build for the future."

Today, every successful mutual help group in the world is modeled after your Twelve Steps. No other group in the world comes close to providing your kind of support to others suffering from a common illness. In the Grapevine, a member wrote, "When I drank, I had a drinking problem that I could not handle. When I stopped drinking, I had a living problem I could not handle." For those who are restless, irritable, and discontent, drinking is not the solution. And not drinking is not the solution. The solution is spiritual growth through application of the Twelve Steps in all aspects of our lives. Thank you for the opportunity to serve.
