



FINAL REPORT
SOUTHWEST REGIONAL FORUM
OCTOBER 11-13, 2013
OKLAHOMA CITY, OKLAHOMA

Dear A.A. Friends,

Please mark your calendar for the next Southwest Regional Forum, which will take place in St. Louis, Missouri, October 9-11, 2015 at the Sheraton Westport Chalet Hotel.

HOW TO CONTACT US:

A.A. General Service Board
c/o General Service Office
P.O. Box 459
Grand Central Station
New York, NY 10163
(212) 870-3120
Fax: (212) 870-3003
E-mail: regionalforums@aa.org
G.S.O.'s A.A. Web site: www.aa.org

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

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INTRODUCTION

The 2013 Southwest Regional Forum was held in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Registration for this Forum topped at 751. This included 407 members attending their very first Forum—several who were welcomed at the Forum Orientation on Friday evening. Sunday morning included a session for first-time forum attendees, followed by sharing from past trustees.

WORKSHOP REPORTS

La Viña: The La Viña Rep and More—Bringing our Message of Hope to Alcoholics (Moderator: Irene D.) The moderator asked the members what they knew about the history of La Viña? The members responded that the magazine was started out of necessity and the future of La Viña is in our hands. The moderator also asked the members “What is the purpose of La Viña?” The members responded that the purpose of La Viña is to carry the message to places where the alcoholic cannot. The moderator also asked the members “How do we inform others about La Viña?” The members responded that they inform members about La Viña through sponsorship and working with those who are getting better. Other members suggested having workshops to involve the fellowship to participate. Finally, the moderator asked the members “What is the difference between La Viña and other magazines?” The members responded that La Viña is better organized than other magazines, it is easy to purchase and the members liked that La Viña can be mailed to a single address.

Conducting a Good Meeting (Moderator: Roger S./Reporter: Tina P.) The moderator asked the question “What is a good A.A. meeting?” The members responded that good A.A. meetings start on time; they announce and explain the meeting’s format; they explain the difference between an open and closed A.A. meeting; they are setup and prepared with a topic or reading; if possible they greet newcomers before the meeting and if they need a first step or newcomer’s meeting they offer that format for the meeting; there is Fellowship before and after meetings to help “carry the message”; they read from and study conference-approved literature; the members demonstrate humility, prudence, tactfulness, grace and patience; they maintain structure and keep on topic; they have a working knowledge of the Traditions; they discourage bad language, cell phone usage, and other distractions; they recognize that the suffering alcoholic is not always the newcomer; they have some group guidelines in place to handle events, such as non-alcoholics who arrive at a closed meeting, distracting “wet” drunks, etc.; and they share announcements of upcoming activities, connections, etc. The moderator also asked “What is a good A.A. service meeting?” The members responded that good service meetings have an agenda posted and available in advance; they stick with the agenda; agendas allow members to be better informed and prepared, saving time during the meeting; they listen as if you had no opinions; they give everyone a voice, time for reflection and minority opinion; the new business or motions might ought to be addressed and put on the next meeting’s agenda; the Chair chairs, and the member’s share; some items may only call for a ‘sense’ from the group, rather than a formal voting process; draw out the ‘spirit’ of the meeting and recovery, inventory, or service; encourage a well-informed participation based on our literature and experience; Robert’s Rules of order can be helpful; there are no emergencies in A.A; encourage careful, mind-full and spiritually guided considerations.

Reaching the Alcoholic with Special Needs/Accessibility Issues (Moderator: Pam J./Reporter: Cathy H.) The moderator asked the members “How do you select facilities when you are having Forums and Assemblies to ensure the accessibility for those with Special Needs?” The members responded to be aware of the need; have guidelines for the selection of facilities; have a place on the registration form for the people to identify special needs; special needs table set-up at conferences; committees should make sure that the hotels are equipped; as A.A. members – pickup those who need help; accommodations and modifications should be put into place; make sure that restrooms have a step up if needed; make available hearing head phones, translation equipment, and any other things that are necessary; translation into Spanish and sign language – typist and projector for the deaf, large print books; member is reading Language of the Heart for those with sight issues; and assign someone in the meeting to help those in need. The moderator also asked “How do you take special need members through the Steps?” The members responded to get audio tapes to read to the member –e.g., Joe and Charlie Tapes and Big Book; may need to read to them; provide lots of repetition; writing down things with them until they are able to do it themselves; if blind, take them to Big Book studies so they hear the book and get the ideas of the book; in one area women with children are special needs? Ask what are your group’s feelings of that? Babysitters provided by the other women in the group encouraged mothers to support each other by one of the women watching the children; and some groups provide paid babysitters; educate how to interact with those who are handicapped; ask the people what they need and then help them out; make sure they feel welcomed in the meetings; and don’t deprive them of the A.A. experience. Finally, the moderator asked “What is your home group doing for those that are no longer able to get to meetings due to being in nursing homes or assisted-living?” The members responded to take meetings into the hospitals where members are staying; have a sign-up sheet at the central service office for alcoholics who are willing to take a meeting to those that request a meeting; have a group conscience and make others aware of the issues; make a point to take home group members from a meeting and talk with them about a future plan if they are going to be gone for a while, into a hospital or nursing home.

How the Three Legacies Work (Moderator: Mike H./Reporter: Don G.) The moderator of this workshop asked the members “How are the 3 legacies implemented in rural and metropolitan areas within the southwest region?” The members responded that rotating the district meetings; going to the group’s stating we need you; and asking “what can we do for you?” helps. Encourage District Committee Member’s (DCMs) take General Service Representative’s (GSRs) and Correction’s Chairs to attend non-participating groups and share what’s going on in the Area and the District. Everyone should take responsibility to teach the legacies of A.A. to the people they sponsor. We create the fellowship we crave, plus excitement and enthusiasm. The moderator also asked the members “How do you give something away that you don’t have?” The members responded that through sponsorship through the Steps, Traditions and Service they give what they have away; after all there are three sides to the triangle and each side strengthens the other.

Spirituality and A.A. (Moderator: Larry N./Reporter: Marge D.) The moderator of this workshop asked the members “How have you come to your spiritual life in A.A.?” The members responded that it was in conjunction with previous beliefs; through religious affiliations applied to our program and through practice of our principles. By practicing the principles of A.A. that is how we found our spirituality. Our book says we are people who normally would not mix; yet it tells us our program is broad and inclusive; perhaps there are

many religions, faiths, believers and non-believers and those who just don't know; but practicing these 36 spiritual principles in all our affairs brings us together.

Grapevine: The Grapevine Rep and More—Bringing our Message of Hope to Alcoholics (Moderator: Ami B./Reporter: Clare G.) The moderator reported that stories in the Grapevine come in through mail, fax, phone, and online; stories cannot be used if they appear elsewhere; three staff will read the story and if it resonates with at least two, it goes to the Senior Editor. On the web there are guidelines to write a story. Trustees, friends of A.A., members share tips on writing stories. The Purple Box gives upcoming topics to write about and categories to write within. Stories that have been helpful are “cultivating tolerance” and Dr. Bob. A story on the topic of court papers helped give out C.P.C. information. Not everyone likes every story but for rural dwellers and many others, the Grapevine helps keep A.A. close. The moderator asked “If we don't like the content what prevents people from writing what they like?” The members noted that there are ways to write in the Grapevine what is on our minds –e.g., “Responsive dialogue”, “What's on your Mind” letters to the Editor and the “Dear Grapevine” email directory are all opportunities for members to express themselves. All content has value!

The moderator also asked the members to reflect on topics for “Share and Connect” to encourage young people in A.A. to connect. The members responded to have Share and Connect as a meeting topic; have more workshops on writing Grapevine articles for young people; have displays at Young People's A.A. meetings; ask Grapevine Reps to get more passionate about sharing their experience, strength and hope and how the Grapevine has touched their lives; and be sure to anonymize your submission. Other topics offered for discussion in the workshop were stories that have affected people's lives; the future of the Grapevine; Grapevine Reps support and how do we continue without advertizing? How can we help with the message of the Grapevine? How can we get Grapevine out there? What is the selection process for Grapevine articles? What does Grapevine look for? The moderator reported that the Grapevine looks for “language of the heart” process of getting/choosing stories. It is okay to announce Grapevine at other meetings. We can build our awareness of the Grapevine to the Fellowship's full potential.

The moderator also asked the members to discuss the Grapevine in terms of “Self-support” and the decisions made by members to acquire new subscriptions for newcomers which creates an ongoing need. Subscriptions = self support and we need to get the word out about subscriptions if support declines. We have been in the black for two years because of declining subscriptions but this has also provided an opportunity to do things differently. For example, groups now lend Grapevine's to attract new subscribers and they give Grapevines out for anniversaries. Next year is Grapevine's 70th anniversary and local celebrations will be encouraged. A great asset of the Grapevine is the welcome quote of the day. Finally, the moderator reported that 3,500 groups are getting quarterly updates from the Grapevine – and we need to continue to get group's connected with these Grapevine reps. One idea is to have the General Service Board, trustees etc. communicate with the fellowship via the Grapevine.

A.A. and Advancing Technologies (Moderator: Blaine B./Reporter: Jen N.) The moderator of this workshop asked the members how do we maintain anonymity and respect the Traditions in social media?” The members responded that the 12 Traditions are of the utmost importance; is no change to the 11th Tradition enhancing search visibility and advertizing/promotion? One member suggested that groups include a Tradition's advisor, area

workshops, policy guide and the web chair does not need to be an A.A. member. There is a lot of fear of technology due to anonymity concerns. We need to be cautious about inadvertently breaking other's anonymity. The moderator also asked the members "How do we pass on our team knowledge and experience?" Rotation requires special skills; similar to archives; less frequent rotation; may require non-A.A. specialists; need to write consistent policies; relatively few people are able and willing to serve in tech roles; and this role requires consistency. The members also reported that we need to be sure website (tech) is accessible to visually impaired and special needs members. Paying for consistent platforms, vendors, etc. may help rotation. Cloud-based systems to share Area records and archives within Traditions and Concepts may be something else to think about as they are less vulnerable than physical archives. Young people are a good resource for tech service although the choice of technology may limit who can rotate into a tech service position.

How to Attract Old-Timers into Service Structures they have not yet Experienced (Moderator: Jaime R./Reporter: Deb G.) The moderator asked the members "How do we attract Old-Timers into service they have not yet experienced?" The members responded to offer Old-Timers a personal invitation—in person or via telephone; service is not about politics, rather is making sure A.A. is here for our kids and grand kids. There will be people who you have not seen in years; respectfully, we want the next generation of A.A.s to be here as the Old-Timers now; we don't want a watered-down version of A.A.; and simply – "Get in the car, please." Ask for help—attraction—patience, love, tolerance. The moderator also asked the members "How do we address resentments that Old-Timers have about service?" The members responded to be respectful towards Old-Timers; set a good example; attraction; talk about the three legs of service; and find their interests –i.e., finding everybody's gifts makes Old-Timers feel necessary and welcome.

Service Committees: Ideas for District and Group Projects (Moderator: Randy R./Reporter: Joe R.) The moderator of this workshop asked the members "What kind of projects have your groups/districts successfully completed?" The members responded that they bring food to panel discussions; they host special needs meetings in nursing homes; they host meetings in correctional facilities; they have Grapevine workshops, service workshops on the 12th Step and workshops in rural areas; they present A.A. materials at Area Assemblies and health fairs; they communicate with mental health professionals and invite them to open meetings; they have Big Book readers in treatment halfway houses and ask the leaders of those halfway houses to attend meetings; they encourage young people to get into service; they have weekly policy and procedure meetings; they un-complicate the Concepts; and they have a Unity day. The members also host Traditions meetings and work in groups – 3 panels (mini conventions); they talk about how to conduct group inventories; Gratitude Dinners; monthly speakers, 2nd basket for literate; invite youth to conventions and functions; and have convention talent shows.

The moderator also asked "What do you want to do with your group/district?" The members responded that they want to have district inventories—how are we doing? They also want to host GSR workshops; have a Unity Day; invite mental health professionals to a CPC workshop; visit youth detention centers; visit nursing home meetings and different town meetings; Bridge the Gap with others from the other areas; discuss technology and a hot line; Sponsor a Doctor who gets Grapevine; in rural areas – various locations at district; serve not govern; befriend legal folks with food; host a One Day Service Conference Workshop; spread

the word and excitement; have get-togethers; have fun and pass on vital information; share information from Forums.

More on Treatment and Corrections (Moderator: Bruce G./Reporter: Charlie F.) The moderator asked the members to discuss “What do groups need to get started going to jails, prisons, treatment?” The members responded to get information and then contact the District (correction chair, Area Chair, treatment). Find volunteers first then contact the facility. Since different facilities have different requirements get to know their requirements. It takes time to get approval to take meetings to facilities so it’s important to take the time to get that approval. No socializing with inmates. Show inmates how to run their meetings; let them do it; let them read. Bring contact cards for when clients or inmates are released and need someone to take them to their first meeting on the outside. BTG originated in Oklahoma helps save lives. Alcohol problems are rampant in facilities. There are many who want our help and it is our job to try to present A.A. in a friendly way to them.

PRESENTATIONS

“Singleness of Purpose: What and How?” Patrick C. Delegate Panel 63, Area 67 Southeast Texas

I want to thank you for this loving invitation to participate in the 2013 Southwest Regional Forum to present on the topic “Singleness of Purpose: What and How?” First I want to make a disclaimer: I clearly understand that I am about to share on a topic which everyone in this room, more than likely, has discussed and formed an opinion. So, I appreciate the challenge! Whenever I am faced with a challenge you have taught me to pray and reach out for help. My prayers have been answered, and I was recently asked to attend a Traditions workshop where I heard about a singleness of purpose talk that Bill W. gave in 1957, which is posted on the internet. In addition, I was guided to review the pamphlet “Problems Other Than Alcohol” (P-35), and was sent several A.A. Grapevine archival articles on the subject.

In my studies I learned early members wanted to share our message with hopeless alcoholics. Subsequently, they became aware that our solutions might be beneficial to others, like nonalcoholic family members. As our Fellowship grew, clubs formed where A.A. groups would hold meetings. Trouble came when the issues of club and group business started to become entangled. Early members felt we should participate and endorse alcoholism-educational efforts. These experiences taught us that when we marry ourselves to other activities, irrespective of good motive; it diverts us from our primary purpose.

In Bill W.’s 1957 talk he shares about how dually addicted members felt compelled to start carrying the message of recovery to straight addicts. These alcoholics, who were also addicts, understood the pure addict’s agony and naturally wanted to provide them with a solution. Some dually addicted A.A. members wanted to invite the pure straight addicts to A.A. meetings and bring them into full membership. Bill asks, are we going to take on all of the world’s problems? And can *anyone* with a problem join Alcoholics Anonymous? No, he answers. We decided long ago that A.A. is for drunks.

Bill goes on to discuss the principle of group autonomy. A group can do what it likes, as long as it does not affect other groups or A.A. as a whole. He continues by sharing an idea of a

possible better solution. Could these A.A. members invite the pure addicts to open A.A. meetings, as observers and visitors, to learn about the principles of recovery, with the intention for them to start their own groups? Instead of having them stay and believe they are A.A. members, this could ultimately prove more helpful. A.A. cannot offer them the full scope of recovery because, for example, they would not be capable of carrying the A.A. message to newcomers through identification. Bill shares that he could not see how we, as a fellowship, can go any further than this. I loved listening to Bill share this idea because it outlined an approach to be helpful to the addict while adhering to our Traditions.

In early sobriety I introduced myself in A.A. meetings as an alcoholic and an addict. At eighteen months sober I walked into a Step study group that separated the men and women from the boys and girls. It was in that meeting that I first experienced a member advising me that I did not need to introduce myself as an addict in an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. He reminded me that Tradition Three states that there is one requirement for A.A. membership: a desire to stop drinking. In addition, I needed to participate in our group's primary purpose: to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

As an A.A. member and delegate, I have participated and listened to many members discussing singleness of purpose at my home group, district meetings, and even at the General Service Conference. I learned that, like Bill and the early members, we still have a lack of unity regarding our single purpose, and that concerns me. Late this summer I attended a workshop and it included an "Ask-It Basket" session. An anonymous attendee asked the following question: "I am an addict and I am conflicted with the principle of honesty. I want to understand how I can attend an A.A. meeting and not have to lie and say that I am an alcoholic?" The panel member, who has been sober since 1983, shared that there is no reason for this person to feel dishonest because a drug is a drug is a drug, and we are all trying to practice the same Twelve Steps of recovery. Tradition One reminds us that "Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity." Our lives, and the lives of all to come, depend squarely upon it. It is my hope that we as a fellowship do not let dissension creep up on us as other fellowships have in the past.

I recently listened to an A.A. member share her story. She explained that she used to introduce herself as an alcoholic and an addict. A member named Waterfront Joe asked her, "Is A.A. working for you?" She said yes. He said, "Then stop being unique and out of respect for our program follow our Traditions." I would like you all to ask yourselves: how are we doing as a Fellowship in regards to respecting the Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous?

Finally, my area C.P.C. chairperson e-mailed me an article written by Peter Gaumont, chief of the Office of National Drug Control Policy. The article stated that the chief visited our General Service Office and met with our Board. He wrote that, according to A.A.'s Fifth Tradition, "Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers." This does not mean that people who take part in A.A. meetings don't have problems other than alcoholism, including addiction to drugs. Rather, it reflects the understanding that it is through a singleness of purpose that A.A. can best accomplish the mission for which it was established. I love the fact that non-A.A. friends are still writing truthful and helpful articles about our Fellowship and Traditions. I again urge you to ask yourselves; how are we doing in accomplishing the mission which was established for our Fellowship? Thank you.

“Spirituality and Self-Support” Steve F., Delegate Panel 63, Area 04 Arkansas

My name is Steve and I am an alcoholic. I have the privilege of serving Area 04, Arkansas, as their Panel 63 Delegate. When I began attending Alcoholics Anonymous I had no understanding of how self-support could possibly relate to spirituality. I now understand the freedom we have in A.A. because of our tradition of self-support. I also understand the uniqueness of our Traditions. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to present on the topic of “Spirituality and Self-Support.”

I believe we can all agree that A.A. is a spiritual program. I think we can also agree that some money is necessary for the program to function and the contribution of our time and money is spiritual in nature. When discussing self-support the logical place to start is with the Seventh Tradition, which, in its long form, reads: “The A.A. groups themselves ought to be fully supported by the voluntary contributions of their own members. We think that each group should soon achieve this ideal; that any public solicitation of funds using the name of Alcoholics Anonymous is highly dangerous, whether by groups, clubs, hospitals or outside agencies; that acceptance of large gifts from any source, or contributions carrying any obligation whatever, is unwise.”

I believe we all understand the implications of accepting contributions from any source outside of A.A. As the saying goes, “He who pays the piper calls the tune.” In other words, the person who pays the bill should and will have a voice in the decision-making process. It is imperative to the destiny of A.A. that decisions are made by members of the Fellowship whose recovery is dependent on this program. Therefore, outside money and spirituality do not mix. If we do not accept outside money we are obligated to no one except ourselves, our Fellowship, and our program of recovery.

The first evidence of the mix between spirituality and money came when Ebby T., who had sobered up in Oxford Group, wanted to help his friend Bill W. With a couple of nickels, one in the phone booth and one in the subway turnstile, money and spirituality began to mix.

Initially, Bill and some of the early members believed the only way to survive and provide the necessary services to carry out Twelfth Step work was to solicit financial support from anyone capable of contributing. After all, this was the typical way non-profit organizations were funded. However, when John D. Rockefeller, Jr. was approached he unknowingly helped lay the groundwork for the tradition of self-support when he said “I am afraid money will spoil this thing,” even though at the same time endorsed the work of the Fellowship.

As the realization that large sums of money were not forthcoming hit them, the membership realized the wisdom of Mr. Rockefeller’s words. The Fellowship began to understand that A.A.’s money would have to come from members of A.A. Bill W. said it best in 1957: “Our spiritual way of life is safe for future generations if, as a society, we resist the temptations to receive money from the outside world. But this leaves us with one responsibility, one that every member ought to understand: our groups, our areas and A.A. as a whole will not function unless our services are sufficient and their bills are paid.”

Page 221 of *The Language of the Heart* includes “When we meet and defeat the temptation to take large gifts, we are only being prudent. But when we are generous with the hat we give a

token that we are grateful for our blessings and evidence that we are eager to share what we have found with those who still suffer.”

Carrying the message of recovery requires the investment of time and money.

As my two or three dollar voluntary contribution goes into the hat it becomes spiritual as it:

1. Pays the group’s expenses
2. Sends trusted servants to district and area functions
3. Allows central offices to provide A.A. hot lines, group schedules, and literature
4. Allows the district and area committees to provide vital links in communications and services, as well as elect and send delegates to the General Service Conference.
5. Helps to fund the General Service Office, which coordinates services, literature, communications, and continuity between the areas.

Self-support begins with each one of us. If it were not for these services many alcoholics would never hear the message of recovery or experience the miracle of sobriety. All of these entities exist to better facilitate more and better Twelfth Step work, fulfilling our primary purpose of carrying the message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

Yes, indeed, in Alcoholics Anonymous our tradition of self-support is spiritual.

“Tradition Three” Maureen “Mo” N., Delegate Panel 63, Area 65 Northeast Texas

When I talk about Tradition Three, I can’t help but think about how twisted and misunderstood this simple Tradition has become in A.A. One of the challenges we face as sponsors in A.A. is to teach our new members the importance of learning how and why these Traditions came about, and the most efficient way to do that is to go to the source—our A.A. literature.

The sad truth is too many members only contact with the Traditions is through the short version we see hanging on the walls at groups all over the world. Trying to understand them using that one source is like buying a book, reading the table of contents, and stopping there, thinking you know the whole story. There isn’t a better example of a recipe for misunderstanding than you will find in the difference between Tradition Three’s short and long versions.

We must first recognize that the Traditions were written for A.A. members. If we understand this, it eliminates a lot of the problem. It’s also important to note that when the short version of our Traditions appeared in the Grapevine in November of 1949, many believed that Tradition Three was clipped a bit too short. This is understandable considering how A.A. was in 1949. Nonalcoholics were not trying to sneak into A.A. back then; heck, we had enough of a challenge getting alcoholics into A.A. as it was! But things were soon to change, and we still see the results of that change today.

So, what do I mean when I say “clipped”? Too short? Let’s look at some A.A. literature.

From the long version of Tradition Three: “Our membership ought to include all who suffer from *alcoholism*.”

From the Grapevine 1948 article on Tradition Three: “It tells every *alcoholic* in the world that he may become, and remain, a member of Alcoholics Anonymous so long as he says so.”

From the chapter on Tradition Three in the Twelve and Twelve: “For A.A. is really saying to every *serious drinker*, “You are an A.A. member if you say so. . . . So the hand of Providence early gave us a sign that any *alcoholic* is a member of our Society when he says so.”

The picture is pretty clear that our membership requirement is for *alcoholics* or, at the very least, *problem drinkers*. So why do we have such a serious problem in A.A. leading people who do not have an alcohol problem whatsoever to believe they are A.A. members? Our Big Book uses the term “real alcoholic” on page twenty-one, and is repeated many times thereafter. There’s no gray area in our Big Book as to who we are talking about. It even tells us on page ninety-two that when working with a newcomer, I need to be satisfied that they are a real alcoholic before proceeding any further. I could go on all day with literary references, but this should be enough for now.

I have something I’m going to put into your head and you’ll never fail to hear this from now on. Listen for how many times you hear a nonalcoholic claiming to be an A.A. member by saying, “The only requirement for membership is a desire to *not* drink.” We hear it all the time. The Tradition does not state *not drink*; it states *stop drinking*, and that’s an important difference. In order to *stop* something, I had to have *started* at some point. There are many people who have a desire to *not* drink and have never taken a drink in their life; does that make them eligible to be an A.A. member? I think not. I cannot imagine why anyone who does not have an alcoholic problem would want to be in A.A. to begin with, but we all know it happens. This led Bill W. to write one of his most powerful essays, “Problems Other Than Alcohol,” in 1958.

I understand that many people have come into the rooms of A.A. with no knowledge of what they are, and without assurance that they want to stop drinking. I believe we have a responsibility to those that come in to make sure they are in the right rooms with guidance through the chapters in the Big Book describing the real alcoholic, specifically the “Doctor’s Opinion” through Chapter Three, plus a few other snippets here and there. Without this guidance, A.A. gets watered down. Never mind we could be killing someone by giving them the wrong solution for their other problems. We are so afraid to hurt their feelings, but not so concerned with the fact that we might be killing them with the wrong medicine. How disturbing is that? And what do we hope to accomplish when we do this? The Traditions were written because of our bad ideas and behavior—and because of our egos. And how egotistical can one person be to believe he or she can solve a nonalcoholic’s problem with our program of recovery?

Bill W. wrote the following in “Problems Other Than Alcohol”: “It has also been learned that there is no possible way to make non-alcoholics into A.A. members. We have to confine our membership to alcoholics and we have to confine our A.A. groups to a single purpose.”

I’m still baffled every time I hear that A.A. is “all Inclusive, never exclusive,” implying that we allow nonalcoholics to be A.A. members. This is not written anywhere in our literature. Furthermore, anytime a nonalcoholic speaks in an A.A. meeting, it ceases to be A.A.

So what about the positive sides of Tradition Three? There are certainly a few. It promises me that if I'm an alcoholic with a desire to stop drinking and say I'm a member of A.A., no one can take that from me. I cannot be forced to believe anything, work the program, pray, or do anything else if I choose not to. In other words, I can stay unrecovered as long as I choose and still be a member.

The Tradition also promises us that there are no second-class members. We are a society of equals in the eyes of A.A. No one has authority over anyone else, nor can anyone compel someone else to do anything. Thank God we avoided having a list of membership rules. Imagine how many would have never had the chance to recover had we kept this attitude of excluding alcoholics because they had other problems. We don't care what your other afflictions are as long as you don't trouble us with your other difficulties.

Then there's the final sentence of the long version of Tradition Three, where an A.A. group is defined. There are elements of Tradition Five and Six in those final words, which state: "Any two or three alcoholics gathered together for sobriety may call themselves an A.A. group provided that, as a group, they have no other affiliation."

This is something that A.A. members completely miss if all they read is the short version of Tradition Three. It's a powerful sentence that, if followed by A.A. members, can eliminate a lot of group problems. It defines who we are and what we are, and that we don't affiliate with anyone or anything else; if we do, we are not an AA Group. The words "provided that" are a stern warning.

A.A. membership and its Traditions are for alcoholics, and we would do well to remember that. It even says so in the first word of our name.

"How to Involve More Members in Group, District, Area and Regional Events" Diane D., Delegate Panel 63, Area 10 Colorado

How do we involve more A.A. members in service to our groups, districts, and areas? I believe it starts with these three things: sponsorship, service sponsorship, and leadership. Upon pondering this topic, I am concerned about how some A.A. members perceive service in general, what general service is, and how it relates to a home group. Traveling around Colorado this past year, I often heard "What is the General Service Conference and what does it have to do with me?" Also, "Why should I care?" Or, "That stuff is politics. We do not do that here."

The work of suiting up and carrying the message from the Conference has been an extremely eye-opening experience. To keep members interested, I often begin my shares with how it started for me through the work of two women in my life. One of those women was my sponsor, who cared enough to say "Get in the car" and took me to my first Area 10 State Convention. This was the initial action that showed me how sponsorship works. I became a contributing member of my home group one night, driving home from another meeting. Our main A.A. meeting place had a regularly scheduled meeting that night at 7:00 p.m. Driving by, I noticed the lights were not on and the door was locked. I did not stop. But what I did do was to

inquire about why the lights were not on and the door was not open the next day to a fellow member. This is how I found out about business meetings, or group conscience meetings.

After attending some A.A. business meetings, I was elected the G.S.R. of my home group. I did not have a service sponsor at the time, but I started attending assemblies. I began to ask questions of those who had more experience than I did. At those assemblies, I realized that our district did not have a D.C.M. After checking in with some more experienced members, I was told that our district had been without a D.C.M. for quite some time. So the more I showed up and the more questions I asked at our area assemblies, the more I learned. The members at the assemblies became my service sponsors. They showed me how to be responsible and how to act. They introduced me to the spiritual principles that encompass our service to A.A.

I was soon elected the D.C.M. and that is when I really needed a service sponsor—someone who could actively guide me through our service structure. I've followed suit with every subsequent service position. I have had different sponsors both in my recovery and in my service. But I know that without these people in my life, I would not be who I am today. I remember an election assembly where I was asked if I was standing for some of the area positions. I didn't think I would ever qualify to be the Delegate, Alternate Delegate, Chairperson, etc. Someone said to me "You are not the best judge of your abilities. So let your name stand. Being in Alcoholics Anonymous qualifies you." God chooses those who serve through our third legacy process. Our A.A. history and experiences are passed on verbally from member to member. We need to have people who can pass on their experience, strength, and hope. We know from our stories that our own sobriety is strengthened when we give it away. Having a sponsor and service sponsor has been one of the best decisions I have made and I am grateful to those women and men who continue to show up for me.

I in turn have been able to show up for those I sponsor. Sponsorship is the solution to a lot of the communication or miscommunication in the rooms of A.A. If I have a sponsor who is involved in service and is leading by example and enjoying sobriety, I will more than likely want to follow suit. It can be something as simple as showing up early to chair a meeting, or traveling miles to attend and participate in an assembly. A sponsor or service sponsor is someone who has made progress in recovery and/or service and shares this experience with an alcoholic who is in the beginning stages of his or her journey. Some of the examples of service can be turning on the lights, making coffee, setting up the tables, or working on different service committees.

Sponsorship only works if you actually use a sponsor. Sponsorship is not in name only. I have to pick up the phone. But what if I have a sponsor who does not participate at any level of service? They can be guides through the steps, but what if they have no experience in service at any level? This is when a service sponsor can help present the various aspects of what is expected and the responsibilities to the new person.

Another form of service sponsorship is someone who can help me understand how our service structure works and what happens at the General Service Conference so I can share it with entire groups. And that is my responsibility. General service is only relevant to an A.A. member in my home group if I take the time and make an effort to find ways to inform them and keep their interest. Even if it is only one new G.S.R. who understands more about the conference than they did before, or are excited to be a part of this process, I have fulfilled one small part of

my mission. If I do not take that responsibility seriously, I am denying members and groups the privilege of participating in A.A. service.

Our service manual states: “Our leaders do not drive by mandate, they lead by example. . . . Act for us, but don’t boss us.” The people we have chosen to be leaders in our home groups and districts are those who have a voice and vote for us at area assemblies. If members of a home group elect someone “via the telephone” or “they can’t come to the business meeting because it is inconvenient,” are these truly our best representatives? Who then is responsible when we now have a G.S.R. who has a title but cannot represent our home group at the district or area meetings because it is inconvenient? If good leadership originates plans and policies and has ideas for improvement but never shows up to put them into action, is that a leader? What about lip service, i.e. “talking the talk” but not “walking the walk”?

I believe that service is a series of ever-improving compromises, and I have learned this through sponsorship. An attitude of action, understanding, and performance is my duty as a leader. And this is learned at the early stages of recovery through sponsorship. If more of our A.A. members would read the information in our Big Book, A.A. pamphlets, Grapevine, and Web sites, then put this into action, we would have more A.A. members who are well informed. If an uninformed elder is sponsoring a new person but has his or her own opinion of what A.A. is and what it is not, the information can get passed on from member to member in a negative way. Case in point: “That stuff is politics. We do not do that here.”

Every A.A. member is responsible to be as informed as they can be about our program. It is the only way we can protect our Fellowship for the generations to come. Poor information leads to poor leadership. Inadequate sponsorship leads to inadequate sponsors. Understanding the steps, traditions, and concepts, as well as the actions needed, will keep us moving into the future. We are Alcoholics Anonymous—alcoholics in action. It is our movement, and it is time to move!

Thank you.

“Making a Strong Home Group” Alan S., Delegate Panel 62, Area 46 New Mexico

Commitment is the key to making any group strong and healthy. As a group we are committed to each other as we practice the principles of recovery, unity, and service—our Three Legacies. Certainly this helps unify a group, but to become truly strong these principles must be practiced outside of our home groups as well. A group’s G.S.R. helps connect the group to the service structure by attending and participating in district meetings and area assemblies. Items from these meetings are brought back to the group for discussion, but generally only the G.S.R. attends these important service meetings. Many avenues are available for a group to exist beyond scheduled meeting times. Twelfth Step calls are accepted from district or central offices, and meetings are taken into correctional and treatment facilities. Groups can reach out to professionals or the public at large through Cooperation with the Professional Community or Public Information activities.

As an active group we are aware of numerous outside commitments, but do we ever consider visiting neighboring groups to share these opportunities? The hand of A.A. is one alcoholic reaching out to another alcoholic. Sponsorship is one alcoholic helping and guiding another.

These same relationships can be accomplished from group to group in the spirit of love and service while respecting and maintaining group autonomy. Each entity and individual receives myriad spiritual benefits, and A.A. as a whole is strengthened.

As a D.C.M. I visited groups in my district. Unfortunately, at the beginning, I didn't have a good relationship with all of the groups. That changed during the two-year rotation as I visited the groups several times. Sound advice was given that I should pray for love and tolerance before I went into a meeting. If I didn't have love in my heart, the group would view me as an outsider. It was important that I stick to the discussion topic at the meeting. If I was given an opportunity to share about the district, I talked about services provided to the groups, such as workshops and various committee opportunities to carry our A.A. message. During those two years, many new friendships developed as I once again experienced a revolutionary change of heart and attitude.

To me, it seems that if this is possible for an individual then it is certainly achievable for a group as well. With the God of our understanding, the principles of our program, and the support of our fellow home group members, our groups can be strengthened as we develop healthy attitudes and relationships with our neighbors. Our groups are linked together, creating a whole, but we are only as strong as our weakest link. To be strong we have to reach out to our fellows, whether they are across the street, the other side of town, across the county, or around the world, so that A.A. will be here for those yet to come.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve!

“Conducting Good Meetings” Dave H., Delegate Panel 63, Area 39 Western Missouri

Here we can look at what is possibly a more expansive view of one of the most important parts of our A.A. program: the quality and effectiveness of our meetings. The chair should be at the meeting early, be prepared by having picked a topic, hand out any readings (e.g. “How It Works,” “The Twelve Traditions,” and the *Daily Reflections*), know the names of the readers, and observe the Seventh Tradition by explaining what the money is used for. If you have a newly sober person in attendance, you might change your topic to the First Step.

As a chair, when you have a large group you might ask everyone to keep their comments to two minutes or less, in order to allow everyone a chance to share. A participant should speak again only after all others have shared once, if time remains. An effective meeting chair can gently direct the meeting by calling on members with an appropriate range of sobriety. Very new A.A. members clearly benefit from both the comments of seasoned A.A. members and the newer members who have been sober only slightly longer than they have. An A.A. meeting needs to move, and it is the responsibility of the meeting chair to make it move.

The absolute necessity of sharing the language of the heart runs through all applications of experience, strength, and hope. Let's be frank—the “stakes” are sky high for every A.A. meeting. The group of alcoholics gathered in the room may contain a frightened, brand new member, an experienced member facing a crisis, or simply a friendly collection of seasoned A.A. s enjoying the good life of sobriety. It will fall to the meeting chair to guide the effort, encouraging all participants to remember the Tradition of our Primary Purpose.

One responsibility that comes with chairing a meeting seems to create an ongoing challenge. Outlining the problem is simple enough: a meeting chair will inevitably need to end a member's sharing at one time or another. This will be uncomfortable, but remember, you set the rules at the beginning. In closing a meeting, each group is autonomous regarding the way they close their meetings. Most meetings close with the Lord's Prayer; remember the prayer begins with "Our father." Good sponsorship can easily include the general preparation of a newer member to perform the task of chairing a meeting effectively and successfully. At the close of the meeting, the chair should ask him- or herself, was the meeting allowed "free range" to roam where it needed to wander? Did the A.A.s in attendance leave with what they had come to get, or did they leave frustrated, perhaps a step closer to a deadly state of alcoholic hopelessness? Was the newcomer welcomed and encouraged to return?

"A.A. Beyond the Doors of a Home Group" Harold C., Delegate Panel 63, Area 57 Oklahoma

Ah, a home group! Where everybody knows your name, and they're always glad you came. Where sorrows are halved and joys are doubled. Coffee gets drank, steps are studied, and speakers listened to. Where the long-timers share tidbits of profound wisdom, and the newcomer finds a safe haven at last. The place where we members drop anchor and proudly proclaim, *We are home!* At first we dare not venture too far away, lest we should get drunk. Then there's the pocket of the worldly, the ones that are always in the know. They're the ones that have things to do and people to see. They are the excited ones. Get in the car, you hear. And thus, the world of A.A. opens up before you.

For most of us, we first glimpsed the world of A.A. beyond the home group when we stepped up to the firing line and tried to carry the message to the still-suffering alcoholic. My first experience with this was when I "got in the car." Seven of us loaded into an old station wagon and drove forty-five miles to take a meeting into a work release facility. We were armed with Big Books, pamphlets, Grapevines, and a booklet called "It Sure Beats Sitting In a Cell." I asked where all this stuff came from, and one of the guys said that it came from our service meeting. It turned out that only one inmate attended our meeting and we gave him the goods. I felt like we probably laid the message on a bit thick, but twelve years later I ran into that guy at another member's funeral and he was happily free and sober.

Sometime shortly after the meeting at that facility I was taken to my first service meeting. I was absolutely amazed to meet representatives from so many different groups; I had no idea that A.A. was so widespread! A gentleman at the meeting explained to me that these people are the real winners in A.A., and that they care for A.A. in ways the average member sometimes doesn't understand. They talk about things called "Concepts," and have discussions about "ensuring our Traditions." They look for new and exciting ways to carry the message to prisons, jails, detoxes, hospitals, and treatment centers. They talk about communicating with teachers, judges, ministers, priests, counselors, doctors, and nurses. They form committees to distribute our literature so drunks can find us, and to help professionals better understand us. Mostly, they talk about ways to get others involved. Two words can describe that first service meeting: infectious enthusiasm.

Those that become involved in our Third Legacy of Service are given an atlas: *The A.A. Service Manual*. Held within, alongside its lists of responsibilities and duties for the various service positions, are the gifts of having vision beyond our home group. When I was elected G.S.R., my sponsor told me that my job was to get the good stuff and bring it back to the group. When we are elected D.C.M., we are instructed to interact within our district and become involved with helping groups better carry the message. We are given a vision of how A.A. works from varied perspectives. Early on, we realize that as a member of a home group, we are really just a small part of the greater good, and as we follow the road map of service, we come to realize that the home group is not the beginning and end of A.A., but merely a small part of A.A. as a whole.

During one of his talks, Chuck C. said “The higher I go, the farther I see, and the farther I see, the higher I realize I need to go.” This was in reference to his length of sobriety and service. Those among us that have years of experience in service can understand his meaning. Not that we believe area chairs, delegates, or (heaven forbid) trustees are higher positions, but that as our road atlas has led us up the mountain in service, our view and opinion of Alcoholics Anonymous continues to broaden, change, and grow.

The average member of A.A. doesn’t realize that A.A. is brand new, or in its infancy, in as many places both here at home and around the world, as it is established. All one has to do is inquire how many new group forms come through G.S.O. monthly, or see how many pieces of our literature are being translated into foreign languages to know that A.A. is a movement that continues to change and grow.

This topic was not intended to diminish the importance of a home group, because it is there that we plant our roots and we recover. It is from there that we get to travel, and the home we must return to. But we do have a responsibility—to say “get in the car,” “get the good stuff and bring it back,” and “come and see A.A., in all its diversity and glory” beyond the doors of your home group.

PAST TRUSTEES' SHARING

Ken B., past trustee, 2008-2012

At the 63rd General Service Conference, something happened and I think it will have a great and good impact on Alcoholics Anonymous. Reading the final report you might miss it — it is almost a footnote. It appears in the Additional Considerations and says, basically, that the trustees' Conference Committee did not support the Board's proposal for interlocking directorates. In another bullet it was noted that they did support some of the Board's other proposals. Lastly, however, regarding some other governance proposals by the Board, it said, in effect, come see us before you implement anything.

I admire the participants of the 63rd Conference — they illustrate what Bill wrote about in Concept Seven; how the Conference and the Trustees both have power, but that there is a balance of power and it is workable. In other words, as Concept Seven says, "We have taken great pains to reserve final authority to the Conference by practical and traditional means. By legal means we have delegated ample functional and discretionary authority to the Trustees. We believe this balance can be maintained indefinitely, because the one is protected by tradition and the other by law." We have traditional rights (Conference) and we have legal rights (trustees), and as a trustee I got very accustomed to those legal rights and, I admit, once in a while it was easy to almost forget about those traditional rights of the Conference. It was impressive to see a Conference Committee take a position and hold it. Of course, it wasn't just that Committee — the proposal was carried to a floor action and the full Conference declined to consider reversing this committee's position.

The nature of our service structure really is one of sponsorship. Home groups and sponsors send GSRs to district and area meetings and they become the pool from which delegates are selected. So we sponsor delegates, not train them, in the principles of A.A. The Conference itself is made up of delegates, trustees, nontrustee directors, and AAWS and Grapevine staff. This collective group is the sponsor for the General Service Board, letting the board know what must be carried out and done. I admire the 63rd General Service Conference for the position it took, and because of this easily overlooked item, I think that we are in for several good years of very serious and dedicated Conference work.

Dean R., past trustee-at-large/U.S., 1997-2001

This hotel where this forum is being held is the same place I took my last drink in January of 1978. I woke up, called the front desk, and said, "Where am I?" I was in rough shape. When I got back to El Reno, the first thing I did was to call Sam T. Sam was a real true blood alcoholic, at that time he had been sober about 15 years. I said, "Sam, I need to talk to you, I think I might have a problem." And he said, "I wondered when you was going to arrive! Do you want to do something about it?" I said, "I want to do something," and he said, "No, do you want to quit drinking?" It's the only thing he asked me. I said, "Yeah, I really do." He said that he'd come by and pick me up. I didn't know it until later, but when I called Sam, he was in the car with his wife and another couple. They were on their way to a dinner in Oklahoma City. He got the call from me and he told them to go ahead. And then he made a Twelfth Step call on a

drunk. Now, that's what A.A. is all about — somebody caring enough for another drunk to do something about it.

I think we have tried to emphasize that principle this weekend at this forum. If you believe in A.A. then you will do all you can to carry this message to other alcoholics and you will do what you can to help them find sobriety. I don't think I can express it any better than Dr. Bob. In the Big Book he talked about carrying A.A.'s message from one alcoholic to another and he said he did it for four reasons. First, it was a duty, on his part, to carry the message of sobriety to help somebody else. Second, it was a pleasure because it was a joy to see somebody find the answer to the problem that they could not overcome themselves. Thirdly, in doing so he was paying back — a little bit — the debt he owed others for his life of sobriety. Fourth, he was taking out insurance so that he might not have to get drunk again.

In Alcoholic Anonymous, we work with people. What we do in the Service structure is to implement and supplement and make sure this is around for the next suffering alcoholic who walks through that door or finds himself drunk in this hotel like I did, thirty-five years ago. That's what we are here about.

Gary K., past trustee, 2003-2007

I'm thinking about Tradition Nine, and the words, "A.A., as such..." I think a lot of people in A.A. will use the phrase "A.A., as such, ought never be organized" to kind of disavow themselves, not only of events like this, but even well-structured meetings. Somewhere along the line, we, by our actions, decided that meetings were mandatory and the taking of the actions of change sort of became optional. As a result, I think that today there is more and more emphasis on A.A. meetings being the basis of recovery. In my experience, nothing could be further from the truth. To me, for what it's worth, "A.A., as such" means two liars sitting down, sorting out the truth. That's where A.A. happens, I believe. It's over a kitchen table or the smoky old back room of some bar. And we hammer at this work. And the work is the taking of the Steps and analyzing, reading, digesting, and discussing the points that are made in the Big Book. Everything else in A.A. is made to support that activity.

It may be difficult for the newer member or neophyte in service to see the connection between this and carrying A.A.'s message. Over time, that understanding will grow. As part of sponsorship, we have a responsibility to talk with newer members about the other two legacies that too often get dismissed as being efforts to "organize." We will never organize working one on one with each other. But everything else probably would benefit from some kind of organization. Since we decided, by our actions, that A.A. meetings are the most important part of our recovery, these meetings, in order to be effective, must, by necessity, be organized.

Finally, I want to talk about Grapevine. I was at a Grapevine workshop held in our area this summer. One of the problems and challenges they face is getting and printing quality submissions. But they are printing what they're getting. It's on us to commit to pen and paper and submit. Here is what my group is going to do — we don't agree on everything, but it was unanimous on this. We are going to take our inventory, come up with a group conscience, and then write it down. Our group has been around since the 1970s, and we have a history. We are going to send what we write to the Grapevine in hopes that they will publish it. And we hope it will stimulate other groups to maybe do the same. In this way, maybe there will be some meat

and substance for people to sink their teeth into, and then perhaps we can increase our subscription rate.

Don M., past General Service trustee, 2009-2013

I want to say ‘thank you’ for your support over the past 10 or 15 years. I recall something from 8th grade junior high school. We were going on a field trip, and before we went, the principal spoke to us. He said, “We are going to a roller skating rink. You are going to feel yourself beginning to fall, and you are going to scream, and then you are going to land on the floor, and it’s going to really hurt. And it’s going to really hurt whether you scream or not. So, please remember, screaming only annoys everyone around you.” That’s like what some of serving on the board was like!

I am a General Service trustee. That means I was interviewed for the job. As a nontrustee director, I was also interviewed. Regional trustees, however, are picked by their areas and have a direct connection with their areas and districts. I missed that. But many of groups in the Southwest region saw fit to invite me to their area to share and to visit and to participate. It was incredibly valuable.

Bill wrote points on insuring the future of A.A., not protecting A.A.’s past. We are all cofounders of the future of A.A. You people taught me that one person’s obsession is another person’s persistence. So turn your worst liabilities into your best assets. Fail fast, fail often, and fail forward. I called myself broken when I got here, and I am still broken and insecure. I will always be, but you people allowed me to wander forward being broken. One of the things we are in A.A. is tolerant. Sometimes I adopt the attitude of tolerance grudgingly, like “well, I’ll tolerate that if that’s the way you *have* to be...” But our literature says what works well for us is an appreciation for another person’s point of view — an appreciation. So, the more I appreciate you, the more I appreciate what I have been given, and then I can show up and let you be you. It says principles before personalities — not principles *instead of* personalities. We all have agendas, and I’ve had much better luck when I’ve asked that my personal agenda match God’s agenda and A.A.’s agenda. Thank you.

Conley B., past trustee, 2007-2011

I meditate in the morning. Usually, it tends to be on the Steps, Traditions and Concepts. I think part of the problem we have in A.A. is that we don’t integrate the Steps and Traditions and Concepts. Sometimes, we get to doing business and we forget about the Steps and Traditions. But the triangle is equilateral. The nature of my problem is I’m powerless over alcohol: When I start drinking, I can’t stop and my life becomes unmanageable. Tradition One tells me I don’t know how to work well, play well, or live well with others, and Concept One says that you’ve got the answer. You have the ultimate authority and the final responsibility for all of A.A. — not just world services.

The answer to my powerlessness and the unmanageability of my life is out here among you. I had to come to believe that a power greater than myself could restore me to sanity. And then when I came to that power, it was a group of drunks who seemed to have good orderly direction. In the Second Concept, I think Bill incorporated on a structural level what the Fellowship had been doing from the get go. But in my life, I had to have a sponsor. I had to

have someone who was plugged into the whole of A.A. who could give me the effective conscience and be the actual voice of A.A. to me. The threes are all about the decisions I had to make to trust. I had to make a decision to trust this God that I didn't understand, but I saw working through you and I saw how you changed. I was attracted to your change, and that gave me hope, and I was able to trust that. In Tradition Three, you said the only requirement for membership was the desire to stop drinking and that made me equal to everybody else.

The threes through fives are how we achieve an informed group conscience. It is the process we go through where all the elements have to come together for us to have an informed group conscience and that is most likely where a loving God is going to be able to express himself. And then, when we get into six through eleven, what we really have is that process of self-governance. Bill talks about it in the Big Book when we get to Step Eleven. He says now we let God discipline us in the way we've just outlined. That is another word for governance. I have to learn to trust God, A.A., and our leaders in service.

Practicing the Concepts and putting them into action ultimately becomes the Warranties. When I get filled up spiritually, it has to spill over. And I want to carry the message and practice these principles in all my affairs. I have to practice this genuine anonymity where I remain in thankful contemplation of the him who presides over us all by placing principles before every personality (including my own) so that I never become a source of perilous wealth and power. We remain in service, democratic in our activities, which we did in Step Three when we said we made a decision to turn our will and our thoughts and our life over to the care of God as we understand him. I have to learn to become a trusted servant. And I know that's what you've got sitting up here in the front row. Thank you.

“CLOSING REMARKS”

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

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 areas of our lives. Former Class A trustee, George Valliant, said that service is linked to survival and 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. As Dr. Bob said, it all comes down to love and service. I have always loved the fact that he put “love” first. This weekend there has been a lot of discussion about the Seventh Tradition. At its core, the Seventh Tradition is about service — service in all its various forms. This weekend, despite many opportunities to the contrary, we have all placed personalities above principles. It seems we have also carefully observed Rule 62 — to not take ourselves too seriously. Look around; in this room you’ll see our future Concept Nine leaders. I hope each of you looks at your leadership with a sense of wonder and delight and joy.

I sense a great enthusiasm with our electronic media initiatives for Grapevine and A.A.W.S. At the same time, I am also reminded that fighting isolation is a key to ongoing sobriety. 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. This weekend, the spirit of gratitude has been alive and well and within our discussions; I sense serenity. Today, every 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 problem. But at the same time, remember that A.A. is Alcoholics Anonymous, not Alcoholics Invisible. For those who are restless, irritable, and discontented, drinking is not the solution. And not drinking is not the solution. The solution, as you know, is spiritual growth through application of the Twelve Steps in all aspects of our lives. Thank you for the opportunity to serve.
