

FINAL REPORT

SOUTHEAST  
REGIONAL FORUM

NOVEMBER 16-18,  
2018

STERLING, VIRGINIA

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

Dear A.A. Friends,

Please mark your calendar for the next Southeast Regional Forum, which will take place in Biloxi, Mississippi on the weekend of December 4-6, 2020 at the Golden Nugget Biloxi.

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# INTRODUCTION

The 2018 Southeast Regional Forum was held in Sterling, Virginia. Registration for the Forum was **432**. This included **288** members attending their very first Forum—many were welcomed at the Forum Orientation on Friday evening. In addition, the Southeast Regional Forum marked the **210th** Regional Forum since their inception in 1975.

# DELEGATE PRESENTATIONS

## **A.A. and Social Media—Jon P., Delegate Panel 68, Area 64 Tennessee**

Good morning to all attendees of the 2018 Southeast Regional Forum. My name is Jon P. and I am an alcoholic. I'm currently serving as the Panel 68 delegate for Area 64 Tennessee. I'd like to send a big thank-you to our Southeast Regional Trustee Cathy B., Steve S. from our G.S.O. staff and everyone else that has played a part in putting this Forum together. A special thanks goes out to you all for allowing me the opportunity to present on a topic that is near and dear to my heart: "A.A. and Social Media." Because this is such a broad subject and we are limited on time, I'd like to specifically address secret Facebook groups in this presentation.

We've witnessed an explosion of private Facebook groups for A.A. members over the last few years. By a show of hands, I'd like to see how many people here belong to at least one secret Facebook group for A.A. members. Ideas and opinions tend to run to extremes when it comes to this movement. I've heard some say that secret Facebook groups have delivered a crushing blow to our unity because they are laced with controversy and discord. I know others that swear by them and believe that more A.A. members are plugged in to A.A. as a whole than ever before as a result.

Whatever your opinion may be, I'd like to take a moment to share my experience with secret groups. Shortly after I got sober in 2009, I removed myself from Facebook for various reasons. In 2015 my friend and fellow D.C.M. at the time, Shane S., talked me into returning to Facebook because he felt I was missing out on a lot of A.A. information that was being disseminated in these secret groups. Shortly after I returned to Facebook, Shane brought me on as admin for a secret group called Southeastern Servants, a.k.a. S.E.S. I instantly fell in love with the idea of secret Facebook groups for A.A. members.

S.E.S. was primarily focused on general service, and it felt as though I had an interactive workshop that could be accessed at any time of the day or night. As our group evolved and grew, I watched and listened to more and more A.A. members become not only interested in but actively engaged in what was going on in our Fellowship. I had been buried in our literature since I had gotten sober, but at this point I started to get a large-scale understanding of the different viewpoints and opinions that our membership has on an endless variety of topics. I also joined other secret groups and, as a result, established countless new friendships with A.A. members from around the globe. I had the opportunity, at the opening dinner of the 68th General Service Conference, to meet two gentlemen I'd had a friendship with through secret groups for a few years for the first time. We all said laughingly, "I guess you really do exist!" Shane — now the Area 64 alternate delegate — and I still admin this secret Facebook group today. We have also brought our Area 64 secretary on as a third admin. The idea of rotating admins has been kicked around, and it will be interesting to see how this movement evolves as we move forward.

Like anything else in and around Alcoholics Anonymous, this journey into secret Facebook groups has not come without many obstacles. Some of those issues have been anonymity, bullying and harassment, criticism, fear of or a lack of understanding about technology, and

misinformation being spread within the groups. Let's take a moment to address some of those issues and talk about the solutions we've discovered for them.

With advancements in technology, anonymity is a principle that will constantly need to be revisited. It's been an ongoing process with Facebook for sure. Our A.A. Guidelines on the Internet state that, "When we use digital media, we are responsible for our own anonymity and for protecting that of others. When we post, text, or blog, we should consider whether we are publishing at the public level. When we break our anonymity in these forums, we may inadvertently break the anonymity of others." The Guidelines go on to say, "Experience suggests that it is in keeping with the Eleventh Tradition to not disclose A.A. membership on social-networking sites as well as on any other website, blog, electronic bulletin board, etc., unless composed solely of A.A. members and password protected." In our private Facebook group, we have established a vetting process for new member requests to make sure this cherished principle of anonymity is upheld. It's really simple, too. When a current member requests to add a new person we reach out to the current member to confirm that the requested addition is indeed a member of Alcoholics Anonymous. Quite often members accidentally send requests to add new people who are not A.A. members. This vetting process prevents us from approving those requests.

Next let's tackle bullying and harassment. Our service piece "Safety and A.A.: Our Common Welfare" specifically addresses bullying. As most of you have probably witnessed, people can behave in pretty offensive ways while sitting in front of a keyboard. Although I have witnessed the maturity level of secret groups grow by leaps over the last few years, we still encounter the occasional bad apple. We have some pretty simple rules of engagement on our secret group to discourage inappropriate behavior. Name-calling and personal attacks are prohibited. Members get warned after the first offense and are removed from the group if the behavior continues. We believe it is important to create a safe platform where A.A. members feel comfortable bringing their thoughts and opinions on matters affecting A.A. today.

Lastly, I'll tackle perhaps the toughest issue we face: criticism. We try not to ignore criticism because sometimes it has merit. On other occasions it is a result of fear and a lack of understanding when it comes to technology. A couple years ago Shane, his wife, Ana, and I were invited to do a workshop on "Anonymity and Social Media" in a rural area of Tennessee. Two-thirds of the way through the workshop we came under attack when attendees started telling us that A.A. members should never talk about A.A. "anywhere" on the Internet! Other times we get approached by individuals complaining about the seemingly controversial content of secret groups and how it disrupts the unity of A.A. Well, some might think we're fighting, but I think we're finally talking. I heard past trustee-at-large/U.S. Don P. once say, "Controversy is the lifeblood of A.A." As long as we're communicating we'll get to a solution.

Thank you again for allowing me to present on a topic that means so much to me. If any of you have thoughts or opinions that differ from mine, I'd love to sit down over a coffee and discuss them with you this weekend. Really and truly, this movement is still in its infancy, and we have to work together to get the best possible results. To do that, communication is going to be the key. I hope you all have a great weekend.

**A Beginner's Guide to A.A. and Service Structure—Joyce C.**, Delegate Panel 67, Area 14 North Florida

Do beginners in A.A. understand what service is? To quote Bill W. in “A.A.’s Legacy of Service,” “Hence, an A.A. service is anything whatever that helps us to reach a fellow sufferer — ranging all the way from the Twelfth Step itself to a ten-cent phone call and a cup of coffee, and to A.A.’s General Service Office for national and international action. The sum total of all these services is our Third Legacy of Service.”

My first sponsor introduced me to service very simply. She’d say, “Please help me set up the chairs, make the coffee or clean up after the meeting.” Eventually she guided me to service beyond the group — into the general service structure.

The beginning of our A.A. way of life centers around meetings where we learn how to stay sober one day at a time and how to learn from and support each other — hopefully in a home group. But there is much more to learn about Alcoholics Anonymous — if we make ourselves available for service outside the group. For everything starts with the group.

Understanding our service structure can be a bit difficult because it is so unique. Most organizations have a president or CEO at the top but in Alcoholics Anonymous there is an “inverted triangle” that has the groups at the top then, following down the triangle: general service representatives, district committees, area assemblies, delegates to the General Service Conference and the General Service Board.

When introducing a sponsee into general service, I give them one of the least utilized pieces of our literature: *The A.A. Service Manual*. It offers such a wealth of information. Besides learning about the general service structure, they also get a good dose of our amazing history. I also point out the glossary because the glossary explains many of the terms we use so frequently, which might sound like Greek to a member that is new to service.

Now I’d like to talk about acronyms — one of my pet peeves. Believe me, I get annoyed with myself when I use them. I really hate it when someone uses acronyms and I don’t know what they stand for — I feel left out, dumb and not in the know. A newcomer to the service structure might feel that way, too, and I never want that.

I do my best to not use acronyms. But please don’t fault me because I will be using them here! However, I hope I will make it clear what they stand for.

The general service representative, or G.S.R., links the home group with the whole of Alcoholics Anonymous, or A.A., through participation in district and area assemblies, and they transmit ideas and opinions as well as facts. Through the G.S.R., the group conscience becomes a part of the collective conscience of our whole Fellowship.

Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., or A.A.W.S., publishes a great pamphlet entitled “G.S.R.: General Service Representative — Your Group’s Link to A.A. as a Whole.” For a new G.S.R., this pamphlet outlines responsibilities and useful sources of information. And, for the group, the pamphlet explains what to keep in mind when electing a G.S.R. We have a past delegate who often says, “A G.S.R. elected because they went to the bathroom might be your delegate some day!”

The G.S.R. joins G.S.R.s from other groups at district meetings. These G.S.R.s elect a district committee member — a D.C.M. Districts are made up of groups within a designated area where the D.C.M. can forward and receive pertinent information important to the area delegate, who carries information to and from G.S.O. — the General Service Office in New York, which is comprised of A.A. World Services, Inc., and the AA Grapevine, Inc. This is how and why each A.A. member and every A.A. group affects A.A. as a whole. The number of groups in a district varies widely, depending on the ability of the D.C.M. to communicate with the groups.

G.S.R.s and D.C.M.s attend area assemblies. Some areas encompass an entire state, but in states with higher populations there may be more than one area. In the beginning, assemblies were held only to elect a delegate to the General Service Conference. Now, at election assemblies that are held every two years, the G.S.R.s and D.C.M.s from the entire area elect area officers in addition to the delegate. Many area assemblies offer other activities, such as workshops, speakers and business meetings. Each area is autonomous in how they operate their area assemblies. In Florida, for instance, we have three areas and each holds quarterly assemblies.

So, you've elected a delegate to the General Service Conference. Now what? The A.A. groups of the U.S. and Canada rely on the General Service Conference to maintain the unity and strength of our Fellowship. It is vital to keep two-way communication between the groups and the Conference.

At the Conference, delegates meet alongside trustees (all volunteers; Class A: the amateurs, and Class B: the boozers), directors (volunteers) and paid staff for a week each April. The delegates meet in committees to discuss recommendations sent in by members of the Fellowship. Those are then presented to the entire Conference body for discussion and vote. Once approved by the Conference and the trustees, it is up to G.S.O., A.A.W.S. or the A.A. Grapevine to carry them out.

The General Service Office performs many functions that groups, districts, areas or central offices/intergroups cannot handle. Although G.S.O. looks like any other business office, it is quite different in many ways. There are paid staff positions held by A.A. members who rotate job assignments every two years. These assignments, lovingly referred to as "desks," for example include public information, literature, corrections, etc. This process ensures that there is always someone experienced for any particular desk.

I have brought along a couple of pamphlets for you that may make even clearer what I've talked about today: P24, "A Newcomer Asks," and P18, "Inside A.A. — Understanding the Fellowship and Its Services." I have been taught that whenever I have a question or a problem or I need help finding a solution, I should go to the literature. We are fortunate that early on our founders saw the need to keep our message pure, and we find that pure message in our literature.

Thank you for allowing me the privilege of serving Alcoholics Anonymous



**Carrying the Message to Remote Communities—Annie C.**, Delegate Panel 67, Area 15 South Florida/Bahamas/Virgin Islands/Antigua

Good morning. I am an alcoholic and currently serving as Panel 67 delegate for Area 15 South Florida, Bahamas, the U.S. & British Virgin Islands, Antigua, St. Maarten and the Cayman Islands. My name is Annie C.

When I received the loving invitation from our Regional Forums desk on the topic of “Carrying the Message to Remote Communities,” I thought, *This is easy!* But as I began to write this presentation I realized how many variations of remote communities there can be. I also realized how many various service committees have an opportunity to identify and assist in carrying the message to those members that are “underserved” or “remote.” At the 68th General Service Conference, the Conference Committee on Treatment/Accessibilities expanded its scope to include those in “underserved” or “remote communities.” It may appear that Remote Communities work may overlap that of Treatment/Accessibilities, P.I./C.P.C. and Corrections. While each of these committees have a specific need as well, Remote Communities work does have a specific need. Through cooperation with other service committees, we are hoping to fill the gap in overall Twelfth Step work by reaching out to various “inaccessible” communities that might not fall within the scope or vision of other committees. Remote Communities work, in essence, can “build bridges and fill gaps.”

From the description of Area 15, you may have noticed we have what people call “remote communities.” While some of these communities appear to be geographic, our area also contains pockets of communities in which language and/or culture make carrying the message of recovery a bit of a challenge. A challenge that we can overcome. Creating awareness of these underserved members is the first step. Explaining what a “remote community” both is and is not opens the door to a world of service opportunities. What you and I may consider a remote community may not be considered one by those that live there. “Far” does not necessarily equal “remote.”

Culture can be one area in which sharing our message of recovery is difficult. Oftentimes recovery comes slowly, with one member of the specific community reaching out to another — e.g., African Americans, women of Spanish heritage and, as we recently witnessed, Native Americans. This might sound a little bit like sponsorship, and maybe we can help get recovery into these communities with this type of shared experience — one alcoholic sharing with another. I need to be that walking Big Book. Our common bond of one alcoholic sharing with another is key. Sharing comes in many forms. We can share with literature such as our Big Book, specific and generalized recovery pamphlets, as well as Grapevine and La Viña magazines and articles.

But what if geography is an obstacle? How do we carry the message then? One of our island communities in Area 15 receives speaker CDs and has a lending library for its members. A couple of times a year a group of members from Grand Cayman embark on a weekend of fellowship and sharing to a sister island in Cayman Brac, where there are only two members in recovery. Another district sends Big Books and other literature to meet the needs of members in the Virgin Islands. Those of us that have easy access to Wi-Fi and Internet may not realize that some places don’t have access to these technological methods. So online meetings and video calls or chats are not possible.

In Area 15 we have two linguistic districts; both speak Spanish. We assist in providing as much literature and other information in Spanish as possible. With the cooperation of our Linguistic Committee we translate and interpret many of our area meetings and documents. A Spanish website was launched recently, and we are seeing an uptick in participation as a result. Unfortunately, there is much more work to be done. We are hopeful that the newly Conference-approved pamphlet for Spanish-speaking women will make its way to those not yet reached. Our Remote Communities Committee has discovered members that speak Haitian Creole and Russian. The members are working with other area committees, such as Treatment, P.I./C.P.C. and Corrections, to hopefully begin a dialogue to overcome the alcoholic stigma in these locations. Over the years our fellowship has been able to identify so many areas that can be labeled as “remote communities.” Recently we discovered that when a natural disaster hits a community or a remote community those areas can become even more remote or possibly isolated. Such was the case with the Florida Keys, the Bahamas and the Virgin Islands.

We are already familiar with geography, culture and language being the prime obstacles for a remote-community situation. But there are others. What about the military? Or those living in nursing homes? Or those individuals that are a part of LIM, or those members that cannot speak or hear? With the help of our General Service Office and staff, we can reach these underserved members. We, as individuals, groups, districts or area committees can request specific pamphlets, articles from Grapevine and yellow Guidelines, and we can then send wherever necessary. We can write letters or notes, provide tapes or CDs and, if possible, “drop by for a cup of coffee.”

This brings me to a thought that keeps running through my head. This is a “WE” program, and communication is a two-way street. Once a candidate is identified as a remote community, are we being mindful and sensitive to the needs of others? Are we building a relationship that benefits both sides? If we can answer yes, then unity and recovery between our communities will foster and grow.

In closing, when doing remote communities work, I need to ask myself these questions:  
Does it help the alcoholic?  
Does it help build unity?

If I can answer yes, and even if the alcoholic in question is me, then I have brought us one step closer to carrying the message to the alcoholic that still suffers — and that is service in action.

**Sponsorship and Service: Sponsoring in All Three Legacies—Roger W., Delegate Panel 68, Area 26 Kentucky**

Lately I hear either that we need strong sponsorship or that poor sponsorship is the root of problems with modern A.A. Strong sponsorship will solve Traditions violations or encourage service. Is poor sponsorship the culprit when it comes to participation in our Third Legacy of Service? Is strong sponsorship the solution?

With these questions in mind, I started exploring the history of sponsorship. How has it changed? When did we start talking about “service sponsors” or sponsoring members into service? Isn’t being a sponsor a type of service in and of itself?

The Akron pamphlet, written shortly after completion of the Big Book, has sections to both “The Newcomer” and “The Sponsor,” thus providing a picture of early sponsorship: “If you have never before brought anyone into A.A. this booklet attempts to tell you what your duties are by your ‘baby’ ... A word to the sponsor who is putting his first newcomer into the hospital or otherwise introducing him to this new way of life: You must assume full responsibility for this man. He trusts you. ... It is definitely your job to see that he has visitors, and you must visit him frequently yourself.”

The 1944 Cleveland pamphlet on sponsorship provided a step-by-step method for qualifying a prospect, sharing your story and introducing the newcomer to the program.

Another example of early sponsorship appeared in the September 1947 Grapevine. The Little Rock plan boasted a success rate higher than the “national average” of 75 percent and kept accurate records to confirm. When a person expressed a desire to get sober, they had a sponsor appointed who assigned tasks and presented prospects to the executive committee for membership consideration.

These examples suggest an intensive and very formal process for sponsoring newcomers in the early days. Growth and success began to impact the time sponsorship took, which began to shape changes. These changes are apparent each time there is major growth or a changing external environment — for example, post–World War II, the influx from treatment centers in the 1970s and ’80s and the current arrival of court-ordered visitors. Bill described this well at the 2nd General Service Conference in 1952:

“Consider also this matter of sponsoring new people. Since we have grown large in numbers, the careful attention that we used to give is perhaps sometimes denied new people. They come into our larger meetings. They wander about. Our sponsorship is still occasionally defective. We can do much about improving it. We can remember the kind of chance that somebody gave us, and the desire can again burn in us to give that next fellow his chance, and not leave the job to somebody else.”

It was at this Conference in 1952 that delegates expressed the groups’ need for a sponsorship pamphlet. The first version in 1953 included a description of sponsorship that remains in the pamphlet today: “Essentially the process of sponsorship is this: An alcoholic who has made some progress in the recovery program shares that experience on a continuous, individual basis with another alcoholic who is attempting to attain or maintain sobriety through A.A.”

Rapid growth in the 1970s occurred from a large influx of people from treatment programs. Our membership surveys show more individuals approaching the Fellowship from these programs than through A.A. members. Both the 1975 and 1976 *Final Conference Reports* record delegates exploring ways sponsorship was changing and what should be done to meet the needs of these newcomers. The 1975 Conference selected the theme for ’76: “Sponsorship: Our Privilege and Our Responsibility.”

Among others, Class A trustee Milton Maxwell shared concern about declining sponsorship: “Whether or not there is overall slippage in sponsorship, I believe it falls short in enough groups to be of general A.A. concern.” Funny how some things never change. I hear that a lot today.

This discussion of sponsorship may have helped delegates reflect on how they came to service. The first written use of the term “service sponsor” I could find is in the 1977 *Final Conference Report*. Responding to the question, “How can we familiarize service committees and groups with the Charter and Warranties?” delegates suggested discussing them with service sponsors.

The term was used in a 1979 Grapevine Box 1980 letter: “If your sponsor happens to be active in general service, you will probably be made aware of the priceless benefits to be derived from AA. ... If you have difficulty finding the answers ... try the nearest service sharing assembly, or go to your own service sponsor!”

Early uses of this term sometime referred to service examples who did not know they were being used or referred to as a “service sponsor.” The 1979 *Final Conference Report* includes Bill K. from Tennessee saying, “Lauretta, my service sponsor (she probably doesn’t know she is), gave me an A.A. Service Manual.”

This concept has grown into a more common practice today. In 1988 *Box 4-5-9* printed “Sponsorship: A Vital Stepping Stone to Service and Sobriety.” The article closed by requesting ideas for a service piece on service sponsorship. The following year, the Conference recommended the article itself be prepared as a service piece.

Does anyone know that this is available? It may need to be updated, but it is good. It states the obvious: those in general service sponsor how they were sponsored and introduce new members to the Traditions and Concepts — Three Legacy Sponsorship.

In 1994 text on service sponsorship was added to “Questions and Answers on Sponsorship.” This I believe has made the idea more available to more people — or at least to those who read our pamphlet literature.

I am thrilled that at least among those active in Alcoholics Anonymous the idea of sponsoring in all Three Legacies is a current positive trend — and one of tremendous potential. The service piece on this topic is a hidden treasure. It is a wonderful sharing session that is still relevant today. Get it and read it. Learning about sponsoring in all Three Legacies requires experience and sharing. So try it.

**Carrying the Message to Youth Courts—Lisa W.**, Delegate Panel 68, Area 37 Mississippi  
Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to talk about “Carrying the Message to Youth Courts.”

First, let me tell you a story about someone I used to know. She was an alcoholic and had reached the end of her rope, only she didn’t know it. Drinking was not a luxury; it instead had become a necessity. The relationships with her son and others had suffered and the ability to maintain her home had taken its toll. Her son was 12 years old at the time and trying his best to fit in. He was used to his mother’s drinking but she was too busy to notice what was going on around her — *until*.

The day came when she received a phone call from the school and she learned that her son had been caught drinking. The detention center would keep him overnight; a court session

would be held the next day and she needed to be there. She was hungover with a headache and the jitters. Her son had not only been drinking but had failed a drug test for marijuana. She said, "I almost fainted." Not her son. He was too young. What would she do? She noticed her supply had been off lately but she never related the two — until that moment. He would be on probation for the next six months, and he'd have to attend programs. Each week they attended information and education classes. Speakers told stories of their drinking. Her son said he was bored and, as a matter of fact, so was she.

They attended each session with her supporting him, but as soon as she could get home she would need a drink to calm her nerves. Since her son was so young there was no need to attend the meeting on alcoholism and the family. They were grateful for that. There were enough alcoholics in her family. Her son? Not so much; he was only 12. The day came when he got off of probation, she went to the bar to celebrate and the son was just left to do as he had always done: exactly what he wanted to do. Nothing changed ... until a few months later when his mother's behavior caught up with her.

She was ordered to treatment and she was told to go or go. *Not to get sober*, she thought, *but to rest*. Drinking had taken its toll. Something was changing. How? She wasn't quite sure. In the late 1990s house arrest was different than it is today; being locked down a person would do anything to get out of your house. The A.A. meetings were her escape. Little did she realize, her life began to change. She went back to the youth court judge and his administrator to tell them that she was wrong for being under the influence in their courtroom. They simply smiled as she told them about treatment and how she wanted to change her life. They said they were very much aware of her drinking and that a whole host of other new friends would come out if alcohol was not around. In a lot of cases the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. In some it was worse: the families never get sober and the nightmare continues. Their reply? "Start volunteering and help us." The road to a new and rewarding friendship began and continues to this day. You may wonder what happened to this mother and son. The son is now 33 with a family of his own. The mother? Well — as you know, this is my story. I went from someone I used to know, with no confidence and no faith in myself. Today, the delegate for Area 37 Mississippi.

Some go back out there, and some of them die. These youths are broken in spirit and in heart. Many end up on the streets because nobody is home. They are forming bad habits, with no goals in life. They are bankrupt on every level — spiritually, emotionally, mentally.

We have a golden opportunity to carry the message to our youth courts; this is what we must do. We need twelve-steppers who can show them love, dignity and a way of life they could not imagine. Don't miss the boat; help us tap into the youth of our future. This is a reservoir of future alcoholics. So, just how do we propose to do this? We go into these courts and carry the message of hope. If we don't, there may be no future for them. In some areas I know the work has begun but for most there is no awareness about the disease. There are some completely unaware of the underlying problem. When asked they have said, *You really think alcohol and drugs are playing a part in their consequences?* I have heard this on more than one occasion.

While reading the Corrections Workbook, I read over and over, *I started drinking when I was 13 ... 12 ... 8*, and I remembered my story. I encourage you to contact the court administrator

and ask, *What can we do? What do you need from us?* I spoke with one of our Class A trustees, Judge Lemelle, and asked him for his experience. He suggested putting literature racks in the courts; you cannot keep them stocked. We even leave extra literature with the staff. Parents — bored, patiently waiting — look to see what's available to read. The literature rack is there; they look cautiously to see if anyone is watching before they grab a pamphlet.

The detention centers are full. Oftentimes the youth are sent to another town if one is not local; that young person is alone. We ask the court if we can leave literature pertinent to recovery. When you are bored, reading will help pass the time. Educate the youth; let them know there is a better way to live. Give copies of A.A. and Al-Anon meeting lists with contact information. If you have an administration that is not familiar with A.A. and recovery, meet with them; plan a luncheon or workshop, prepare ahead of time by sending our literature to their staff and information about the direction you will be going when you meet. There are letters to judges for us to go by that can be found in the Corrections Workbook. I have discovered that if you give them the information when they arrive then they are not a well-informed group. Mailing it out in advance gives them an opportunity to prepare any questions they may have for the meeting. Let them know what A.A. is and what it is not. Getting the judge and his team on board with a clear understanding of what we are attempting to do opens doors for all the other work that needs to be done, and it makes that work just a little easier.

When youth courts have information and education classes and have pamphlets available for the entire family, ask permission for speakers. Getting to know the court staff and the probation officers helps us get into the youth courts and detention centers to carry the message. Let's get them while they are chickens instead of roosters. I was just told by the judge, *Look around when you are in the meetings. Where are the young people?* Identification can be everything. It is when one alcoholic speaks from the heart to another alcoholic that hope begins. Lives are restored. Let's utilize our experience, strength and hope in our quest to plant The Seed of Hope.

# WORKSHOP REPORTS

7-7:55 p.m.

**Supporting Grapevine: From Your Story to Service**—Moderator: Cate W., Chair AA Grapevine Corporate Board / Reporter: Ed L.

This workshop covered topics in the form of six questions answered by the Chair of the AA Grapevine Corporate Board, along with input and additional questions from workshop members. The first question: *What is the “Carry the Message” program?* addressed how the program gets Grapevine subscriptions to inmates who have requested subscriptions. Details included the link on [aagrapevine.org](http://aagrapevine.org) where subscriptions could be purchased for those behind the walls. Some useful questions were posed, such as “How can we make members more aware of this program?” In response, members were directed to the AA Grapevine website, literature, and a contact phone number and name at the Grapevine office. Members shared their experience as well, such as one A.A. who called facilities to see who wanted Grapevine subscriptions and then worked with individuals and groups to determine who was willing to sponsor those subscriptions.

The second question, *“How do I register as a new Grapevine Representative (GVR)?”* was answered with directions to the [aagrapevine.org](http://aagrapevine.org) website. There, filled out some forms could get a new GVR a Grapevine starter kit, bundles of past issues, and other materials — along with a monthly newsletter sent their email address. Workshop members were also reminded that the GVR handbook is a wealth of information for new committee members.

Third, in discussing *“What does the topic ‘From Your Story to Service’ actually mean?”* the moderator shared how the Grapevine calls for stories from the Fellowship. Topics to write about (and where to find them on the website), checklists to apply (use details!), and how to find and use the Editorial Calendar were discussed. “Dos and Don’ts” for writing stories were developed during writer’s workshops and will be shared by the AA Grapevine. These guidelines are important to share and follow so that A.A. writers can increase the probability of story publication, thus sharing a story with Grapevine readers, thus increasing the likelihood of helping another alcoholic.

In discussing the fourth query, *“How do we get more Grapevine representation at the group, district and area levels?”* it was revealed that it is very difficult to get representation at these levels. Members discussed showing states where there are few stories published and then targeting those states to get stories published. Other suggestions included the Grapevine “working on using the digital seven-minute stories now that they have been submitted” as well as a description of a District GVR who creates a bulletin board to take around to various groups so that there is visual aid to go along with their pitch to attract representation.

A fifth question, *“Are there any limitations to circulating the Grapevine?”* was responded to with examples of what to do (is it okay to approach doctors’ offices and other professionals to buy subscriptions? Answer: No, but it is okay for A.A. groups to purchase subscriptions and give them away, but it is not okay for non A.A. entities to sell subscriptions). Questions of cost difference between the Grapevine and other magazines were also discussed.

Finally, possible answers to the sixth question, “*Why aren’t more members buying Grapevine?*” included the thoughts that “many younger people are not reading hard copy books” and [there exists an] “information overload that people cannot keep up with, so it’s not a core part of their sobriety.” A solution may be “to have each home group develop and maintain a Grapevine table” and, of course, “Grapevine subscriptions for Christmas gifts are a good idea.”

**A.A. Around the World: Data Map**—Moderator: Scott H., Trustee-at-Large (CAN) / Reporter: Katherine Y.

This workshop consisted of a presentation of a live international map where the presence of A.A. is known in the world. The map can be drilled down to display information regarding G.S.O., intergroup, group, meeting and individual member information.

Comments and questions from members pertained to its use, what other information can be added, and the value of the Data Map.

Some questions and responses included:

“How can we make the information available to Fellowship?” In response, members queried, “Can we put it on the G.S.O. website?”

“Can it foster how we can focus on dark areas in the U.S. and Canada?” Yes — and discussion ensued on how it could be updated usefully.

A final question, “How do we encourage other countries to participate?” met with the response: “Country to country sponsorship is a good guide.”

Finally, members learned how the Data Map highlights how the inequality of wealth can influence participation — and this is being addressed by contributions made to people/countries in order to attend the World Service Meeting.

On the whole, the overall response to the workshop topic was enthusiastic and participants are looking at how to best use and access the map information.

**Staying Motivated in Long-Term Sobriety**—Moderator: Pat T. / Reporter: Chris E.

In this workshop, attendees were asked to consider what our old-timers (or long-timers) are experiencing. In response, attendees felt that there may be a general feeling of “nobody to talk to,” feelings that younger members challenge practices/ideas, and their “fresh ideas were scary and unnecessary.” Also — complacency.

A question was asked: “But what is dangerous?” Some responses included: Trying to do it alone. When old-timers don’t talk about their issues like health, aging, fears, etc., suicide and relapses can occur. Isolation is also a problem.

But what can we do? It seems the general cure for complacency and loneliness is service and sponsorship, but also attending meetings (new meetings). Look for someone that has a spark — offer to attend things together and stick them to you. Encourage old-timers to keep it green, be willing to change, stick with the winners, don’t take other peoples’ inventory, look for things to keep amazed, stay involved because there are always jobs to do. Younger members need experienced members to guide and teach (they possess what we desire). They can also be reminders of things long-forgotten. Encourage long-timers to keep commitments (serve full-



terms), stay involved, and teach the young and young in sobriety so A.A. can carry on to the next generation.

**A.A. Service**—Moderator: Linda W. / Reporter: Raven L.

Members focused on two topics in “A.A. Service.” The first topic focused on how to encourage people to get involved in service.

Members shared:

- People observe me doing service — show enthusiasm for whatever is needed;
- Show love and enjoyment of service;
- Ask ‘How can I be of service?’ and people will want what I have;
- Some shared the usefulness in trying to be “understanding” and of using the St. Francis Prayer;
- Others educated people about the importance of service to personal sobriety;
- Read the Bernard Smith essay in the A.A. Service Manual;
- Work one-on-one to encourage individual service;
- Be a service sponsor;
- Encourage service by sincere appreciation — individually and publically.
- Getting out of self gives us purpose in life and enriches sobriety;
- Share in meetings and share when you are telling your story;
- Use “The Three “I”s:” 1) Involvement 2) Inform 3) Inspire;
- Bring people in as ‘part of’ — feeling that we belong is important;
- Use prayer before district meetings to stay aligned in principle and to serve the district well.

The second topic discussed how to encourage people to stay involved and avoid burnout. Member comments included listening to the needs of people and, if you are a D.C.M., visit with all the groups. And, after rotation, continue to do other service — see what is needed — although it is OK to say no, as some may need to take time off from service. Furthermore, it is important to take only one job in the service structure.

**Who’s Not in the Room?**—Moderator: Clement C., G.S.O. Staff, Communication Services Assignment / Reporter: Jennifer Y.

Workshop attendees considered and shared on the question, ‘Who’s not in the room?’ We are aware that people of color, those with mental illness, invisible illnesses, and physical limitations may not feel welcomed, represented and/or included within A.A. There are many people missing, but we don’t know what to do about it. Some ideas shared to rectify this situation included using our Third Tradition: How are we reaching out to all who want it? To find those who are not in the room, and keep the hand of A.A. extended, we “need to become aware of and ask for help seeing our blind spots”; “Serve/reach out to underserved/underrepresented areas and groups”; “go where we are uncomfortable”; “Use the language of the heart over the language of birth”; “ramp up” young people’s events; and, finally, remember: “I am responsible.”

**Safety in A.A.**—Moderator: Amy B. / Reporter: El N.

*(Note: The notes for the two workshops on “Safety in A.A.” are combined.)*

The two workshops on “Safety and A.A.” focused on the development of a safety group plan based on past experiences or activities that could possibly occur. The framework for a plan

should emerge from well-informed group conscience and rest on our Traditions, not accepting unacceptable behavior and not allowing protecting someone's anonymity to be a cloak to cover inappropriate or illegal situations.

Keeping the meetings safe to share without fear of crosstalk is paramount. Crosstalk, as defined by one group, is giving advice to someone who shared, speaking directly to a person and not the group, or questioning or interrupting someone.

Through sponsorship or mentoring, a newcomer can learn about sober behavior and how to serve as a meeting chairperson. A chairperson can be effective in enforcing what has been adopted by the group regarding safety and meeting conduct. However, the group is the cornerstone of ensuring and maintaining a safe place.

Home group members or members gathered for any A.A. function should know how to implement well-thought out plans for handling identified behaviors that will not be tolerated. Plans should include directions, such as who to contact, what should be done, and the roles of members.

All members need to keep in mind our Responsibility Statement. This includes our responsibility to keep our rooms safe for all.

### **8:00 – 9:00 p.m.**

**Supporting La Viña: From Your Story to Service**—Moderator: Irene D., La Viña Editor / Reporter: Ed L.

Four questions were discussed, in some detail, at this workshop. They were: *“How can more Spanish-speaking women be accommodated in A.A. meetings?”* *“How are other areas accommodating Spanish-speaking meetings?”*, *“What is the importance of La Viña to A.A. as a whole?”* and *“Problems in receiving La Viña magazines.”* Other intended topics, such as *“How can La Viña be used as a useful tool for the Spanish-speaking alcoholic?”* and *“How do we increase the number of subscriptions for La Viña?”* were not specifically addressed.

In discussing the question “How can more Spanish-speaking women be accommodated at A.A. meetings,” members shared about the existence, though sparse, of such groups across the United States (In Illinois, one Spanish-speaking group is celebrating 50 years). Members also shared about the challenges of creating such a group: “Some central offices have not been willing to recognize Spanish-speaking women’s groups” and “there are 60 Spanish-speaking groups in Maryland, Virginia, and Washington D.C., but only 50 to 60 women in all these groups.” Workshop members gave input on what sometimes happens in these groups: “When women are present the topic can turn to sex, which distracts the group from our Primary Purpose. The women who stay “remain in spite of the disadvantageous environment.” Some solutions were shared, such as how, in one case, “the women did not have a separate meeting place, so they met right before the men (This meeting dissolved when they started attending the men’s meeting).” Members shared that “leaders must set appropriate examples.”

Workshop attendees discussed how other areas are accommodating Spanish-speaking meetings. For instance, in Georgia, there is “only one Spanish-speaking district for the entire

state.” Florida has an active linguistic district with a paid translator. There is a standing linguistic committee at the area, “and about eight years ago [they created a] second linguistic district.” In addition, “several women have served as chairpersons over the past four years [in Florida].” Furthermore, “Area 09 in mid-southern California has Spanish-speaking delegates, five Spanish-speaking districts, and in July of each year has a Spanish-speaking Foro. In addition, it has “Spanish-speaking co-chairs for 10 or 13 committees, and the annual La Viña celebration has resulted in 6,000 new La Viña subscriptions.”

In conclusion, members shared that “it is important that all areas provide equal opportunity for both English and Spanish-speaking members to be of service.” It was noted that there was “a national Spanish-speaking convention in Baltimore two years ago. English translation was provided and a trustee attended the event.”

The third topic discussed was “*What is the importance of La Viña to A.A. as a whole?*” This has been a theme in the past A.A. conventions. Members shared that “La Viña is a means of enriching our sobriety. It is a way of transmitting the message of A.A., which should never be held to ourselves, but shared. When I believe in something, like La Viña, others are more likely to see the importance for them, as well.”

Finally, workshop members discussed problems that some have had receiving La Viña magazines. Mentioned was how the current distribution is different. Workshop members were told that a new person has been enlisted in New York to deal with this distribution problem and Grapevine and La Viña staff is working with the distribution company to rectify and avoid this problem. Members were asked to continue to inform La Viña and Grapevine if the problem persists.

**A.A. Around the World: Data Map**—Moderator: Scott H., Trustee-at-Large (CAN) / Reporter: Peter C.

In a workshop discussing the Data Map, the presenter answered the question: “How can this be of use?” Data from the U.S. and other countries shows that the A.A. presence can range from individuals to G.S.O. offices. There is a benefit to travelers, and the information contained in the map is the same information that aa.org has — and it is kept centralized and accurate. Members were advised to keep the information in perspective — the Data Map is not a meeting finder. Members asked for a more detailed breakdown and some asked if we can “get copies of slides.”

**Sponsorship and Service: Sponsoring in All Three Legacies**—Moderator: Mary F. / Reporter: Jennifer S.

Workshop members were asked to consider, “What do you do when a sponsor says ‘no’ to one side of the triangle?” Members responded:

- We can’t communicate and we can’t help them. We can discuss what ‘going to any length’ means;
- It depends on where they are. Are they new? If so, we can show by example. However, sometimes there is nothing we can do if the person says, it is “just not for me”;
- One member shared, “Thank God I had a very gentle sponsor,” so be careful not to be too rigid as a sponsor;
- Lead by example — “Come with me”;
- If I’m not living it, I can’t give it;

- When sponsees are having difficulty, ask if they are involved in each part of the triangle.

Another question that workshop attendees responded to was, “Should I have a designated service sponsor?” In response, members shared:

- A good sponsor will participate in all three sides of the triangle;
- Another responded that it “seems unnatural to separate” — one sponsor should serve as a sponsor for service and personal sobriety;
- Another shared that she “picked her sponsor because she is all three legacies”;
- Finally, another shared, “We need to make service attractive and be enthusiastic to breed enthusiasm.”

**A.A. Service**—Moderator: Linda W. / Reporter: Raven L.

In a workshop covering the topic of A.A. service, attendees shared their experience in attracting others to service. To attract others to service, it is helpful to be an example of service, enthusiasm and love, as well as to do (responsibly) whatever is needed, and to lead by example. Cultivate humility as a servant, listen to the perspective of others, announce workshops, events, and what service is needed. Members shared how they pass around a signup sheet, then connect after meeting one-on-one. They also take sponsees and other A.A.s to accompany them in service and to other events (conventions, etc.). Remain happy, joyous and free. Remember to give back to the Fellowship which saved you what was so freely given to you. Also, encourage sponsees to get a home group, then do service in the home group and attend business meetings. Focus on people who are there—we have responsibility to inspire.

**Who’s Not in the Room**—Moderator: Clement C., G.S.O. Staff, Communication Services Assignment / Reporter: Kenneth C.

In this workshop, attendees were asked to consider ‘who is not in the room?’ Members were then asked to share their experience. In response, members shared that many types of alcoholics are missing due to race, religion, sexuality, gender identity, language, age, mental health condition, or beliefs. Many find it helpful to set up special meetings for A.A.s who find themselves “othered” but there is an impetus to find unity among the different groups as this will bring us all back to common meetings.

Workshop members were asked a second question: “How are we reaching out to all who need?” In the ensuing responses, members agreed that “change begins with us.” In addition, attendees said, “We have to recognize when we are stuck in our own comfortable bubble and reach outside of it.” Members shared that we need to be willing to be awkward (sometimes) and learn to be direct in addressing issues of diversity, meeting people where they are and being open to listening to those who we are trying to reach out to about what “effective outreach” is for them.

# FULL FORUM

## PRESENTATION/WORKSHOP

### **A Vision for the Future of the Fellowship**—Elliot B., Delegate Panel 67, Area 71 Virginia Introduction

Did you know that only 9 percent of the estimated 15.7 million alcoholics in this country are A.A. members? That's right: according to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 15.7 million Americans suffer from what the medical community is now calling "Alcohol Use Disorder," yet only 1.4 million Americans are in A.A. While the U.S. population has grown over the past 25 years, A.A. membership has stagnated. Why is this? Are there just fewer drunks out there today than there were in the past? Anecdotal evidence suggests there are more drunks out there than ever.

### The World Has Changed

I get that not all of these potential alcoholics may want to walk through the doors of A.A. Early in my life I didn't want anything to do with quitting drinking, much less joining A.A. But I'd be willing to bet that there are people out there who would like to be here with us — they just don't know we exist, or they might have misconceptions about A.A. that have kept them away.

The world was a lot different when I got sober back in the mid-1990s. I found my first A.A. meeting by looking up Alcoholics Anonymous in the phone book. There it was neatly listed in alphabetical order, right near American Airlines. I called from a phone that we rented from the phone company, which was attached to the kitchen wall. I spoke with the office manager at Richmond Intergroup. She gave me the location of an A.A. meeting and I checked my Rand McNally paper map to figure out where it was located.

I'd like to ask every one of you to stop for a moment and think about how you get and consume information in 2018. Think about how you get information pertaining to Alcoholics Anonymous, whether you are looking for a meeting when you travel or searching for the agenda for this assembly. Think about how you communicate with your sponsees and other A.A. members.

Today, most Americans do not own a phone book. Of those Americans who do own a phone book, only 11 percent of them actually use it. Ninety-five percent of Americans now own some type of cell phone. Seventy-seven percent of Americans own a smartphone, such as an iPhone or a Samsung. In 2018, 97 percent of Americans find most of their information online. Isn't that incredible! Google dominates web searches: Almost 70 percent of Internet searches in the United States are Google searches. Social media has quickly become a significant way that Americans get and share information. Seventy percent of adults in the U.S. use some type of social media. Ninety percent of millennials use some form of social media. YouTube and Facebook dominate the market with a 70 percent share but Instagram is quickly gaining ground, especially with teenagers. Roughly three-quarters of Facebook users and around six-in-ten Instagram users visit these sites at least once a day.

### A.A. Is Not in That World

So why am I sharing all of these stats today? What is my point? My point is that most Americans today live in a world of Google searches, Facebook posts, Instagram stories and text conversations. At the same time, we as a Fellowship have only scratched the surface of that world. Potential members make Google searches related to alcoholism only to find pages of for-profit organizations that promise to fix their problems — and for a sizeable fee, of course. These potential members also wade through pages of online criticism about A.A. Alcoholics Anonymous has been criticized for being backward, for being cult-like, for being closed, and for thirteenth-stepping. A.A. has a number of websites, including aa.org, that contain accurate information about us but in most cases our official website comes up as the third or fourth result of Google searches. When was the last time any of you went to the third or fourth page of a Google search? Thankfully, we are making inroads online with the launch of YouTube accounts for A.A.W.S. and the Grapevine, but we still have no presence on any other form of social media.

### We Have So Much to Offer

Our scant online presence breaks my heart because we have so much to offer the still-suffering alcoholic! We embrace such timeless principles: humility, love, tolerance, acceptance, courage, faith, forgiveness. We offer a successful method of recovery that has stood the test of time and is a hell of a lot cheaper than just about any other alternative. We offer a place for fellowship and support. We offer our help free of charge and with no strings attached.

### Primary Purpose and Responsibility Statement

Let's take a moment to remember why we are all here. Our Fifth Tradition says that our primary purpose is "to carry [the] message to the alcoholic who still suffers." This Tradition is reinforced in our Responsibility Statement, which states: "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." Unfortunately, the hand of A.A. is rarely there when people search for us online. The hand of A.A. does not exist on popular social-media platforms, either.

So what is stopping us from having a more robust online presence? Some members will point to our Eleventh Tradition, which asks us to guard against breaking anonymity at the level of press, radio and film. (The Internet is clearly in the public domain.) But consider this: Having our General Service Office invest in search-engine optimization does not break any A.A. member's personal anonymity in any way. How about social media? Having G.S.O. launch Instagram or Twitter accounts that provide basic information about what we are all about does not break any member's personal anonymity in any way, either. AI-Anon has been very successful with their presence on social media. They have robust Instagram and Twitter accounts that I follow. Does following an AI-Anon social-media account mean that I am somehow violating my own personal anonymity? No, it does not. Following an AI-Anon account simply means that I have an interest in the organization. I could be a doctor or other member of the professional community following AI-Anon's Instagram account.

My sense after talking with many A.A. members about this topic is that fear is holding us back. So many members are afraid of messing this thing up. But what if we stopped for a moment to simply recognize fear as the bad actor that it is and walk through that fear with faith and courage? Think about the intent of our Twelve Traditions. They articulate the way our society

functions and how we relate to the outside world. Not one of our Traditions was designed to be used as a barrier to getting our message of recovery out to the still-suffering alcoholic.

I don't know about you, but I always find comfort quoting Bill Wilson's many useful nuggets of knowledge contained throughout our literature when I face the spirited topic of change in our Fellowship. Bill must be spinning in his grave as I quote his words. He must be thinking something like, *I turned over guardianship of the Fellowship almost 70 years ago and you are still quoting me.* With that said, I'll quote him. Bill talks about the importance of vision in his essay on Concept IX. He says that, "Vision is ... the ability to make good estimates, both for the immediate and for the more distant future." He goes on to say that, "Some might feel this sort of striving to be a sort of heresy, because we A.A.'s are constantly telling ourselves, 'One day at a time.' But that valuable principle [of one day at a time] really refers to our mental and emotional lives ... [and not to planning for the future]." Bill writes, "As individuals and as a fellowship, we [will] surely suffer if we cast the whole job of planning for tomorrow onto a [foolish] idea of Providence. God's real Providence has endowed us ... with a considerable capacity for foresight, and He evidently expects us to use it."

I'm using his words to help us see that having the vision to ask questions about what we want A.A. to look like in the future is so important. After all, wasn't it Bill Wilson that challenged the Fellowship to approach change with courage and faith when he said things like, "the good is enemy of the best"?

The heart of our success is one alcoholic talking with another, but in order for folks to get here they need to be able to find us easily. In order for folks to stay, they need to be able to identify with what members share in meetings and what they read in our literature. In order for our Fellowship to be successful with future generations we need to stop complaining about how kids interact with the world these days and meet them where they're at. I didn't know how to do a lot of things when I arrived here, but you all taught me. Consider where we would be if we had a text-chat function where people could text an A.A. member. Once they got to a meeting and found a sponsor, that sponsor could show them how to talk on the phone!

### A Vision for the Future of the Fellowship

When I look into our future I see a thriving Fellowship with a robust online presence and more contemporary literature. I see A.A. taking full advantage of search-engine optimization for our websites. I see a vigorous social-media presence with pages full of accurate information about Alcoholics Anonymous. I see engaging YouTube channels where members and potential members can view public service announcements, short videos that describe what we are all about and maybe even a TED Talk done by one of our Class A trustees. I see the Fellowship embracing a new, comprehensive piece of literature that articulates our collective experience with our Steps and Traditions that spans between 1953 (the year our "Twelve and Twelve" was published) and 2018. I see a centralized meeting search function in an A.A.W.S. app and at aa.org. I see a text-chat function that will allow any of the 95 percent of Americans who have a cell phone to conduct a text conversation with an A.A. member. I see podcasts on a variety of recovery-related topics. I see us moving through fear and embracing change as we keep our attention focused on getting our message out to the still-suffering alcoholic while also being mindful of our Twelve Traditions.

## Closing

I realize that this is just one member's vision of the future of our great Fellowship. I do not have all of the answers, but I have a lot of ideas. I'm hopeful as we move from this presentation to the discussion portion of this workshop; you will share your vision for the future of this Fellowship that we all love with such depth. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share.

**A Vision for the Future of the Fellowship**—Presenter: Elliot B. / Moderator: Cathy B. / Reporter: Pam S.

In this Full Forum Workshop, the presenter shared a few thoughts, such as how reaching the still-suffering alcoholic is the challenge and at the heart of our Responsibility Statement and that young people are the future for the A.A. Fellowship. He asked members present, "What will A.A. look like in five years, ten years, and twenty years?" He shared some statistics with those present, such as how, in the U.S., only nine percent (9%) of the estimated 15.1 million people who are alcoholic in the U.S. are A.A. members, which means only 1.4 million are in A.A. The Institute of Health says there may be far more who suffer from "alcohol use disorder." Also discussed was how A.A. membership has stagnated. While 91% of the number estimated by NIH — or 14.3 million potential people — suffer from "alcohol use disorder," not all will want A.A. and many do not even know about A.A.

Workshop attendees were asked to think about how we get info today. How do we communicate with our sponsees?

- 95% of Americans own a cell phone.
- 77% own a smartphone
- 70% of adults use some type or form of social media.

Although we live in an age of Google searches and text messages, we A.A.s are fearful of communicating using technology tools because of our fear of anonymity breaches.



# PAST TRUSTEES SHARING

**Billy N.,** General Service Trustee, 2013-2017

I think I can safely say that very few people I meet in service didn't say that their first forum changed their life. I am not one of those who think that A.A. has been watered down. I believe that if Bill W. and Bob came out of their graves and showed up at the International Convention in Atlanta, I think they would have looked around with tears in their eyes and they wouldn't have been able to comprehend how far A.A. has come in (basically) such a short time. However, we do have a lot further to go. I want to thank the board for the communication audit. I have been a loud voice and I think that some of the things we do is not talk about are our lessons learned. I am not afraid to talk about a few of them.

I know what it is like to be delegate in 1999 and to be called by a past delegate and told that I am friends with too many people with tattoos and too many people with piercings in their face. I know what it's like, in 1999, to get a call from G.S.O. and be told that Minneapolis can't find people to chair the Spanish meetings at the International Convention. Would the Spanish district in Chicago willing to do it? The Spanish district in Chicago was over-the-moon happy about doing it. They couldn't believe they had the honor. I can also tell you what happened a few months later. At a regional forum, a Spanish person from that district talked about how they were putting together the program and they got bashed because no one wanted to talk about the lesson learned: That Minneapolis couldn't find any people in the Spanish district.

I am glad that we are getting these issues about diversity and inclusion out. Rather than use my words, I'd like to pass on a couple of reminders about what Bill W. left for us. He said, "A.A. must and will continue to change with the passing years. We cannot, nor should we, turn back the clock." I think what he meant is A.A., meaning the organization, will need to change. I don't think he meant that our message needs to change, but that is my personal view. I was helped in A.A. service because I heard some people talk about how, if you really want to serve in general service, get used to not getting your own way. It's very helpful in your personal life, by the way. You're going to be on the other side of decisions that you are not happy with. But it is going to help you in your work and personal life, because not everything always goes your way. It's just the way it goes.

One of my favorite quotes in the world is this: "Progress is impossible without change. And those who cannot change will not bring change." I share this because we've talked this weekend about diversity and inclusion. Bill left a warning for us in his final message: "However, I deeply believe that the principle of anonymity must remain our primary and enduring safeguard." It is 50 percent of our name, and I think we have to watch out — the rest of the world might not treasure our anonymity like they did sixty years ago. So, we have a lot of extra work to do about that.

In 1999, I became a delegate and in 2000 I went to the General Service Conference. At the 2000 General Service Conference I sat down next to a man I had never met and had never seen. I was the youngest delegate at the Conference that year and he was quite a bit older than me. He wound up being the keynote speaker for the opening meeting that year — it was the 50th birthday of the General Service Conference. His name was Dennis Manders. Dennis

answered an ad in 1941 to be a bookkeeper for a small publishing company called Works Publishing. He began working for G.S.O. At that time, in 2000, he was the only living person to be at all fifty General Service Conferences. Not an alcoholic, he retired as Controller and Chief Administrative Officer of the G.S.O. Dennis said two things that have stayed with me for a long time. One, he said that day. We were sitting in that room and he elbowed me and said, "Take a good look around, Billy. No matter what, if anyone gives you trouble about your age, you're the only one in this room who has a shot at being at the 100th General Service Conference."

I've always remembered that. I stayed in touch with Dennis until he passed away a few years ago. In about 2007, he said, "Billy, if Bill W. was alive today, we would have been on the cover of Wired Magazine ten years ago. He would have grasped this Internet and this digital technology. In all things, Bill was a communicator." I have remembered that. Diversity is a great word, but in my professional life, it has been a mission that I have been on for a long time. But "diversity" is a useless word without the word "inclusion." In fact, if you look up the best diversity teachers in the world, they always give South Africa as an example. At one time, there was lots of diversity there, but no inclusion. Inclusion takes work, and is usually not popular. Also, you have to do three things:

1. You have to believe that people are different, and accept that.
2. You have to believe that all people, no matter how different, have equal worth.
3. You have to be willing to take action to include different people in your organization.

I was there at the first inner city special forum in Chicago. I chaired it. I know what it was like for young women from Chicago to be at that forum and to see Elaine McDowell, Dorothy, and Adrian, all at the same time, up on the stage. I know the effect it had on them. The truth is, I want us to pick our leaders by Concept Nine. I want the best people. But the only way we can get all the best people to apply for positions in our service structure is if they know they have an equal shot at it. Again, that's just the way that goes. And if they don't see someone else on that stage that looks like them, they are not going to think they can apply. Finally, I know we can do a much better job, digitally, of letting everybody know that there is an opening(s) for G.S.O. staff, class A trustees, non-trustee directors, etc. I owe this organization my life. Thank you.

**Pam R., East Central Regional Trustee, 2009-2013**

My first forum was 1983 and my last drink was in 1980. One of the things I've been impressed with this weekend, as I've been impressed with at every forum, is all of the first-time people. I remember how I felt after the first forum I went to. I thought, "These are real people, this isn't just an empty PO Box that we send money to." I went back to my group and told them I shook hands with the chairman of the board. I don't even remember who that was in 1983, but Michelle is standing back there, so go shake her hand and then go back to your group and tell them. At regional forums you can see the General Service Office come alive. That's the importance of a forum. These are real people doing real jobs on our behalf.

I was the East Central regional trustee from 2009 to 2013. I had the good fortune to serve with El N. We were both dog and animal lovers and we rotated onto the board at the same time. We called each other littermates and became best friends. El and I were both on the nominating committee when David Morris interviewed for class A trustee. I didn't understand

the importance of trustees — even when I was a delegate. It wasn't until I became a trustee and served on the board that I got to know each and every one of them — their backgrounds, their expertise and their function of how they serve us. The phenomenal gift(s) that they bring to the board, and to A.A. as a whole, can't be measured.

After all the other candidates had been interviewed, all eight of us on the nominating committee looked at each other and said, "We have to grab this guy." He was a senior vice president at JP Morgan Chase bank and he wanted to do volunteer work. We said, "We cannot let him get out of the hotel." But he was so humble. He told us a little about his story and his background in finance. How blessed we were to have this great financial mind overseeing us.

I don't have any words of wisdom because I never had any, but I am so grateful to be here. This is my first forum in the Southeast Region. Thank you for being here and making me feel welcome in this new region of mine.

### **EI N.**, Southeast Regional Trustee, 2009-2013

I'm an alcoholic and my name is EI. I am your past regional trustee. My rotation has been bittersweet; I miss my friends and I miss doing the work for Alcoholics Anonymous. It's hard to sit back and not want to be in the middle of it, to hear the discussions and watch things unfold. It has taken me five years, at least, to recover in rotation because I gave what I had, and when you do that, you need to take some more time to get more of it together.

I was reflecting that I spent half of every month doing service as a trustee. So, you think, 15 of 30 days is doing nothing but A.A., and when you are not doing that . . . Well, one of the things I have done is some traveling, and in my travels, I saw one of the members in this audience hand a gentleman in Rwanda literature in a language that he can use. Now, this did not just happen, it came about because of our Seventh Tradition contribution and the efforts of committees and our contracts and agreements to translate our literature into all of these languages. So, she laid it out and this gentleman wept. Today, sometimes he is the only person in the meeting in Rwanda, but he is there, and he has got the door open and now he has the message to carry. Thank you for your Seventh Tradition contributions. And if your home group isn't contributing, then we don't have ambassadors, staff to carry the message, and if that happens, our message is not being carried not just by our international committee, but by each one of us who goes abroad. And we don't have to go far to find a foreign language.

I also went to Peru. There are a lot of llamas there, but our guide, as we were approaching Machu Picchu, was talking about his brother with a drinking problem. We talked about Alcoholics Anonymous as we walked up to Machu Picchu. I was also in Ecuador, in the Galapagos, with my granddaughter. I talked to the guide about his family member (and yes, there is A.A. in Ecuador). It is the effort of A.A. in U.S. and Canada that helps these countries emerge and become healthy groups for our fellows in foreign countries to recover.

So, another activity of mine after I rotated — 'cause I'd run out of money doing that kind of thing — is I'm a volunteer at my local zoo. I'm a docent — though at first, I didn't even know what that word meant. I am a trained educator. But how did I get there? Through friendships and meeting someone in Alcoholics Anonymous. One of the ladies sitting in this room today approached me and said, "You need to work here, this is where you belong." And you know what? She knew more about me than I did, because I didn't know how to fill my non A.A. time

as a trustee. I didn't know what to do with myself, and now I get to help people understand our worldwide crisis that we have with so many of our animals. I get to teach, to be outside, to be with children and people that I don't know and I get to turn them on to life. And yes, there are two people at the zoo, on the staff, that could use our program. I haven't finished my work in Alcoholics Anonymous, I'm just doing it differently. So, I want to leave with a couple of thoughts about looking forward, I truly believe it is not an issue of whether we carry the A.A. message on multiple platforms or not. That is not the issue. It is *how* are we going to do it. And I believe our trusted servants, guided by the principles of our program, can meet this challenge. Trust our trusted servants. And finally, I trust our General Service Board, A.A.W.S. and A.A. Grapevine to do several things:

1. To explore current practices to remove barriers that exclude potential trusted servants.
2. Continued sharing of current operating resources, G.S.O and the Grapevine, in areas where financial distribution, sales and products, warehousing, where the areas that these two separate operations can continue to come together to benefit financially in another resourceful area in our Fellowship.

At home, my home group members — and these are the young people in A.A. — they think that A.A. is one thing. They don't realize that we have two separate operations. When they are looking to buy literature from A.A.W.S. or AA Grapevine, this is what they say to me: "I click on and I go on to get Language of the Heart and I can't get the other stuff." Or "I click on this, and I can't get that..." So, hopefully, as this new platform unfolds, we can find a way to bridge this. Perhaps we can figure out how to sort the money and the products on the inside, but tell the Fellowship that we are one group. That's what I would like to see.

3. Finally, what is my responsibility for safety in the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous? I was asked a few questions, a long time ago, that apply to a lot of things: I'll apply them to the issue of safety in our rooms: If not now, then when are we going to address it? And if it is not me, who is going to address it?

I want to close with something:

Service, gladly rendered, obligations squarely met, troubles well accepted or solved with God's help, the knowledge that at home or in the world outside we are partners in a common effort, the well-understood fact that in God's sight all human beings are important, the proof that love freely given surely brings a full return, the certainty that we are no longer isolated and alone in self-constructed prisons, the surety that we need no longer be square pegs in round holes but can fit and belong in God's scheme of things—these are the permanent and legitimate satisfactions of right living for which no amount of pomp and circumstance, no heap of material possessions, could possibly be substitutes. True ambition is not what we thought it was. True ambition is the deep desire to live usefully and walk humbly under the grace of God.

*-The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, Step Twelve*

It is through general service that I have found that this, that these promises come true. Thank you.

# CLOSING REMARKS

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

I am Michele Grinberg, I am a class A (nonalcoholic) trustee and I am your board chair. You know what class As are, right? Amateurs. As you've probably figured out, I love what A.A. does, I love the miracles in this room and I want you to know that I personally practice, to the best of my faulty ability, these principles in all my affairs.

I have gotten excited several times this weekend by the sharing. If I've gotten a little overzealous, please forgive me — that's just my nature. You have a lot to say, and it was terrific. I encourage all of you, as you rotate from delegate, D.C.M. or another position, make the person who comes next a buddy of yours. It is amazing how much more comfortable I got when that happened to me and I felt that A.A. love.

I'm so proud to be here with you. What a collection of regional delegates here in the Southeast Region — you are very blessed. They gave outstanding presentations. Invite them to come to your groups and give similar presentations. You want to stir people up? Have them come talk about those topics.

To those of you who ran the workshops, thank you for engaging us in great conversations. As tired as I was, I was busy taking notes because I was learning stuff. I see my job, at regional forums, to be a good listener. You'll see me taking notes and sometimes I am sparked (from you) to think about new ideas. I take those notes and I take them back to the board or committee or discussion. So, you are heard, and if I am in the room and you see me typing away, I'm listening and I've heard *a lot*.

So, at every regional forum, in the course of the weekend, I have discovered that an unofficial theme emerges. Yesterday, at this forum, in a moment of clarity, the unofficial theme became clear to me. And it is *willingness*. What I'm hearing now, and what I've heard in 2010 and 2011 (by way of contrast) is that you and I, the boards and the office, we are all becoming willing to try to break through the current barriers, to get our message of hope out. We seem to be becoming more willing to move past our fear so that we can share the language of the heart in the digital world in which we now live, and to define methods that replace phonebook, radio, and TV.

Someone mentioned one-to-one communication. That is A.A. and that *doesn't* change. But that is not the issue — the issue is our public relations policy. It is part of our Traditions. So, wherever this colossus of communication is headed, I sensed a willingness this weekend to find a way to get the A.A. message there. Actually, it's not find *a* way, it's find *the ways* to get the message out there while respecting our principles of attraction — not promotion — and singleness of purpose. But, most importantly, as Billy reminded us, is respecting our spiritual principle of anonymity.

I am impressed by the energized spirit that pervaded the rooms this weekend. So, here are a couple of the many things that resonated with me, from the wonderful presentations, to the sharing on the floor, to the conversations in the hall, and to the workshops. And, you know,

you said whatever you said, and I heard whatever I heard, so if they are not exactly the same, that's how communication works! From you, I heard that there are people dying from alcoholism in jails and prisons, including black Americans and Spanish-speaking people.

We need to do what it takes to expand a welcoming A.A. hand to reach into our correctional facilities. That is not to negate what has been done — there are just more populations out there that we need to find a way to reach and to get Spanish language material into correctional facilities. We need to find out where Spanish-speaking people are being housed. I also heard, softly said, that “maybe we need to see if we can get A.A. into the current detention centers.” These have a lot of Spanish-speaking people.

I heard that we need to make sure we have the best outreach for when inmates are discharged from correctional facilities so they don't fall into that hole of despair and get a drink. We need to strengthen our A.A. hand of help with the youth courts. I heard that in a presentation. We have tons of special meetings out there — whatever you need to identify with to get you in the door of A.A. But then it's the next step we talk about. How do we get together within the one tent of A.A.?

From the workshop “A Vision for the Future of the Fellowship”: To assure us that A.A. will be there for my grandchildren, uncles, nieces, nephews, friends, children's children... I heard this and I wrote it down: “Fear of the tech platform is the bad actor that we need to replace with faith and courage.” I like that and this, too: “None of our principles is meant to be a barrier to getting the hand of A.A. out there.” Very thought-provoking. From the floor I heard: “How do we make our service structure accessible to younger people?” I heard someone softly say: “To older people.” To older folks who are in those senior facilities, what can we do? From a workshop, a member shared about being in a very diverse group that he belonged to in the northeast before he moved here. His description of it, said without a trace of irony, was: “That meeting was the best show on earth.” I heard people share that they were hearing this question at group inventories: “How do we become more inclusive?” I was thrilled to hear that reported. I also heard this share that stuck with me: “We've got to keep talking [they were talking about inclusiveness] if I see a lack. If I see a lack, I've got a responsibility to do something about it.” At the “A.A. Service” workshop, I learned a new phrase — “The Three ‘I’s’”: Involvement, inform, and inspire. That's attraction, rather than promotion.

I have to chuckle that I tried two different times to get in the “Staying Motivated” workshop and I couldn't either time because the room was packed and people were hanging out at the door. Now to me, that's a perfect example of your willingness. To continue to be of service — even with long-time sobriety and long-time service.

So, on processing everything I heard, of which this was a short sample, I did come away with some questions, like ‘What more can each of us do to communicate that A.A. is welcoming to all who need us?’ ‘How can we communicate better with each other?’ And, ‘How can we encourage more folks of all ages and backgrounds into our wonderful service structure?’ Bill W. wrote (and I love this quote): “Honesty with ourselves and others gets us sober, but it is tolerance that keeps us that way.”

Listening to you, I know that A.A. is full of passionate, smart, willing people who will work hard, do service, and keep the hand of A.A. out there — and maybe even stretch it a little further. I

look forward to hearing your solutions on ensuring that the hand of A.A. is extended to anyone that's reaching ever so slightly towards us, as well as ensuring inclusion into our service structure.

I've really enjoyed getting to know you and I thank you for your service. I have a spouse that I want to thank, as well. My husband Jim is my right-hand person. Most of you know him. I don't know how I would do this job without his willingness, and he is always willing and always loving. If you have a spouse like mine, you have a lot to be grateful for. Thank you and I look forward to meeting you again on that road of happy destiny.