

FINAL REPORT
SOUTHWEST REGIONAL FORUM
OCTOBER 9-11, 2015
ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

Dear A.A. Friends,

Please mark your calendar for the next Southwest “Additional” Regional Forum, which will take place in Denver, Colorado, June 3-5, 2016 at The DoubleTree by Hilton Denver Hotel.

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

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INTRODUCTION

The 2015 Southwest Regional Forum was held in St. Louis, Missouri. Registration for the Forum was 472. This included 305 members attending their very first Forum—many were welcomed at the Forum Orientation on Friday evening.

ASK-IT BASKET QUESTIONS

(Not answered onsite)

- Q. Can we have a translation committee at G.S.O. to handle our day to day communications and to translate the background materials to the delegates?**
- R. G.S.O. employs and contracts with professionals for written translations involving English, Spanish and French.
- Q. Do other Areas have Bridging the Gap (BTG) Chairpersons as Area Committee positions to help provide volunteers for Treatment and Corrections releasees?**
- R. Yes, there are some Area Bridging the Gap Committees with Chairpersons and some of these committees work to connect alcoholics leaving treatment and corrections with an A.A. contact and meeting.

It is important to note, approaches to the 12 step service vary from Area to Area. While some Areas have Bridging the Gap committees, others do not. Some Bridging the Gap committees only work with Correctional facilities, others only with Treatment and others with both. Additionally, the connecting of alcoholics from treatment or correctional facilities to A.A. in some Areas is done by treatment and corrections committees.

- Q. What is the progress with the Karin language Big Book?**
- R. A.A.W.S. has been working with Burmese Karen-speaking folks on translations of the 12 Steps and of the 12 Traditions, as a breakthrough first foray into serving these communities. The review process of polishing the texts with the help of our independent translation-evaluation services notes in hand, and the polishing of texts by local speakers will continue.
- Q. In the Foreword to different editions of the Big Book, the length of sobriety mentioned of A.A.'s pioneers changed from 31 years to 50 years, why?**
- R. As far as I can tell, the length of sobriety for pioneers is not mentioned in the Forewords to any of the Editions, and I do not know where these numbers come from.
- Q. Why was the Big Book not printed in 1975?**
- R. I was unable to find a definitive answer for this. The sixteenth and last printing of the Second Edition Big Book was produced in 1974, and the first printing of the Third Edition was produced in 1976. It is possible that A.A. wanted to sell out of the remaining copies of the Second Edition before producing and selling the Third Edition, and so they did not create a printing of the Big Book in 1975.
- Q. Is there a chance for GSO to go broke in 10 years or the future since contributions are down and membership is staying the same?**

R. Anything in the world is possible, however, the Trustees of the General Service Board trustees are always working to be sure that does not happen. It is worth noting that Unit Sales trends are down, Grapevine circulation shows downward trends, contributions are flat, and inflation always affects expenses.

Q. What is the methodology of the Membership Survey?

R. Once the General Service Conference approves moving forward with the survey, the Public Information desk coordinates the process. The process involves surveying a random selection of the A.A. groups listed at G.S.O.

Once the groups to be surveyed are selected, a letter is sent to the 93 Area Delegates who serve as the local, survey point-person, notifying them that they will be receiving packets for each of the randomly selected groups in their particular area.

The packets contain instructions for the group about conducting the survey and the questionnaire that groups are asked to complete. The Delegates distribute and collect the completed packets of surveys. Frequently, the Delegates distribute the packets through the local District Committee chairs who give them to the groups. As per the instructions, groups go over the questionnaire either during a regular meeting or at a specially arranged group meeting. There is a designated time period within which the groups must complete the information and get it back to the Delegate.

Once the Area Delegates receive all the completed packets back from each group, they return them to the General Service Office. Then, the PI desk, usually working in conjunction with a professional statistician, collates and organizes all the information and provides a summary for review to the Trustees and Conference PI Committees prior to bringing a draft copy of the survey pamphlet to the Conference.

Q. Please elaborate on the current vision of this new committee “Communications Services” please.

R. Communication Services is the designation for a new staff position at G.S.O., rather than a new committee. The staff member on the Communication Services Assignment coordinates G.S.O.’s website activities, and serves as the chair of G.S.O.’s Intra-Office Website Committee and secretary to the A.A.W.S. Technology/Communication/Services Committee (TCS). This staff member assists G.S.B. and A.A.W.S. board committees that are looking at electronic communication in A.A.

Q. Contributions go up and A.A.W.S. raises prices without asking for permission from the Conference. I refuse to send my contributions in protest. How can you violate our commission to lower prices when contributions are up?

R. The corporate board of A.A. World Services, Inc. is required to review literature pricing at least every three (3) years and decide whether to adjust (raise or lower) any or all literature prices. After much discussion in 2014, for reasons reflected in the minutes and reported out to the Fellowship by trustee members of the corporate board, the decision to raise book prices was made, effective October 1, 2014. The General Service Conference does not have a voice in literature pricing, per se, but receives the reports of the corporation on this matter as required by the Conference Charter.

WORKSHOP REPORTS

“LA VIÑA: THE LA VIÑA REP AND MORE—BRINGING OUR MESSAGE OF HOPE TO ALCOHOLICS” (Moderator: Irene D., La Viña Editor / Reporter: anonymous)

The workshop moderator discussed the La Viña SMS program. In view of the fact that most people nowadays have smartphones, an experimental program was designed to provide information about La Viña and other topics of interest to Hispanics in A.A., as well as inspirational quotes taken from the magazine. Registered users receive about 6 SMSs a month.

The program was financed through a \$10,000 grant from the GV Board.

The program, which was first introduced at the Hispanic National Convention, is free of charge, but different phone companies may charge for individual SMSs, based on the actual service contract the user has.

The La Viña SMS program now has 450 registered users (the Pacific Region has the most members) and only two people have cancelled the service so far. There are no ads of any kind, only announcements. The whole purpose of the program is to carry information (LV Anniversary, LV service and other relevant topics). Registration is easy: the user dials a phone number: 50555. After dialing, the user types “AALV” and is automatically registered.

“RECORDS MANAGEMENT FOR REGISTRARS” (Moderator: Karen H., Manager Administrative Services/Special Projects / Reporter: Mark E.) The workshop moderator opened with an explanation of the duties of a registrar, as well as what a registrar can (and cannot) add, directly, to FNV (Fellowship New View Database). She then demonstrated with FNV screens and explained how dealing with “unknowns” is important. The registrar is tasked with locating updated information. It was also noted that the service number is for the position – not the incumbent. Use “personal records change” to update or change personal records such as phone, address, etc., but **not** the position.

Finally, it was brought up to group members that not all A.A.s realize that there is a difference between notifying a group’s central office about information and notifying or sending information to G.S.O. Group members kept this in mind when sharing information with fellow A.A.s.

“CONNECTING OUR MEMBERS AND GROUPS TO A.A. AS A WHOLE” (Moderator: Marge D. /Reporter: Gene M.) The attendees at this workshop discussed how the lack of participation in general service is a long-time and widespread issue. Is it due to a lack of information or is it due to apathy? Workshop members discussed the problem as well as solutions to it. Members shared that sponsorship is a major factor in getting people into service work, as well as being enthusiastic and showing the fun in service. Districts need to begin having events to promote communication. Then, use one-on-one communication and personal contact to share information and ask people to help. As always, we need to be good examples of the A.A. program and of service. We also need to sponsor people into all Three Legacies and bring them to district and area meetings. We emphasize the positions and benefits of service because it is not an extra part of our life in A.A. — it is necessary. Our life depends upon it.

Members made various comments, such as many groups focus only on the first legacy; many A.A.s hear negative comments about service work, such as the distance traveled, politics, and the difficulty of work. Are we not transparent? What can we do about the lack of interest? Another member shared a success story: There was a group in her district, the oldest in the area, but it was never connected. The district helped by sending some new people to the group. The group is now active and connected to A.A. as a whole.

“ARE WE REACHING MINORITIES? RACE IN A.A.” (Moderator: Matthew D./ Reporter: Anon.) In the “Are We Reaching Minorities? Race in A.A.” workshop, members worked on addressing two basic questions:

1. Why are minorities underrepresented in A.A.?
2. What can we do to address this?

The group concluded that minorities are underrepresented in A.A. due to language barriers, lack of inclusion in fellowship after meetings, literature issues, cultural perceptions about A.A. and addiction, and a tendency among some racial groups to gravitate towards other twelve step fellowships, including NA and CA, and addiction professionals steering newcomers to different fellowships based on their race. The group felt that, while people with time sober can see beyond racial differences, it is easier for newcomers to feel unique and be scared off.

The group concluded that these issues could be addressed at the group and individual level. Through groups and A.A.’s service structure, we can use PI and CPC committees to communicate with various communities and publish literature and announcements in different languages. Individual A.A. members can focus on inclusion of everyone at meetings, making sure attendees of all races are explicitly invited to fellowship, using the language of the heart and emphasizing the common addiction to alcohol that we share over other real or perceived differences, and by speaking to newcomers to make sure people of all races know that A.A. is an option. Taking these actions is an essential part of ensuring our primary purpose is fulfilled.

“PRIMARY PURPOSE—HOW DO WE UTILIZE OUR TRADITION” (Moderator: Steve F./ Reporter: Diane D.) The workshop attendees discussed several topics regarding A.A.’s primary purpose. A question was posed: What does your group do when someone introduces themselves as an alcoholic *and* an addict? Some comments from the group were:

I am a member if I say I am a member; my story is my greatest asset; our Fellowship can fail if we do not stick to our primary purpose; we cannot be all things to all people; and we violate the unity of A.A. by separation (“and-a”); every time we say we are different, we separate ourselves; if newcomers come to our group and say they are an “anda” we let them stay—they usually drop the “and a” later; do not water down the message; We are not doing a heroin addict any good in an A.A. meeting; recovery requires all 12 Steps; and a solution is important to all of us; sponsorship is the key.

The second question posed was: “What is your group’s message?” Some responses of the workshop attendees were:

To carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers; all is contained in the first 164 pages of the Big Book; our book states precisely how we recovered; responsibility statement; one alcoholic talking to another; we are here for singleness of purpose; we have a solution in Alcoholics Anonymous.

“ANONYMITY, OUR SPIRITUAL FOUNDATION” (Moderator: Tami R. /Reporter: Erica C.) A question was posed: “Have you ever lived outside the spirit of anonymity?” In response, members shared: “Early in sobriety, I broke someone else’s anonymity or my own anonymity with self-seeking motives (getting special treatment, attention, a good laugh, etc.) I’ve also put people in A.A. on pedestals or sought celebrity of my own within A.A.” Members concluded that (sometimes) good intentions, matched with ignorance, could lead to inadvertent anonymity breaks (e.g. sharing about another person’s story in your home group when they’re family members). Furthermore, just because someone is in A.A. doesn’t mean they understand A.A.’s concept of anonymity.

Another question was posed to workshop attendees: “How have you learned to live within the spirit of anonymity based on this experience?” In response, members shared:

- I’ve learned to suppress my ego by attending a group that pulls tickets at random to share. It teaches me we are all equals.
- We are responsible for lovingly teaching one another, on on one in our groups.
- We need to teach humility and anonymity at home, with our families, when they attend meetings.
- Anonymity is spiritual; confidentiality is practical; we need to practice both.
- We learn not to seek distinction within A.A., or put others (including celebrities) on pedestals.
- We always check our motives when sharing our A.A. membership with others.
- We discuss all Twelve Traditions at our groups.
- When asked about our membership in A.A., we trust God in deciding who needs to know.
- We don’t take photos or share about our sobriety on social media.

“GRAPEVINE: THE GRAPEVINE REP AND MORE—BRINGING OUR MESSAGE OF HOPE TO ALCOHOLICS” (Moderator: **Ami B., A.A. Grapevine, Inc., Executive Editor/Publisher/** Reporter: Suzanne S.) The Grapevine’s executive editor answered questions and discussed several issues regarding the Grapevine in this workshop:

1. *How to search the archives by name:* Using the search field, you can retrieve an article using the author’s name. Also, inputting the author’s location and the topic is helpful. The more tags, the easier to find the search topic. The search module is being upgraded.
2. *Can institutionalized persons get a subscription?* Know the institution’s requirements before sending a subscription.
3. *Passing on magazines:* Give away newcomer packets; send to doctors’ offices, send care packages to military troops, give out fulfilled gift subscriptions.
4. *What are some ways to present the magazine?* One of the best and quickest ways to present the Grapevine (and what is inside of it) is to comment on a point or story in the magazine.

Ami asked the group, “If you were going to write an article for the Grapevine, what would your topic be?” The participants found that there were many interesting topics. However, the bottom

line is that everyone has a story that applies to him or her. Their topic, their story, also touches others. In regard to the website, the executive editor shared that the sobriety calculator is very popular. To support the Grapevine and the message of A.A. that it carries, encourage your group to give the Grapevine representative time to speak.

“RECORDS MANAGEMENT FOR REGISTRARS” (Moderator: Karen H., Manager Administrative Services/Special Projects / Reporter: J.G.R.) A phrase was shared within the workshop: “It is all about the verification!” Verification IS the backup. Karen H., manager of administrative services and special projects, discussed the services that an Area Registrar working within the General Service Office’s Fellowship New Vision (FNV) database does. For instance: input group changes, new groups, and new officers. The moderator shared that Annie C., area 15, is available to mentor registrars and will provide face time. Annie C. is also able to explain how A.A. Traditions and Concepts are involved. The FNV database is only as good as the information put into it.

Briefly, the group learned that invalid addresses are the cause of many problems. Incomplete or incorrect contact information, not group information (addresses), cause many problems. Invalid emails are easier to correct since email is entered twice. Finally, it was noted that returned mail makes costs double and triple, therefore implementation of the FNV is a cost-saving solution. Karen shared that the biggest problem that database entry people face is “can we read this?” The group learned much about typical database errors and how to correct them.

“COMMUNICATION: HOW CAN WE BETTER IT WITH TECHNOLOGY?” (Moderator: Melissa R. / Reporter: Ron C.) The workshop “Communication: How Can We Better It with Technology?” considered three questions:

First, how does your area or district use technology to search for and find meetings? There were many different approaches among areas. Some used their website to conduct business only, while other areas had a searchable meeting directory based on city and zip code. One area had both a private and public website. The public website is searchable for meetings. However, the lack of standardization of websites was a major concern. Discussion followed about the feasibility of GSO providing a standard template to be used for websites.

Second, what are the risks of anonymity breaks using social media? Anonymity breaks can occur by association, but our literature and websites are for people interested in alcoholism and the solution. Some participants questioned if the Fellowship was limiting our outreach to people because of our fear of anonymity breaks.

Third, is spirituality lost using technology? In response, the workshop attendees agreed that technology is a tool. It should not be used as a spiritual solution or replacement of one alcoholic talking to another. Technology can broaden our spiritual life and widen our world. Additional discussion included the needs for harmonization of information sources, standardization of A.A. websites and looking at the possibility of hiring professional IT personnel to improve continuity of technology usage.

“SPONSORSHIP” (Moderator: Stephanie B. / Reporter: Pam J.) The workshop members were asked to consider and discuss three questions:

1. *What are the advantages and responsibilities of being a Three Legacy sponsor?* First, a Three Legacy sponsor should read the Big Book. Early in an A.A.’s sobriety, the legacy of service should be introduced. It is the responsibility of the sponsor to carry all three legacies to sponsees. Be excited about sobriety! Set the example for newcomers. Stick with the literature. Steps are suggested, but sponsors can have requirements like sponsees must have a home group, do service work, etc. Also, sponsors do not have all the answers—newcomers to A.A. will benefit most if they get involved in A.A. When many of us get to A.A., we put ourselves in God’s hands and allow him to lead us where we are needed. Sponsors take us through the Steps as outlined in the Big Book, and share only their experience.
2. *What are your experiences sponsoring people with other cultural differences?* One member related that he asked a gay sponsee if he wouldn’t feel more comfortable with a gay sponsor. He was answered, “I don’t have a problem with gay, I have a problem with alcohol.” Others noted that it was easy to sponsor when we sponsor using the literature as our guide—it contains all the directions we need. Another mentioned that alcohol is our common bond that unites us. Also, that our common problem becomes more apparent when there is some diversity between sponsor and sponsee.
3. *What do we do with sponsees and newcomers who don’t call?* Members shared that the responsibility to call was on the sponsee—it is their sobriety. Others said that they call sponsees after a few weeks or a month to let them know that they are available if help is needed, but we do not chase someone who doesn’t want what we have. Others set expectations up front about calls, and shared that we are all responsible for our own sobriety.

“P.I. COMMITTEES AND SPREADING THE MESSAGE THROUGH MEDIA OUTLETS”

Moderator: Don G. / Reporter: Susan C-N.) Workshop participants discussed several questions, such as:

Are we abandoning conventional media for the electronic age? Are we continuing to utilize proven methods of successful PI work? For example, are we going out to media sources and asking them to play PSAs? Also, is fear holding us back from embracing new technologies?

Members asked if there was a way that GSO could help access satellite TV and radio stations — as a whole — to carry the message with PSA. Members discussed forming our PI committees, as well as the new “Doors” video and the time and effort and expense put into it.

“CORRECTIONS CORRESPONDENCE” (Moderator: Dave F. / Reporter: Pam K.)

1. Two questions were addressed at this informative and interactive workshop. *First, how can we encourage more male correspondents?* The consensus indicates that better communication of the need at area and district levels would be beneficial. In addition, sponsors should encourage sponsees to participate, members could place more information in area, district, and intergroup newsletters and put out a call for volunteers. Expediting the connection process would be helpful.
2. *The second question dealt with how to better communicate the CCS program to the Fellowship.* Some ideas were to have GSO communicate with the delegates about the program twice a year, encourage workshops at the area and district level—expand our resources to use the tools and communication channels available. Another idea was to provide sample introductory letters for first time letter writing members. Another suggested a link with Grapevine to generate interest at the local level. In closing, many participants did not know the CCS program existed, but are now very interested in taking it back to their areas.

PRESENTATIONS

The Twelve Traditions—James H., Delegate Panel 64, Area 68 Southwest Texas

Good morning. My name is James and I am an alcoholic. Sober since December 17, 1993, I am a member of the Bookmarks Group in Corpus Christi, serving as delegate from Area 68, Southwest Texas. I thank my friend Yoli, our Southwest Regional Trustee, for her loving invitation to share my experience, strength, and hope with our great A.A. Twelve Traditions.

Every bit three months sober, my first service commitment was with the Clean Air Group, making coffee and setting up tables and chairs each Friday evening. Every week the topic rotated: from Step, to Tradition, to discussion, and then speaker. I noticed that in the weeks when a Tradition was to be read and discussed, attendance shrunk by a third or more. I even overheard some members grumbling about Tradition meetings. Today, I find this negative attitude ironic in light of this passage from the Foreword of the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*: “A.A.’s Twelve Traditions apply to the life of the Fellowship itself. They outline the means by which A.A. maintains its *unity* and relates itself to the world about, the way it lives and grows.” I am grateful for the oldtimers like Eve S. who knew about our great A.A. Traditions and encouraged us newbies to learn about A.A. history. She told me, “It’s important to know why A.A. works the way it does. Just like in our personal recovery, our movement’s *past* has led us to where we are today, and holds the key to where the Fellowship is headed in the future.”

For me, I don’t think we can ever talk too much about A.A.’s Twelve Traditions. District meetings and area assemblies back home often devote agenda time to presentations on Traditions. This is good. But what about open A.A. discussion meetings? Isn’t one purpose of open meetings to allow observers to learn about Alcoholics Anonymous? What better way to show visitors who and what we are than by discussing A.A. Traditions? Is simply reading the short form of the Twelve Traditions in the opening format of a meeting doing much to teach our guests, or our members?

Time does not permit me to cover each Tradition in depth, so I will attempt to summarize them in a minute. Before then, I want to share with you a few resources that I find helpful. First, the long form of the Traditions that’s printed in the back of every Big Book is a good place to start. Also, I recommend two pamphlets which I use regularly. The first is “A.A. Tradition – How It Developed,” in which Bill W. reminds us, “May we never forget that without permanent unity we can offer little lasting relief to those scores of thousands yet to join us in their quest for freedom.” The second pamphlet is “Twelve Traditions Illustrated.” Several years ago a D.C.M. asked me to facilitate a workshop on the Traditions. Prior to my two P.M. workshop, I attended the group’s noon open discussion meeting, followed at one P.M. by a group conscience meeting. The group heatedly grappled with whether a nonalcoholic doctor should be allowed to be the speaker at their regularly scheduled Saturday night meeting. A.A. Traditions came to life, as several self-proclaimed “experts” shared their opinions. Eventually the informed group conscience, guided by a loving God, emerged. Thankfully I was armed with a stack of “Twelve Traditions Illustrated” and the proceeding workshop was one of the better attended and discussed that I have facilitated.

I highly recommend several A.A. Conference-approved books. *Pass It On* and *Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers* gives the reader a sense of what our society was like during the “flying blind”

period, before the Twelve Traditions were formulated. In *A.A. Comes of Age*, Bill W. writes, “For the sake of the welfare of our entire society, the Traditions ask that every individual and every group and every area in AA shall lay aside all desires, ambitions, and untoward actions that could bring serious division among us or lose for us the confidence of the world at large. The Twelve Traditions of A.A. symbolize the sacrificial character of our life together and they are the greatest force for unity that we know.”

My favorite resource to better understand the Traditions has to be *Language of the Heart*, the compilation of all the Grapevine articles written by Bill. He wrote two sets of essays, each describing the history and meaning of every Tradition. A couple of years ago my home group set aside one night each week to read and discuss this fascinating book.

To sum up A.A.’s Twelve Traditions, in my simple own way: We need each other; we seek God’s direction; we walk with all seeking sobriety from alcoholism; to remember that you might be right, to stick with A.A.’s message of hope and recovery, no side deals are needed, only A.A.’s own Alcoholics Anonymous; we give freely of what we found; we serve without any need to police; we mind our own business; we have nothing to sell; and we say thank you often.

I once met a minister of a large church at an event hosted by local A.A. members. The purpose of the event was to introduce Alcoholics Anonymous to the local professional community. The minister, having read some of the materials provided, remarked how he wished his faith had something similar to A.A.’s Twelve Traditions. He immediately recognized their power.

As members of Alcoholics Anonymous, the Twelve Traditions are part of our inheritance, one of our three legacies. They are a treasure passed down from our founding members, forged on their sometimes-painful experience, tempered with an inner strength to survive, and the hope that you and I will carefully guard this treasure for those who follow. It is a responsibility I have grown to love.

Thank you for your attention this morning. May your days and ways be blessed!

Involving Young People in General Service—Tom M., Area 65 Northeast Texas

It is my distinct pleasure and privilege to briefly share some thoughts with you regarding how to involve young people in service, including general service. Although much of what I present today may apply to, well, “not young” people as much as to young people, there are some areas where young members may be particularly helpful, and some ways that are more effective than others in reaching younger people. I should mention that while I am no longer a young person, I got sober at nineteen and have stayed sober since, so this talk isn’t just some old(er) guy’s opinion about young people—it reflects more than twenty-seven years of experience.

Perhaps the best place to start this talk might be to frame what we mean in A.A. when we talk about “young people.” It is not uncommon for teenagers to make their way to A.A. and belong here, although they make up less than 1 percent of our membership according to the 2014 Membership Survey. The 21 to 30 age group accounts for 11 percent of our membership, and 14 percent of our members are 31 to 40 (again according to the 2014 Membership Survey). This means that one-quarter of our members are younger than 40 years old, and nearly one-eighth are younger than 30. However, there is no bright age dividing so-called “young” A.A. members

from their older counterparts, and I'm not aware of any activity of, by, or for young A.A.s that restricts participation to folks of a more-advanced age. I sometimes hear the expressions "young at heart" or "young is anyone who still has growing to do," and I think they do a great job in conveying the message that no one is excluded because of age. However, I think these expressions sometimes obscure what can often be the most powerful aspect of young people in A.A., namely the sense of identification and belonging that comes from being surrounded by one's same-aged peers.

When I was young and newly sober, I would often tune out the old folks (back then, anyone over the age of 40 was old), but would somehow hear the very same message when it came from my contemporaries. Much of what we do in general service, especially in corrections work and treatment work, involves carrying the A.A. message to still-suffering alcoholics wherever we find them, and carrying the message in a way that the still-suffering can understand. In fact, we often go to great lengths to do this.

In my experience, this is exactly what young people's A.A. does: it carries the A.A. message to alcoholics, particularly young alcoholics, in a way that they're often more likely to understand. If someone were to say, "Oh, let's not carry the message into jails, because if those folks really wanted to get sober they'd bust out and come to a meeting," we'd think that person a bit daft. But I continue to hear things like, "If young people were willing to go to any lengths to get sober, they wouldn't need their own meetings." Is making people demonstrate just how willing they are a fitting way to demonstrate our code of love and tolerance? Or, to put it another way, why make folks walk if they can take the bus? If young folks get and stay sober because they get the message from people their own age where they otherwise might not, what's so bad about that?

So perhaps one way to involve young people in service is to let them find their own way in service, encouraging them to start or continue their own groups and gatherings when they feel moved to do so. As a former young sober guy, I'm (obviously) passionate about young people in A.A., and I sometimes find myself pushing my experience on younger A.A.s. This, of course, rarely ever goes well; I often have to remind myself that, whether I like it or not, I'm no longer a young person in their eyes, and when I get pushy I seem like a grown-up telling them what to do, rather than a peer sharing my experience. Just as with prospects that are new to the Steps, I find our best results in service come from merely laying out the kit of spiritual tools for inspection. And that means I can't allow my feelings to get hurt when, after inspection, folks want to go in a different direction. After all, Tradition Four gives folks the right to try things their own way, even when we think our way is better.

Many A.A.s—young and old alike—don't appreciate the rewards of service until they experience it for themselves. It's like describing the Grand Canyon; for folks who haven't seen it, no words are sufficient, and for folks who have seen it, no words are necessary. And as much as we general service folks find what we do to be fun, the plain fact is that it often seems quite boring to young A.A.s. So what if there was a way for young people to get involved in service that seems more fun to them? As it turns out, there is; it's what is often referred to as YPAA—an abbreviation for Young People in Alcoholics Anonymous. I trust that many of you have heard of ICYPAA, the International Conference of Young People in A.A., which we have hosted here in the Southwest Region six times in the last eighteen years. And perhaps you've also heard of some of the autonomous state or regional counterparts, such as our very own TXSCYPAA in Texas, or MOSCYPAA in Missouri, or HACYPAA, the first-ever Heartland Area Conference of Young

People in AA, which will be held in Oklahoma in March of next year. While I could talk about my YPAA experience for much longer than you'd like to listen, in the interest of time I'll simply say that I am a better delegate because of my YPAA service experience, and I personally know at least ten delegates, current or past, who also have a YPAA service background. There are countless more who are or have been area committee members, D.C.M.s, G.S.R.s, etc., from the top to the bottom of our upside-down triangle.

I'll suggest there may be four little words that can be quite effective in getting anyone, young or not, involved in service: WE NEED YOUR HELP. In my experience, a sincere expression of need goes so much further than guilt or pressure; e.g., when we say things like, "Why don't you want your triangle to have three sides?" When asking young people for service help, it often helps to be specific; e.g., "We need someone to speak at a local high school, and having someone younger would be uniquely helpful. Would you be available to help with that sometime?"

Finally, in closing, I'll suggest that if we want young people to be involved in general service now rather than later, perhaps we should stop referring to them as the future of our Fellowship. Maybe we should instead refer to them as the present of our Fellowship, if that's what we want to encourage them to be. Thanks for your time and attention.

Anonymity in the Twenty-first Century—Vernon H., Panel 64, Area 66 Northwest Texas

We are not going to be talking about anything new here today. This is not a new presentation. Bill Wilson realized the importance of anonymity early on; he understood that there could be no individual recognition or personal gain from breaking our most vital spiritual principal, which is anonymity.

So, what is anonymity, and why is it often referred to as the greatest single protection of the A.A. Fellowship? Here are some answers:

- At the personal level, anonymity provides protection for all members from identification as alcoholics—a safeguard often of special importance to newcomers.
- At the public level of press, radio, TV, films, and other media technologies such as the Internet, anonymity stresses the equality in the Fellowship of all members by putting the brake on those that might otherwise exploit their A.A. affiliation to achieve recognition, power, or personal gain.
- When using digital media, A.A. members are responsible for their own anonymity, as well as that of others. When we post, text, blog, or tweet, we should assume that we are publishing at the public level. When we break our anonymity in these forums, we may inadvertently break the anonymity of others.

With today's technological advancements and social media, it is very easy to break our anonymity and that of others. Publicly-accessible aspects of the Internet, such as websites featuring texts, graphics, audio, and video, can be considered the same as publishing or broadcasting. Unless password protected, a website requires the same safeguards that we use at the level of press, radio, and film. Basically this means we do not identify others or ourselves as A.A. members using full names and/or full-face photos. When we post pictures to Facebook or Twitter, we are breaking anonymity if we include a full-facial view, even if we only identify the person by first name. I challenge each of us to think twice before we post to social media. We must ask ourselves, "Will this post boost my ego? Will it fill me with pride? Is it going to take away from the spiritual principles of the A.A. program?" If you answered yes to any of the

questions, then don't do it. Your spiritual stability is more important than a few minutes of perceived fame or attention.

Let's play a little game. If the statement below is true, give me a thumbs up. If the statement below is false, give me a thumbs down.

1. It is okay to post pictures of A.A. members at conferences and conventions to my Facebook page. (false)
2. I should treat social media as if it were public access. (true)
3. It is okay to break my anonymity and the anonymity of others as long as I have permission to do so. (false)
4. When speaking as an A.A. member at a non-A.A. event or meeting, I should only identify myself with my first name. (true)
5. It is okay to use the Internet and social media to attract new members to the Fellowship. (false)

We must remember that our anonymity is both an inspiration to others and provides a sense of safety to newcomers. Anonymity encourages alcoholics and families of alcoholics to approach us for help. They regard our anonymity as an assurance that their problems will be kept confidential.

Anonymity is so important in our Fellowship, that it is included in our name: Alcoholics Anonymous. "The word anonymous has for us an immense spiritual significance. Subtly but powerfully, it reminds us that we are always to place principles before personalities; that we have renounced personal glorification in public; that our movement not only preaches, but actually practices a true humility."

A.A. Membership: An Opportunity for Growth—Jen N., Panel 64, Area 46 New Mexico

First, let me explain what my talk is about, since I know the title is ambiguous. What I'm interested in is the number of A.A. members in the U.S. and Canada, and how that volume has grown and plateaued over years. Now, one challenge is that we don't have precise figures on all this, since we don't track members nor do we take a rigorous census. What we have is the reported number of home group members submitted by registered groups. As we know, there are a lot of unregistered groups and meetings, and the estimates of home group members are often inaccurate. But, the numbers we do have present a picture of a fellowship that has grown steadily since the early publicity efforts of the 1940s, then rose sharply in the '80s and '90s, then leveled out in the last decade or so.

To me, these figures raise a few questions. If membership in A.A. has indeed plateaued, why is that? Is this something we should see as a problem? And if so, what is the solution?

As I've gone around New Mexico giving my reports, I've asked these questions. Let's consider a few theories.

- Other approaches to recovery: When A.A. began it was pretty much the only game in town in terms of dealing with alcoholism. Now, there's a whole range of alternatives—some medical, some derived from A.A.'s Twelve Step approach—which alcoholics may be turning to instead of A.A.

- Drugs: Many young people are using other drugs before they've had any experience with alcohol. When they seek recovery, it is for drug addiction rather than alcoholism. [Side note: Are N.A. and other drug-related Twelve Step programs growing?]
- Not enough Twelfth Stepping, P.I., and C.P.C. work: Reaching out to the still-suffering alcoholics is now often perceived as an optional activity, rather than the cornerstone of recovery. We may also be out of touch with means of communication that may be more effective in reaching today's potential members, particularly younger ones.
- Not retaining new members: A lot of potential members are just passing through A.A., either because they lack the willingness to embrace the program or because they are given insufficient guidance as to what it takes to maintain sobriety.
- Reached "dynamic equilibrium" after period of rapid growth: The growth of the '80s and '90s was a direct result of the treatment-center boom of that time. Since practices have changed, the size of our Fellowship has stabilized.

Not all of these possibilities represent a problem. If people are getting sober by other means, that's all well and good. We're not in competition with anyone, nor do we wish to criticize any approach that helps alcoholics.

We also have to consider that rapid growth creates problems of its own. A.A. membership exploded after the 1941 Jack Alexander article. In *A.A. Comes of Age*, Bill writes, "This sudden growth ushered in a period of awful uncertainty . . . the specters of disunity and collapse grew to frightening proportions. We could only do our best and leave the rest to God." (p. 87) In the years following that first membership boom, the Traditions, along with the General Service Conference and its associated service structure, were developed to insure A.A.'s stability and future, for as long as our creator shall need us.

It's possible that our creator doesn't need quite as much anymore, but I'm inclined to think at least some of the responsibility falls on our shoulders. My primary concerns here are with carrying the message effectively and the retention of members. Our goal is not to expand indefinitely. This isn't a pyramid scheme. Our goal has always been simply to share the gift of sobriety with any and all alcoholics who want it. But I fear that we've been overly passive, when our mission calls for us to be active.

I believe we can use this leveling off as an opportunity to strengthen our Fellowship. With a large influx of new members it's very difficult to ensure that newcomers are shown the ropes by experienced A.A. members. The result, I think, is a lot of groups, meetings, and members in A.A. today that know very little about our Traditions, our service structure, or even about our program of recovery. This is not willful ignorance. It's the impact of too few experienced members to adequately sponsor the throngs of new members coming in during previous decades. But now we have the chance to catch up and to share our history and experience throughout the Fellowship. The tools that were developed after our first membership boom have perhaps gotten a bit rusty. The Traditions only benefit us if we know them and can apply them. Our service structure only functions effectively if it truly reflects the voice of our Fellowship. Those of us who were fortunate enough to be sponsored into an appreciation of our three legacies have a responsibility to share that with those who haven't. And I really think the only way we can do this is through attraction. You can't expect people to seek out what they don't even know exists. We talk about preaching to the choir but I think the choir, in this case, are the ones who this message needs to reach. We have been given a gift and we need to actively share it, instead of waiting to be asked.

All Who Suffer—Simple But Not Always Easy—Rebecca M., Delegate Panel 65, Area 04
Arkansas

I really struggled for a while to write this presentation. After all, the Third Tradition is one of the simplest ones; we all understand it already. “The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking.” It’s pretty cut and dry, right? We don’t hand out applications for people to be able to attend meetings.

We all have our Third Tradition sagas—the one issue that “Had *this* been a requirement, I would have never been able to stay in the program.” My issue was my age. I was young when I came to the program, and yet no one said, “You aren’t old enough to be here. Go get some more experience.” So, when I was new in A.A., I thought this Tradition was written to protect me and others like me.

It took me a while to begin to realize that this Tradition was written for me to *practice*, not just for my benefit. I had thought that this Tradition was devised so that groups would remember to let everyone in. I wondered how this Tradition applied to me. After all, no one ever asked me for permission to attend any meetings. Then I began to hear people say things like, “Groups don’t break Traditions; people break Traditions.” How do I keep from breaking Tradition Three?

I was taught that one way to look at the Traditions is to consider the Steps as actions I must take to recover and to consider the Traditions as actions that I must *not* take in order for the group to survive. Tradition Three is really asking me to not judge whoever can be a member in this Fellowship. It sounds simple enough, but how well do I really practice this?

The Traditions Checklist from the A.A. Grapevine is a useful tool for me. Here are some the questions it asks regarding Tradition Three: “Do I set myself up as a judge of whether a newcomer is sincere or phony? Do I let language, religion (or lack of it), race, education, age, or other such things interfere with my carrying the message? Am I over-impressed by a celebrity? By a doctor, a clergyman, an ex-convict? Or can I just treat this new member simply and naturally as one more sick human, like the rest of us?” These are really good questions for me to periodically examine.

My favorite (or perhaps my least favorite) question from the checklist is, “Is there some kind of alcoholic whom I privately do not want in my A.A. group?” At first glance, the answer is, of course, “No.” But just as I constantly look deeper at my character defects in the Fourth Step, I have the opportunity to do the same with this question. What about the chronic slipper, or the person who doesn’t work a “strong” program? What about the obnoxious know-it-all? Or what about the member who doesn’t show up for business meetings, doesn’t serve the group, but shares in meetings how wonderful the program is? Do I have to accept these people as real members? Surely that isn’t what this Tradition is talking about. Surely I don’t have to accept those people as my fellow members. Of course, they can come to meetings, but do I have to accept them as members of Alcoholics Anonymous? Wouldn’t that mean that we are equals? Am I setting up a second-class membership? That is, am I judging people and putting them in one of two groups—the people I can respect, and the people that I let come to meetings, but maybe I get up and go get a cup of coffee when they share? I can tolerate those people coming to meetings, but to tolerate as members who deserve to gain from the program, just as I do—well, that is a different story. On the other hand, what did Bill mean when he wrote in the Grapevine article “Who Is a

Member of Alcoholics Anonymous?” in August 1946, “We wish to be just as inclusive as we can, never exclusive”? How inclusive am I at my home group? Do I reach my hand out to everyone at the meetings, or do I sit with and visit with my little group of friends?

These are questions I continuously have to ask myself, because I will never attain perfection. Each of you may have a slightly different set of questions to consider, but the idea is still the same: Am I being inclusive or exclusive?

In the essay on Tradition Three of the Twelve and Twelve, Bill wrote, “Fear is the true basis of intolerance.” (p. 140) That certainly proves to be the case with me. The fears that I found in my Fourth Step end up staring me in the face when I examine how I practice the Third Tradition. Fortunately, as my sponsor constantly reminds me, I keep getting more and more opportunities to practice, knowing that I will never 100 percent “get it right.” The gift is that I have the solution—faith. I can remember to ask for faith that the group will be just fine, even if I don’t get to handpick the type of members who attend, or to tell the members how to behave.

Once I started writing this presentation, I ran into another difficulty: I found I really had too much to say! There are several more aspects of Tradition Three, which I don’t have time to discuss. One is the concern that we often lose the emphasis on the one requirement we have. Mo N. did a wonderful job discussing this aspect at our Regional Forum two years ago, and I would encourage you to read her essay on that topic.

I’ll close with one more quote from Bill’s 1946 Grapevine article, “Who Is a Member of Alcoholics Anonymous?” Referring to the then-new trend of practicing the Third Tradition, Bill wrote, “perhaps it bespeaks our confidence that every storm will be followed by a calm; a calm which is more understanding, more compassionate, more tolerant than any we ever knew before.”

PAST TRUSTEES' SHARING

Don M. General Service Trustee (past, 2009-2013)

When I came into Alcoholics Anonymous in September 1987, I was following a parked truck. I showed up looking for a good story to give the judge and I had a lot of resentments against institutions. Today, I'm driving for money, and I am proud to announce that I now make a living doing something I used to get arrested for. I'm grateful for what I've been given, and you allowed me to get close to you. I know that I cannot arrive at harmony unless I go through conflict, I can't go over or under or around, I have to go through. But lately, I am beginning to think that opposition is what allows me to grow, and the conflict might be optional. That's what service has given me. I got a note recently. It said, "Don, you are still having a hard time making the distinction between praying and scheming." Sometimes I mistake getting my way for having a spiritual experience.

This weekend, I listened to workshops and conversations and I have come to the conclusion that I still have a lot of growing to do — and that has to do with the phrase, "Our troubles are of our own making." The phrase doesn't say our *problems* are of our own making, it says our *troubles*. I think my troubles are my worries and fears. When I was at the technology workshop, I was listening to worries and fears and I am pretty sure it wasn't technology that was the problem. Either I over-enthusiastically embrace and encourage it, or I want to focus only on the human side because I am afraid of something. It is not technology or fear that's the problem; it's my relationship with it. That is hard for me to remember unless I get the chance to show up and talk to people about it.

At the technology workshop, it occurred to me that I should be sponsored into the future by the people who are going to be the future. We are all co-founders of the future of A.A. — whether we want to be or not. We have many of the same problems that many organizations have. We have egos, we have agendas, we have problems with the future, we need strategies, and we need to take risks. The thing that makes us really special is that we have a bunch of people whose lives depend upon A.A. showing up with passion and dedication. We also have these spiritual principles that allow us to work through our conflict and get to our group conscience so that we can move forward in some kind of harmony.

I am grateful to be here, and what I learned about sacrifice is that it is damn hard! It is supposed to be, because it is what separates the men from the boys and the women from the girls. The more difficult it is, the more I have to reach for something larger than myself. If it's easy, I can do it on my own. I learned in A.A. that we do together what we cannot do alone. I believe A.A. is comprised of tens of thousands of spiritual entities, called groups. The job of those groups is to help alcoholics to do Twelfth Step work. Everything we do here and at the General Service Conference is to support groups so that they can produce members who can do Twelfth Step work. If we keep our focus on that, all our trials and tribulations become worth it.

Conley B., Past Southwest Regional Trustee, 2007-2011

My first regional forum was in Colorado in 1983. Since then, I've met a lot of A.A. giants and lots of general service managers. I said to the new general manager, "We expect an awful lot from you. We expect you to lead our Fellowship into the next vision because you are the steward of that office, and that office has been central to keeping us all on track and to keep the information flowing and to keep the heartbeat of A.A. connected." I am constantly amazed at Bill W. and the things he thought about and the time he was thinking about them. In his articles, included in our service literature, he says that everything he ever dealt with — the Big Book, the General Service Conference, the Traditions, the Concepts, and certainly the ratio on the Board — was controversial.

I became the alternate G.S.R. for my group and I showed up at an area assembly, and they were talking about A.A. in a way that they didn't at my home group. Not that my home group was wrong in any way, but it was a different aspect of it. I was attracted to this thing like bees are to honey. I wanted to be around it. At the next area assembly, I was the only alternate G.S.R. for the whole district. They came to me and appointed me acting D.C.M., even though I hardly knew what a G.S.R. was. I talked to the D.C.M. from district 11, he had 100% attendance of his G.S.R.s, so I asked him how he did the D.C.M. thing. He told me, and I followed his instructions. I got elected co-chair at the next area assembly. Sober for two years, I got involved in this early on.

But at the next area assembly election, I got turned down for every office! I didn't know what to do, and my sponsor told me to do the next right thing. A guy invited me to talk down at the prison. I was friendly with an inmate there, and then I became friends with a few more. They were looking for someone to sponsor a meeting in the prison. I didn't think I had enough time sober, but I said I'd hunt down someone. "In the meantime," I told them, "if you want to start, we can talk about a Step for an hour and a Tradition for a half an hour." They allowed that would be fine. I served as Corrections chair and went in and out of institutions. I have never been convicted nor sentenced to serve time, but I figure I served, collectively, somewhere over four years behind the bars, just taking meetings in. It was only by the grace of God that I didn't have to stay in there all week; I got to go home and then come back. I qualified to be in there, I just didn't get caught.

I am grateful this program works. It has become obvious, to me, as I have reread Bill W.'s writings that we need to continue to take our own inventory— personal, district, group, area and General Service Conference. We need to certainly take our inventory as it relates to A.A. as a whole. Bill was so clear, in writing the Twelve Concepts, that we have two important and equal (though different sizes) parts of our organization: A.A.W.S. and Grapevine. They are both important, particularly for the newcomer, for carrying the message, and for reaching out. We need to treat them equally, though they are separate in size. I look forward to my next journey up to G.S.O. to see the reorganization of that floor because the physical thing is a representation of how we act with each other. The world is evolving and there is no reason to believe that we are not going to survive into the next millennium. But how we utilize our principles to interact with each other separates us from the rest of the world. The most important thing we can offer each other is love and service. And if the two are not connected, we are in big trouble. Thank you.

Gary K. Past Southwest Regional Trustee, 2003-2007

Terry, our Class A Chair, asked us what things that the G.S.O. can do better to help carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers. First, what comes to mind is our conference literature process, and how we get literature approved. When I started out, we were told that the Conference approval was an onerous process, because it involves the Conference itself approving literature. Somewhere along the line, we decided we would put something out to a committee and have that committee review it, and then we'd put it out to the Fellowship — if we could get it out past the floor of the Conference. Was it our best product? Probably not. But it was putting something out. And then it seems we decided that we were going to let the Fellowship edit it on the fly. I do not agree with that process. I believe that the process for our literature should be vetted by our entire Conference, and not just by the trustees' Literature Committee. Does it mean that we are going to have a whole plethora of literature? No. But I'd rather see us put our best out than just something.

I would also like the General Service Office to find a way to be more considerate of area autonomy. When we, as an area or a region, come together with a proposal and we vet that proposal in the trench, in the ground, with the G.S.R.s, I'd like to see more consideration given to it by the trustees' Committee on Conference. I do not think the trustees' Committee on Conference ought to debate the thing or its merits. I think it should be put on the agenda for discussion by the entire Conference. If it's a crap deal, that's okay. Just send a letter back.

I think we need a way to get off our printed literature dependence. I believe G.S.O. has a responsibility to really check and see how many of the "services" provided have actually been requested by the groups. And how many we are doing because somebody thought it was a good idea? What if we could list a few hundred things that the groups are getting and ask, "How much of that could be done by the areas?" There are simple things, like G.S.R. handbooks. What can't those be done at the area or the district? I believe that we, out here in the Fellowship, have created a wrong dependence on the G.S.O. to do things that we can do ourselves.

Finally, alcoholics in Alcoholics Anonymous it's so important that it's the *other* half of our name. Addicts cannot be members of Alcoholics Anonymous. A.A. happens when the two liars sort out the truths. Everything else, including this event, supports it to make that possible. If it doesn't happen out here, it ain't going to happen. All the problems at the group, area, and district level are traceable to two causes. One: the failure of sponsorship as an institution. Two: the failure of Alcoholics Anonymous to carry its own message. We are letting everyone carry our message, and some are carrying a message that's intended to stray from the message of A.A. We are responsible to carry our message. And that starts in the home group. We worry about membership being flat but there are a lot of meetings around that are not groups. And we have a lot of "meeting makers" trying to "make it." But meetings have never been where recovery occurs. Recovery occurs when you take the actions of change and you have a result: you get struck sober, and then you go and try to help someone else. But it seems many of us have made the meetings mandatory, and the Steps optional. I support you in going back to talk to your groups about the responsibility at the group level to do the Twelfth Step work. Carry the message and be helpful to one another.

Clayton V., Past Southwest Regional Trustee, 2011-2015

I'd like to talk about a topic that is very important to me — the hand of A.A. reaching out to help the suffering alcoholic. There is a group that should have the hand of A.A. reaching out to it, but I don't think we are doing a very good job of it. There are 2.1 million men and women in the armed forces of the U.S. and well over 100,000 in Canada. They also have (at least) half a million dependents. We have no listings in our book or on our website for Afghanistan, although there are a great many military personnel there. In the U.S. alone, there are 152 Veterans Hospitals and 1400 clinics operated by the Veterans Administration. They serve about 9 million people a year. In 2013, 13,000 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans were treated for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). 30% of Vietnam Veterans suffered from posttraumatic stress disorder and 60% to 80% of those Vietnam Vets, as part of their treatment for PTSD, sought treatment for their alcoholism.

I've been working my through the talks that were given at the last International Convention, and if you have an opportunity, listen to the session on "A.A. in the Armed Forces." You will discover the great lengths our service men and women go through just to find A.A. meetings. They cannot go on aa.org and find the link to the area of the armed forces that has meetings listed on it, because there is no link to the area of the armed forces and there is no directory of meetings online (that I am aware of) that these men and women can use to find A.A.

We need to create a service assignment for them, as well as make a commitment to help them, including having an ongoing database so they can find meetings. When you go back out to your areas, and the time comes to come up with agenda items, these kinds of things should be on your mind — how could we better serve the suffering alcoholic? It's been on my mind. I've listened to those recordings, and I heard about the extraordinary lengths they had to go through to find A.A. meetings. Today, in the presentation, I learned that we have a desk that serves 400 loners and internationalists. But we don't have a desk to serve between 4 and 20 million veterans. I believe it's time we lived up to our responsibility to them.

It was a great honor to represent the Southwest region as trustee, and it is an especially great honor to sit with these A.A.s who are my predecessors; we all bring different perspectives on how best to serve Alcoholics Anonymous.

CLOSING REMARKS

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

I attended my first A.A. meeting in 1975. I was a military person and I was a counselor at a treatment program and one of the sergeants said, "Sir, you need to see how people really stay sober." So off we went to an A.A. meeting. It was an open meeting and they wouldn't let me put any money in the basket. There were about a dozen people there, and at the end of the meeting, every one of them shook my hand and for some reason I had this compulsion to say, over and over again, I'm not alcoholic, I'm just visiting. They seemed like they had heard that before.

A.A. is a gift of life. We don't need to convince a drunk to get help. Booze takes care of that. We don't need to convince the world that A.A. works. That is taken care of by a couple of million members across the world — and their spouses, children, partners, and employers in 180 countries around the world. All we have to do is show up for a meeting, get a sponsor, and let our Higher Power take care of the rest.

What fascinates me about A.A. is that no other fellowship, anywhere, comes close to providing your kind of support to others suffering from a common problem. Alcoholism is a chronic health condition and if it is not treated it will kill someone. From a public health perspective, there is no better support system in the world for any chronic illness than what A.A. provides. So, it is humbling for me to be able to be a small part of that. I am grateful.

We cannot be complacent about technology if we believe that God wants us to be relevant in the 21st century. But as we buddy up with our tablets and smartphones, we should also not be complacent about isolation and the risk of isolation. How much sober time does this forum represent? 500 years? 1000 years? 1500? But all of it — one day at a time. A characteristic of alcoholism is a tendency to relapse and a tendency to isolate, no matter how much sober time one has. To stay sober, there is no room for complacency. Each of us has an obligation to those who are not here yet to keep the message strong, no matter where they come from or what their background or previous beliefs might have been. Those most capable of gratitude are those who have emerged from the darkness of alcoholism into the light of sobriety. It is with great gratitude that we all celebrate 80 years of carrying the message to the still suffering alcoholic and carrying the message of A.A. hope throughout the world. We are grateful for a power greater than ourselves and the indefinable magic of one alcoholic talking to another alcoholic. Thank you for the opportunity to serve.
