

sober moment in his life,” Olukunbi said that “on this unfortunate night, he had arrived home drunk. When Sister Abe tried to talk to him about his drinking, he lost his temper, picked up a burning kerosene stove and the pot of soup on it and threw them at her. Two days later she died. Her children, unable to forgive their father, drifted away as soon as they were able. Her husband was never himself again.”

Olukunbi has not forgotten Sister Abe. “Since her death,” she said, “I’ve had the desire to help such women, and also to help their alcoholic husbands become rehabilitated—there are many in this prison like Sister Abe’s husband. But in order to do so, I need the support of A.A. Will you help us?”

G.S.O. staff member Eva S., who answered Olukunbi’s request for help, sent her A.A. literature and noted that A.A. has a presence in the correctional facilities of the U.S./Canada and several other countries. In Cameroon, Eva pointed out, A.A. started around 1996 when one French-speaking alcoholic guard found a copy of the Big Book and wrote to France’s General Service Office. Thanks to that one guard, A.A. grew in Cameroon, where today there are more than 110 groups and 500 members, including those in prisons.

Were it not for professionals in the medical community who use A.A. as a resource and refer alcoholics to meetings, the Fellowship as we know it would not exist. Today, Eva told Olukunbi, “we are aware of a few A.A. groups and contacts in Nigeria—at Lagos, Carki, Igbajo and Warri.” She offered to arrange for an A.A. member to contact Olukunbi and further suggested that she get in touch with Al-Anon/Alateen Family Group Headquarters in Virginia Beach, Va., for help in reaching out to families of alcoholics.

Soon afterward, Olukunbi wrote again. “I’m so grateful to G.S.O. for the books and the other contact addresses you sent me,” she said. “I’ve given a friend of mine a copy [of the Big Book] and have gotten two people, including my husband, to help me help the alcoholics in our area. Additionally, my boss in the Prisons Service has agreed to help me organize the inmates who need help with their alcoholism. Long live A.A., and may God bless all its members.”

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## ■ The D.C.M.: Linchpin Between Group Reps and The Area Service Structure

Of all the offices in general service, perhaps one of the least understood is that of the district committee member. Just what is a D.C.M.? How are these trusted servants elected, and what do they do?

To understand, let’s start with the District itself. The term “district” was mentioned during early General Service Conferences, and both “district” and “district committee member” were used informally in the 1950s. The term “district” was included in the 1955 draft of *The Third Legacy Manual of World Service* (now titled *The A.A. Service Manual*) and 20 years later was formalized in a 1975 supplement to *The Service Manual*.

In today’s *Service Manual* a district is clearly defined as “a geographical unit containing the right number of groups — right in terms of the D.C.M.’s ability to keep in frequent touch with them, to learn their problems, and to find ways to contribute to their growth. In most areas a district includes six to 20 groups. In metropolitan districts the number is generally 15 to 20, while in rural or suburban districts it can be as small as five.” (To encourage maximum group participation, some areas have incorporated linguistic districts. These usually have a bilingual D.C.M. or liaison, and their boundaries may be independent of the conventional geographic district boundaries.)

Now to the D.C.M.: The heart of A.A. is the group, which elects a general service representative. G.S.R.s attend district meetings that are made up of the groups in that district and elect a D.C.M. As noted in the flyer “Your D.C.M.,” available from the General Service Office, the D.C.M., who serves a two-year term, is the vital link between the group’s G.S.R. and the area service structure (including the area’s delegate to the General Service Conference).

Usually the D.C.M., who is elected by other G.S.R.s, has already served as one of them and so knows the ropes. Time, energy, and commitment are important attributes, because D.C.M.s take the collective group conscience of their district’s A.A. groups to the area committee. Among other things they hold regular meetings of all G.S.R.s in the district and keep them informed about Conference activities; help the delegate obtain and update group information for appropriate A.A. directories; and hold workshops on carrying the message of the Seventh Tradition of self-support to A.A. groups.

Across the U.S. and Canada several thousand D.C.M.s are doing all this, and more. In Long Beach, California, D.C.M. Phil L. stresses that “we D.C.M.s do not work alone. It takes a lot of people working together to accomplish whatever we are able to do here, and many of our ideas come to us as the result of the sharing of other A.A.s in service.” One of them, the idea of putting together visitation kits, came, Phil says, “from seeing one at the Pacific Regional Forum in July 2002; and the idea of the flyer that’s included came from a fellow D.C.M. Then it took a team to put them together, took the district to vote and approve it, and the D.C.M.s to take it out on visits to our groups.

“Our visitation kit consists of an information flyer listing the addresses of the area, district and local services committees, such as Hospitals and Institutions (H&I) Committee, our Harbor Area Central Office, as well as

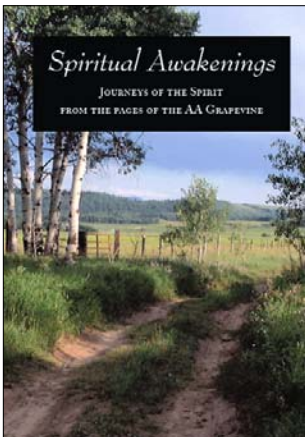
G.S.O. and the pamphlets ‘Your A.A. General Service Office,’ ‘The A.A. Group,’ and ‘G.S.R. May Be the Most Important Job in A.A.’ We remind them to include their group service numbers when making contributions to any of these entities. Our kit also contains the Self-Support Packet (F-19), which includes the pamphlet ‘Self-Support: Where Money and Spirituality Mix,’ the service piece ‘Memo to a Group Treasurer,’ Self-Support flyers and a Group Service Number Card.” This Self-Support Packet is available from G.S.O. at no charge.

Once prepared, the kits are taken by the area’s nine D.C.M.s to the groups they represent—approximately 30 in each district. “Wherever I’ve gone with the kits,” Phil relates, “the groups have been receptive. Part of our purpose is to update and check the accuracy of group registration information that is forwarded to G.S.O., and to extend a warm welcome to our district meeting. It is held once a month and anybody can come.”

Phil takes the demands of being a D.C.M. in stride. “I joined A.A. over eight years ago,” he says, “and in my Icebreakers Group I’d see my service sponsor, Pete B. [now Mid-Southern California delegate, Panel 52], and a lot of other people keeping service commitments come rain or shine. They were staying sober — it was inspiring and in turn helped me to make and meet commitments. This is where the road took me, and I’m grateful. I love general service.”

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## ■ New From The AA Grapevine



*Spiritual Awakenings*, a new collection of stories from 60 years of the AA Grapevine, chronicles the spiritual journeys of individual A.A. members. Bill W. said one of the main aims of the Big Book was to put recovering alcoholics in touch with a Power greater than themselves, and these stories in *Spiritual Awakenings* reflect the many ways A.A. members have made that connection. Some

discovered a Higher Power for the first time, while others regained a faith they once had. Above all, in their journeys, they discovered themselves. And they tell how, “having had a spiritual awakening,” they learned to practice spiritual principles in their everyday lives. Copies of *Spiritual Awakenings* (GV-14), which comes out Nov. 15, can be ordered by calling 212-870-3404, writing to PO Box 1980, Marion, OH 43306-8080, or online at [www.aagrapevine.org](http://www.aagrapevine.org), 240 pages; softcover; \$7.95, plus shipping and handling.

## Correctional Facilities

### ■ Inmates Getting Out Can Take Heart From a Grapevine Issue

The General Service Office is sending a copy of a special correctional facilities edition of the AA Grapevine to inmates who write in with their coming release dates. The magazine, entitled “Released,” contains eight articles from the Grapevine’s July issue written by inmates or former inmates sober in A.A. Since many prisons forbid inmates to have material with staples, the edition sent to the correctional facilities is thread-bound.

The G.S.O. staff member on the correctional facilities assignment, Mary Clare L., says that an A.A. member about to be released from prison is at a critical juncture. “If the inmate can make the leap from A.A. inside the prison to A.A. outside the prison, they tend to stay sober and avoid a return trip to jail,” says Mary Clare. “It may be hard to get a job and they might not be welcomed back by their family. But if they can stay sober, they have a lot going for themselves,” she says.

G.S.O. gets 150 to 300 letters each week from inmates, and they are all answered. Some of those writing want literature, some are looking for an A.A. member on the outside to correspond with. “We put them in touch with an A.A. member on the outside, someone who is part of the Correction Correspondence Service,” says Mary Clare. More than 10,000 A.A. members “inside” correspond with “outside A.A.” through the C.C.S.

Some letter writers want to start a meeting in a jail. These requests are sent to the correctional facilities area chair in that part of the country.

To inmates close to their release dates, G.S.O. sends the pamphlet on sponsorship, the listing of central offices and intergroups, and the “Released” Grapevine issue.

“The special correctional issue is full of success stories from inmates, and that’s great for those on the verge of being released, because it can be very scary facing the world outside,” says Mary Clare.

Their requests for an A.A. contact, someone to introduce them to A.A. on the outside, are, like the requests to start a meeting, passed on by G.S.O. to the appropriate correctional facilities area chair.

The “Released” issue is available for \$1 a copy (including postage) for orders of 10 or more. Contact the Grapevine at 212-870-3404 or on the Web at [www.aagrapevine.org](http://www.aagrapevine.org).