

# **SOUTHEAST REGIONAL FORUM**

## **FINAL REPORT**

### **December 2-4, 2022**

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

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The 2022 Southeast Forum was held on December 2-4, 2021. Registration for the Forum was **406**. This included **276** members attending their very first Forum.

Dear A.A. Friends,

Please mark your calendar for the upcoming 2023 Regional Forums:

**Northeast Regional Forum:** June 2-4, Burlington, MA

**West Central Regional Forum:** August 25-27, Missoula, MT

**Southwest Regional Forum:** September 29-October 1, El Paso, TX

**East Central Regional Forum:** November 17-19, Independence, OH

## UNANSWERED ASK-IT BASKET QUESTIONS

- **I'm having trouble receiving Box 459. What do I do?**
  - Contact Member Services at [memberservices@aa.org](mailto:memberservices@aa.org), or by phone at (212-870-3023)
- **Where is the AA Bridge Marita spoke about?**
  - British Columbia, Area 79
- **What plans are being made for people at conference who have to leave due to health concerns to still be able to participate?**
  - There is a subcommittee of Trustee Literature in place – Subcommittee on Conference Improvements – chaired by Marita Rhinehart – which has the responsibility of identifying best practices to put in place during GSC 2023.
  - 
  - The question says 'have to leave the Conference' but our model is based on a member being sequestered/quarantined in their room, as was the case during the 2022 GSC. We (TCGSC and the SCI subcommittee) are investigating how best to include those quarantined members in Conference discussion (either in committee during Monday/Tuesday or in full Conference Wednesday-Friday) and of course enabling them to vote. We are also using the GSB weekend protocols as a successfully implemented guideline for best and safest practices if a Covid-19 type situation arises during Conference week.
  - Details around this will be a point of discussion at the January 2023 GSB weekend when our delegate committee chairs will be in attendance. We expect to form a group conscience around suggestions brought to the table at that time and then disseminate the results of those discussions among all Conference members.
- **I noticed that corrections are not on the agenda. Possibly it should be added in the future. I'm a member of my district corrections committee and we have difficulty getting volunteers to go through the state/county clearance process.**
  - My suggestion regarding your first comment would be to provide your feedback to the forum committee that corrections be included on the forum agenda or possibly offered as a workshop topic.
  - 
  - Regarding your second comment and the difficulty you are having getting volunteers to go through the clearance process, this is a common issue shared by many corrections committees. My suggestion would be to reach out to other local district and area corrections chairs to ask how they prepare volunteers for the clearance process. It is my understanding that each facility has its own clearance process and that some may be more involved than others. It might be worth asking the facilities in your area to share that information with you so you can better explain the process to potential volunteers.

- Lastly, there is a National Corrections meeting that meets virtually on Zoom every Sunday. Corrections trusted servants from the US and Canada meet every week to share their experience on topics like the one you mention. They are a very enthusiastic group and welcome all members to join.
- **Why do we not utilize tables at SERF? Most alkie are more comfortable that way and spill less coffee.**
  - We agree, tables would be nice. Thank you for the suggestion – wherever the hotel has enough space and tables for future events, and the cost fits into GSO's budget, providing tables will be considered.
- **The search engine on AA.org is still very difficult to use. It seems to provide so much info you can't find what you need. Are there any plans to improve this function?**
  - The search capabilities on aa.org were set up at launch to improve the last website and we do have plans to improve their current functionality. It would be very helpful if we could get specific examples of how we could improve so please contact website services ataa.org with some specific examples we can use during this next phase of development.

# WORKSHOP REPORTS

## **Inclusivity: How much is too much?**

**Moderator: Ruth R.**, Area 14, North **Florida Reporter: Mary**, Alternate Delegate Area 14, Panel 71

The attendees were asked if they're heard complaints about whether AA was trying to become too inclusive, or whether we aren't inclusive enough?

Overall, the sense of the room was split, depending on the subject. Most agreed we should not be inclusive of drug addicts, as we are doing them a disservice Only one attendee spoke in favor of embracing addicts.

The change to the Preamble camp up, with the majority being OK with it, noting that "people" didn't change the meaning or the spirituality of the Preamble. It was noted that had Bill written the Big Book today, his language would have been far different than in the 1930s.

One person noted our aging population and that the younger generations are more gender fluid, with more LGBTQ+ members. More young people, and that we should be more concerned about pulling them into service. In addition, it was noted that regional differences resulted in more diverse populations that will not be easily addressed by our fellowship.

## **Sponsorship and our Three Legacies**

**Moderator: Charles T.**, Area 37, Mississippi **Reporter: Katherine Y.**, Alt Delegate, Area 37

Questions:

- 1) How can we become better sponsors?
- 2) What are the advantages of being a Third legacy sponsor?
- 3) What do we do with sponsees that don't follow directions?

Discussion:

- Sponsorship is a gift we've been given to share. A spirit of service: recovery, Unity, SERVICE. How can we carry sponsees further than 12 Steps?
  - o Being involved, aware. Follow steps with Traditions.
- Practice Principles
- Use literature – carry the AA message. Get back into the books (read books with them)
- Introduce them to service work. Beginning at Group Level. Share service work with them. Go to business meetings. Service oriented sponsorship. Practice the principles and legacies in your recovery. Use your experience.
- Continue to learn, listen, become better informed.
- Build a respect for service.

The group was very engaged with experience, suggestions, questions.

## **Call for Stories, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition Big Book, A Writing Workshop (Spanish)—**

**Moderator/Reporter: Amalia C., Literature ACM**

Attendees: 5

There were 3 Spanish speakers in attendance. One was a member interested in writing his story. He took notes, shared in the conversation and said he would submit his story by email along with the signed publishing rights. He also brought with him copies of printed publishing rights and the call for stories with the submitting information to give to the members in Mississippi.

The delegate from Puerto Rico brought with him 11 stories from members in his Area; the stories did not have signed publishing rights agreements. He has the information for the authors and will go to them and have them sign them and will email the stories with the contact information along with the signed publishing rights agreement to the Literature Desk before December 15<sup>th</sup>.

An Area member from Tennessee came to inquire about how to reach the Hispanic community and encourage participation and inclusivity. A conversation ensued and I hope progress with communication will also ensue.

## **Grapevine Workshop—**

**Moderator/Reporter: Chris C., Publisher, AA Grapevine**

### **Questions and Comments:**

- I read Grapevine every morning for meditation after several years of sobriety
- Regarding the app, I love to buy e-books. Is there a place where we will be able to get digital books? Will it be a charge for the e-books?
  - Is the app designed to replace the magazine? We do the magazines for jails, institutions, please don't go anywhere.
  - Thanks for keeping the magazine.
  - How to reach the young people, I go to 13 meetings a week and there are only older people. The app is a wonderful idea to reach all those young people.
  - The app a great tool for sponsorship
  - I used GV to host my meeting. Are there group subscriptions? I share my login info to be able to have a meeting.
  - I have read the GV for over 20 years. I still read an article every morning. I don't use apps.
  - Why do I not get my subscriptions?
  - I read each magazine and then bring the magazines to his group.
  - The books of the stories are a way not to rewrite the Big Book
  - How to get more Grapevine Reps
  - I have always read the Grapevine, always enhanced my sobriety even when I came, I could barely read. I give it to many people and try to motivate folks to read it.
  - If we have an app, everyone will be on their phones.
  - Why we cannot give away the GV and LV for free.



- My group gives subscriptions.
- I am a computer guy and never read the print.
- What's the difference between the pub and app.

### **Connection between GSR, Delegates, and Alternate Delegates: Accessible to all Alcoholics**

**Moderator: Sherry W.**, Area 71, Virginia **Reporter: David H.**, Area 71 Chair-Elect

#### **Question: How do we get the agenda items information anonymously up to the GSRs so they are prepared and can capture their group conscience?**

- Reduce the size of the packet to make it more digestible, 1100 pages is too much.
- Overwhelming amount of information, most don't know what an agenda item is.
- Many districts and/or areas have pre-conference Zoom meetings, they present the hot topics and focus on them, can have multiple sessions to cover more topics.
- Make service fun and attractive, give animated reports, have "sober fest of sobriety" with food and dancing after agenda items, use technology and keep on innovating.
- Delegates are not "Gods", they're also alcoholics, need to change the mindset and make them more approachable. One Area had delegates share their recovery story.
- Get to know your GSRs, share recovery stories to find common ground and relate.
- Also, a problem getting responses from groups down the structure, many groups feel agenda items don't apply to them until after the fact.
- Give DCMs an agenda item to present and get them invested, DCMs can travel to groups, make announcements, let groups know why it applies to them.
- Delegates deliver reports locally after conference, maybe also do it pre-conference.
- Possible to use hybrid meetings/assemblies to make service more accessible.
- Have group contact committee, reach out to dark districts, meetings not participating.
- To increase participation, just ask, get them once and good chance they get the bug.

### **Unity: How do we stay Unified in a Divided World? —**

**Moderator: Brian T.**, Area 73, West Virginia **Reporter: Tom W.**, Area 15 Panel 71 Delegate

Opening Remarks: Unity, Traditions 1+2, concept 4, no 2<sup>nd</sup> class members

"Politics" being diverse, are you seeing that.

- More focus on change than how to carry the message.
- Wearing political clothing, how do we deal with this?
- We need more 3 legacy sponsors!
- Need to stick with common peril – common solution.
- Accountability – take action at your home group.
- Diversity should be / is a strength.
- Sometimes we go through periods of disparity to make progress – growing pains.
- Can unity we = unconditional love
- Personal sacrifice – set aside preconceived notions to be of better.

Can we accept people and ideas that we don't agree with if it is a group conscious.

- Am I willing to go to any lengths?
- Can we look past our differences to be helpful?

### **From In Person to Online to What Now—**

**Moderator: Pablo R.**, Area 77, Puerto Rico **Reporter: Hector S.**, Area 37

Groups start in persona and went virtual due to Covid- however they have stayed virtual and find it more convenient- commented on get into action committee registering virtual representation there are two virtual areas one in Washington and one in New York.

Hybrid assemblies need to purchase online communication equipment is expensive. There are 300 registered online groups with 4000 meetings. Suggested new members to attend in person meetings ahead.

Hybrids are great to include everyone. In order to participate in area assemblies. Hybrid is the way to go.

Equipment and use of professionals to work equipment becomes too expensive. Districts can join any area they want. Ad hoc committees are facing different challenges- In N.C. all hybrid meetings.

### **La Vina Writing Workshop (Spanish)—**

**Moderator/Reporter: Paola M.**, Interim La Vina Editor

Two English speaking AA members wanted to know about submitting stories for LV, they mentioned the Hispanic community is very big in their area. 1 Hispanic member wanting information about LV. Since we did not have other Spanish speaking members, he shared his story, and we talked about the editorial process and the guidelines for submitting stories.

### **How to Sponsor Young People in Service**

**Moderator: Jack M.**, Area 62, South Carolina **Reporter: Curt R.**, Alternate Delegate, Area 62

Number of attendees: 14

Number of Current Workshop Attendees under the age of 30: 3

Number of Current Workshop Attendees that found sobriety under the age of 30: 6

Number of Current Workshop Attendees sponsoring members under 30: 5

Attendees Suggestions & Experiences with working with younger members of Alcoholics Anonymous:

- 1) Young people are enthusiastic about service and eager to help out, let them.
- 2) Young members bring new energy to a Group, District, Area, embrace them.
- 3) Older/experienced members in service should level the playing field to encourage younger members to feel comfortable & confident to perform said service opportunities.
- 4) Encourage younger members to be involved in committees / Ad-Hoc committees to gain experience and confidence.
- 5) Encourage Service Sponsors
- 6) Getting involved with young person's conventions, service assemblies (PAWS)

- 7) Encourage older members to attend young people meetings to act as a resource not a bleeding deacon.
- 8) Provide the new and improved service manual to young people in your local Groups, Districts, and Area.
- 9) Encourage young people to get a home-group and a service commitment in said home-group. -
- 10) Being accepted in an AA Group/Meeting is very important.
- 11) Life has to be fun again
- 12) Best advice given by a young member attending the workshop: "when sponsoring young people in AA, meet them where they are in their journey. Area 27

### **Do Special Interest Groups Add or Subtract Unity? —**

**Moderator: Corey D.**, Area 26, Kentucky, Alternate Delegate **Reporter: Jimmy W.**, Alt Delegate, Area 64

*A big thanks to Corey who agreed to moderate the workshop in Jennifer S.'s stead.*

- Opened by reading A.A. Group pamphlet, including excerpt speaking directly about special interest groups.
- Moderator shared own experience.
  - doesn't belong to a special interest group.
  - moderator spoke to another member who belonged to a men's group that said he went there because of his own personal struggles with women being a distraction for him.
  - What do we think about starting special interest meetings? Are there too many? Not enough?
- Sharing from attendees
  - Mike – as a newcomer, found safe space in special interest group that allowed him time to heal spiritually and to grow, still involved with special interest special events and groups to help others have same opportunity, to have time and space to find what they need.
  - Jared, St. Pete Beach meeting – found women's meeting (did not realize it was a women's meeting), got weird look, left, did not drink; he is gay man, been to gay meetings and felt more comfortable sharing certain things there that he wouldn't otherwise feel safe sharing.
  - Britton, New Orleans, Trans meeting – trans people scared of going to other meetings due to negative experiences, go to other meetings together in groups and that helps them feel more comfortable, home groups create space for trans people to talk freely and find the help they need
  - Bernice, Area 26, women's meeting – able to talk about things she wouldn't talk about in mixed meeting; women feel more comfortable talking about sensitive topics in women's meeting vs mixed meetings
  - Sarah – struggling to find mom friends in sobriety, being a mom in sobriety is hard, needs connection with other moms who struggle with children in sobriety
    - Another member shared experience with having a moms meeting that provided childcare
  - Neena – sometimes primary purpose can be lost in special interest meetings when certain people who don't fit the group are rejected and potentially die

- Mark, Area 16 – straight man who got kicked out of a women’s meeting; came to workshop because question is about unity (no disagreement that special interest meetings serve a good purpose); has witnessed special interest groups being excluded because they don’t conform which leads to divisiveness
- Tom, Area 16 – home group brought meetings back to treatment center he got sober in; been to special interest meetings, is a gay man and did not find solution of AA in the gay meetings he went to; taught that when you go to a meeting and present a problem you should also present a possible solution; attends Zoom AA meeting for fathers that is very solution based; looks for meeting that are solution based, regardless of special interest or not – message is more important than special interest
- Dave – grand sponsor was a black man; grew up in a meeting that wasn’t special interest but was very diverse; strong message more important than special interest, but special interest has its place, often to serve as triage for newcomers
- Newton – intergroup got involved in controversy over listing and atheist/agnostic meeting or not, intergroup passed rule that if the group changed the Steps they would not list in directory, group initially did change the Steps and the Intergroup took them off the schedule, bitterly debated for a year, group changed back to original Steps and was added back to the meeting list
- Carl – founder black indigenous & people of color (BIPOC) meeting – need for special interest is saving people’s lives, experienced people leaving because they didn’t fit, home group is Big Book meeting; welcome anyone to attend but ask them not to share unless BIPOC (meeting is virtual)
- Bonnie – as a newcomer was scared of mixed meetings and men, only felt safe going to women’s meetings until a few years in; home group morphed into a women’s meeting and Big Book study and newcomers meeting, if men come in, they are welcomed
- Paula – sober at 20, single lesbian woman in room full of old white men – special interest groups are needed
- Kevin, trans guy – home group solid, went to LGBTQ meeting that started rough but ended up solid, now attend home group that is largely white upper middle class that is very active in service, attends other LGBTQ and trans meetings and agrees there is a place for them, but insists that groups grounded in the solution is first priority
- Jimmy – home group started as young people's group, morphed into mixed group that is very diverse, focuses on loving on everyone who comes in the door, no matter what they look like, first priority is welcoming people and offering the solution of A.A.

### **GSR Workshop for Incoming Trusted Servants**

**Moderator: Nick P.**, Area 27, Louisiana **Reporter: Eban B.**, Secretary, Area 27

The workshop began with a question: What works and what doesn’t work regarding GSR orientation? Participants were mostly either currently serving GSRs or were newly elected. Many GSRs were elected in absentee and were clueless about what it means to be a GSR

when they started: “I came into my position backwards and learning on the fly.” Literature is available from GSO, such as the GSR Kit, the General Service Manual, and the Concepts Illustrated which explain the role of GSR. Sponsors can aid members in understanding by guiding them through available service material. One member asked if there could be a video orientation for GSRs coupled with an outreach program leading new GSRs to the orientation video by link. DCM and GSR sharing sessions at area assemblies provide a place where new GSRs can get to know their fellow servants, exchange contact information, and become informed about the happenings of their area assemblies. During breaks at assembly, new GSRs can chat in the halls with those who have served before them to get guidance on their new roles. Committee meetings at the area level connect GSRs with service opportunities for their group and help them to learn about AA general service. The GSR is one of the most important roles in the entire service triangle: it is the first and last point of communication between the group and AA as a whole. It is important to ensure each GSR is signed up to distribution lists for meeting minutes which help them report back to their groups. One district prioritized GSR reports by placing them first on the district agenda so that they were not an afterthought. Some members found information lacking at the district level for new GSRs, expressing that some sort of orientation at the district level needs to occur. One district implemented a slideshow to provide important information to new GSRs. It was also suggested that districts could time their GSR orientations to coincide with the rotation of area assembly service positions, providing much needed information just before the first assembly of a new panel. One member asked why a basket was being passed around at business meetings for intergroups and area assemblies when their group already contributes 7th tradition funds. Don’t be afraid to ask questions about whether something is appropriate or to gain insight into business items. One member was given the advice: “If I don’t understand, it’s better not to vote.” Another member shared: “GSR is a great experience. Go for it!”

## PRESENTATIONS

### **Using A.A.’s Literature in Carrying the Message--- Ruth C., Area 1, Alabama/Northwest Florida**

Good Morning Tribe! I am Ruth and I am an alcoholic. I like to refer to you as my Tribe because I embrace you as my people from all nations and all places. You have saved my life and I am grateful. The forward to the 4th Edition states: “In country after country where the A.A. seed was planted, it has taken root, slowly at first, then growing by leaps and bounds when literature has become available.” When I think about Carrying the Message using A.A. Literature, I think of the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous. I love this book! I have read it over and over personally and socially and I have never gotten tired of it. In fact, I get a little excited when I meet someone who has not read it at all! At first when I entered A.A. they handed me a book and I thumbed through it and said – what no pictures? The woman that recommended it to me said “just read it”. I asked – How many pages because it was kind of big, and looked like a lot to read. She read that book to me every Saturday

morning (Stick a fork in my eye... thought I was going to die!) and asked me if I had those experiences. I was resentful because I was a grown up, I can read, I am not a child. Little did I know I was going to need my Big Girl panties with this woman. I remained obstinate for two and a half years. I came to a bad place like in Chapter 11, "the boy whistling in the dark to keep up his spirits." I was on the brink, and I was so full of Fear. I begged this Big Book Thumper – you know the type – to help me because I was going to drink and for us: to drink is to die. He told me to start reading my book daily and that we would talk about it. Of course, I did not but I lied and said I was, and he pointed out that if I had read, I would know the answer to his questions and maybe answers to a few of my own questions. He encouraged me to attend literature only meetings and not so much discussion meetings which I liked better. As I read and listened more and more, I began to see my illness and accepted it too that I had it pretty bad. More importantly was I to accept all these steps in my life. In doing so, he helped me find and develop a relationship with that Power Greater than myself which would solve my problem and that it was vital for long-term recovery. It was like in Dr. Bob's Nightmare: "Of far more importance was the fact that he was the first living human with whom I had ever talked, who knew what he was talking about in regard to alcoholism from actual experience, in other words, he talked my language." I felt that way toward this Big Book Thumper because he helped me out of the mire of Alcoholism and set my feet on solid ground that really goes somewhere. Since then, I have had many occasions to share the Big Book and what I had learned from him and my own experience. Nothing beats that newcomer's ah hah moment when she hears her story in these words just as I had done and how I found my Higher Power deep within as they do too. There are a lot of exciting things going on with using our literature in Carrying the Message – we have pamphlets, Twelve Steps & Twelve Traditions and AA Service Material. The well runs deep and I made it my business to be acquainted with all of it. At my Home group, we get a pamphlet and write our names and phone numbers on them and encourage the newcomer to call us. I know every pamphlet we have tells the story about how all this came to be. At first, I thought it ridiculous to tell the same story over and over. My sponsor said if you remember where you came from you are not likely to return. The thing that fascinates me the most is our Translations – 70 of them AND we have it in ASL (American Sign Language) and Navajo. To me, these are amazing accomplishments – not because we were looking for another award but because people are still dying out there and they still need our life saving message. I once asked a GSO Staffer – You probably will remember the late Warren S. He was visiting Area 1 innocently waiting for his flight home. I came up and sat beside him then I asked him how come GSO wasn't pushing out those translations any better than they do. At that time there were only maybe 20, 2001 43 and 2013 70 -- What, with computers and translation software, they should just stick our book in there and let it rip out those translations. What's the hang up? Well, he smiled at me and said he wished it were that simple. He explained that for us to be able to begin a translation we have to have someone get sober and help those in their community to get sober and begin drafting stories and then they would have to work with us to get the translation right for their dialect. To do it right, it's a complicated process and it's worth it to see the lives being saved by receiving this life saving message. Its powerful! I was only able to absorb only so much of the complex project a translation must be. My view of Alcoholics Anonymous changed in a profound way after that day. The Big Book that had no pictures suddenly became brand new picture book for me. Alcoholics Anonymous is global and that's no small thing! All because the message can be transmitted by the written word as well as the spoken word. What a miracle we have here! Thank you for allowing me to share. I love you all dearly.

## **Reciprocal Responsibility: Communication and Participation---Tom W., Area 15, South Florida/Bahamas**

A great reminder from a Box 459 article, “Many of us have heard that our co-founder Bill W. said, “If A.A. ever fails, it will be from within,” or words to that effect. Actually, the quote is from the closing talk at the 1977 General Service Conference by Bob H., who served as G.S.O.’s general manager from 1968-1974. Excerpted here it is an interesting piece of A.A. history: “. . . all of us are a part of the continuum of A.A. history. To some small degree, then, each of us is responsible for A.A.’s future. Some of us, sometimes, are fearful of that future. We fear lest this development, or that problem, may destroy us all. Fear not, my friends. If this Fellowship ever falters, it won’t be because of ‘two-hatters,’ of professionals in the field. Nor will it be caused by future ‘Rand-type’ reports, or by members with ‘other’ problems. No, it won’t be because of any of these things about which we seem to worry so much. If we ever fail, it will be simply because of us. It will be because we can’t control our own egos, nor get along well enough with each other. It will be because we’re just not wise enough nor good enough to hold this thing together. It will be because we think too much about our ‘rights,’ and too little about our obligations and responsibilities. But I don’t think we’re going to fall apart. I think we are going to stick together and keep A.A. strong and growing.” (Box 459 Feb/March 2006)

So what are our obligations and responsibilities as AA members? “Reciprocal Responsibility” is a phrase that was used in an additional committee consideration of the 72<sup>nd</sup> General Service Conference and I think it deserves more discussion, as a continuation of Bob H.’s thoughts. From the Conference Corrections Committee additional considerations: 1) The committee discussed the request to make A.A. literature changes slowly and with A.A.’s primary purpose in mind and took no action. The committee agreed the cadence and role of the annual General Service Conference already provides the appropriate guidance. The committee also noted that through Concept Four, “The Right of Participation,” all members of Alcoholics Anonymous are invited to participate in the year-long process of the General Service Conference. Note: As a result of the 2021-22 Equitable Distribution of Workload plan, this item was on the agenda of the Conference Committee on Corrections. 2) The committee discussed the request to limit changes to the book Alcoholics Anonymous and took no action. While the committee discussed the concerns expressed by the Fellowship, the committee noted that we operate on a system of trust and checks and balances and agreed that A.A.’s Twelve Concepts adequately provide guidance to our trusted servants to make decisions that reflect the informed group conscience of the Fellowship as a whole. Note: As a result of the 2021-22 Equitable Distribution of Workload plan, this item was on the agenda of the Conference Committee on Corrections (page 82 in the 72<sup>nd</sup> GSC Final Report). From the Conference Committee on the Grapevine/ La Vina: The committee discussed the wide-ranging impact the AA Preamble change has had on the Fellowship. The committee felt that after careful consideration of Fellowship feedback, it would be premature to quantify the impact when many A.A. members are still either uninformed or ambivalent about the change. (Page 83 in the 72<sup>nd</sup> GSC Final Report)

The committee emphasized that throughout our Conference process there is a reciprocal responsibility of all A.A. members and trusted servants, of participation and communication, to embrace the guiding principles of trust and transparency. So, as we can see, the 72<sup>nd</sup>

General Service Conference, through its committees, expressed the idea of reciprocal responsibility- not only do we have a responsibility of participation but we also have a responsibility of communication. Reciprocal ((of an agreement or obligation) bearing on or binding each of two parties equally) speaks to a mutual or equal responsibility- the conference perhaps owning the need for even better communication and the responsibility through the entire structure of even greater participation. A rhetorical question: how well do we participate in our home group? District? Area? Conference process? Can we improve?

There will be continued effort to make progress in all of these areas, as there has always been, but as my experience serving as Delegate has shown me: we need to stay flexible, open-minded and make progress. As Bill W. said in a 1960 General Service Conference talk (and continues to be applicable today): “We live in an era of change. Our Twelve Steps probably won’t change; the Traditions not at all likely. But our manner of communication, our manner of organizing ourselves for function, for service – let us hope that this goes on changing for the better, forever (page 104, Our Great Responsibility). As a fellowship, we have begun to dip our toe into new forms of communication, and we accomplished reaching forcibly remote communities during Covid lockdowns. But we have also started two YouTube channels that are populated with great content, a LinkedIn page that has been much more active informing professionals, a new podcast, an Instagram page for the Grapevine, and even providing content on over 200,000 tablets for AA members and other interested persons in custody (free of charge). Why do we do this? Because these are increasingly the ways that prospective members and others interested in AA search for and consume information today!

The Conference operates 52 weeks of the year, not just the 1 week business meeting in New York. The other 51 weeks are equally as important, if not more so, to the process. Starting with the Proposed Agenda Item submission deadline (now September 15 on a trial basis), distribution of the Final Agenda in January, distribution of the Conference Background Material in February (now in all 3 languages at the same time), pre conference agenda review in all of its various forms February 15<sup>th</sup> up to Conference week itself. Then after conference, reporting back all of the results the remainder of the year. There are opportunities for all to participate in the process throughout the year!

So in what ways can we improve in all of these steps in the process? How can groups participate more? How can the structure improve the ways we communicate? What innovative things are we already doing that we can share with others? We need to continue to make progress, “Change for the better”, so Alcoholics Anonymous is around for another 87 years!

### **Unity: Rights vs. Responsibilities---Tracy M., Area 16, Georgia**

I would like to begin with an experience I had in early recovery in Alcoholics Anonymous. I was in the Psychiatric ward of the Hospital where I woke up after an attempt to take my life. After a few days of group and activities including but not limited to ceramics and creative imaging I still held out hope that I would be able to leave the hospital and finish my original plan to end my life. Then something happened. One of the counselors in the unit sat me down and talked to me. He shared with me about his alcoholism. He talked about the



families he had drank up, the hopelessness he had felt, and how someone had helped him when he wound up on the street. He told me, Tracy you are not bad trying to get good. You are sick and there is a way you can get well. That day was the beginning for me. This man was carrying the message that he had been given. He got up that morning and asked for another drunk to help. Fast forward, 18 years later, this man is still a very important part of my sobriety. I have watched him help countless alcoholics like myself and he has called me to come to the hospital many times to talk to women that are in the same place I was when my life was on the line.

When I think about rights for Alcoholics that are still suffering without hope, I have to wonder what would have happened to me if my higher power hadn't intervened. I grew up with active alcoholism, married an alcoholic, and was an alcoholic myself. I knew nothing about Alcoholics Anonymous. I have the right to be grateful and a responsibility to make sure that I ask my higher power for a drunk to help.

Our *Big Book* states, in "There is a Solution" that "Most of us sense that real tolerance of other people's shortcomings and viewpoints and a respect for their opinions are attitudes which make us more useful to others. Our very lives, as ex-problem drinkers, depend upon our constant thought of others and how we may help meet their needs." How I feel, what I think, and what I want, is not the point. How can I be helpful? What am I bringing to the table? Am I willing to make compromises? These are *First Tradition* questions for every one of us. Can I tell you a secret? We all think we are right. At the end of the day, we all have to decide if we are willing to work together for the people that haven't had the privilege we are enjoying today.

Bill W. in his essay, *Leadership in AA: Ever a Vital Need*, says in part; "Compromise comes hard to us "all or nothing" drunks. Nevertheless, we must never lose sight of the fact that progress is nearly always characterized by a series of improving compromises."

In *AA Comes of Age*, Bill writes; "Our experiences have taught us that anonymity is real humility at work. It is an all-pervading spiritual quality which today keynotes A.A. life everywhere. Moved by the spirit of anonymity, we try to give up our natural desires for personal distinction as A.A. members both among fellow alcoholics and before the general public. As we lay aside these very human aspirations, we believe that each of us takes part in the weaving of a protective mantle which covers our whole society and under which we may grow and work in unity." page 117

I am passionate about the work that we do in Alcoholics Anonymous. We are not fragile flowers. We can and will bring hope to as many still suffering alcoholics as we can reach.

Our *1st Concept* states: "Final responsibility and ultimate authority for AA world services should always reside in the collective conscience of our whole Fellowship."

*Tradition Two*, "For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience, our leaders are but trusted servants they do not govern." I would hope that, as Delegate, I would practice the *Third Concept*, "Right of Decision", within the spirit of that concept, remembering our 9<sup>th</sup> tradition, that tells me that I am responsible to those I serve.

In *AA Comes of Age*, Bill writes, "Unity: The Second Legacy", "Today we in A.A. are together, and we know we are going to stay together. We are at peace with each other and with the world around us. So many of our conflicts are resolved that our destiny seems secure. The problems of yesterday have produced the blessings of today. Ours is not the

usual success story; rather it is the story of how, under God's grace, an unsuspected strength has arisen out of great weakness; of how, under threats of disunity and collapse, world-wide unity and brotherhood have been forged. In the course of this experience, we have evolved a set of traditional principles by which we live and work together and relate ourselves as a fellowship to the world around us. These principles are called the Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous. They represent the distilled experience of our past, and we rely on them to carry us in unity through the challenges and dangers which the future may bring." (Page 72)

Our General Service Structure is our gift from our Co-Founders. I am honored to be a part of General Service. I believe I have a right to be grateful. There is a priceless freedom that comes with that right.

On the last page of the *AA Service Manual*, Bill ends with these few sentences:

*"Freedom under God to grow in his likeness and image will ever be the quest of Alcoholics Anonymous. May our General Service Conference be always seen as a chief symbol of this cherished liberty. To a man, we of A.A. believe that our freedom to serve is truly the freedom by which we live-the freedom in which we have our being.*

### **On Trust---Rainer L., Area 51, North Carolina**

My name is Rainer L., and I am an alcoholic currently serving as the Panel 71 Delegate for Area 51 North Carolina. I say that as an identification, but serving as Delegate really just means that it's my turn in the pool. My real position is member, and I try to always stay mindful that we all share a members' stake in the future of Alcoholics Anonymous. I'm presenting today "On Trust," which is miles away from where I started. I brought you doubt, desperation, and incessant self-reliance. I entered into General Service very much clinging to the delusion that I could wrest happiness and satisfaction from life, if only I managed well. Thankfully, as a result of our Program of Action, time spent with you and time spent in prayer, the guiding forces which once drove me through life have been cast aside. I owe my life to a spiritual awakening resulting from our Steps, to a series of experiences which allowed me to trust in you, to trust in myself, and to trust in God. Our 12 Traditions are what allowed me to have these experiences. They are the banister which keeps me from going over the edge, the guardrails which keep me on track. They are the reason why I was able to walk into an unknown room and find wall hanging with our Steps and Traditions, a solution-based group led from our Conference Approved literature, free of outside issues and affiliations. In AA we also have a general tradition, going back to 1935. It is a spiritual heritage and a shared identity. That heritage is the sincere desire to be helpful, it is the destruction of self-centeredness, it is the recognition that no personal sacrifice is too great for the preservation of our unity. It is the sharing of a common bond, from peril to solution to membership, and a fundamental same-ness which allows us to recognize ourselves in each other. And to recognize others in ourselves. Trust is a choice, and when we choose to trust we are acting on faith. You've never seen me drink, but you trust the authenticity of why I'm here. When we share from Working With Others that "to be helpful is our only aim," or from There Is A Solution that there is "nothing whatever except a sincere desire to be helpful," we trust those things to be perfect aspirations. We trust God, we trust the Process, and we trust that a shortcoming will be a necessary experience to finding a brighter future. Our whole Program and our whole Fellowship stand squarely On Trust. I started my General Service journey in 2006, and I've seen decisions get second-guessed. I might even have second-

guessed a few of my own. I've seen things be implemented on a trial basis and go well, seen others go poorly. Seen new policies be put in place when they should have been trials. In short, I've seen what there was to see, as best my eyesight allowed. And throughout, through successful and failed efforts, I've seen members greet each other with mutual trust that each was there to do what was best for Alcoholics Anonymous. Different opinions, different group consciences, but a common purpose in serving the Fellowship which saved our lives. There was a trust in the intention of others, a trust which I think has recently suffered. It's easy to trust when things are going my way. It's easy to trust in the God of our Second Tradition when a group decision affirms an idea I support. But what about when it doesn't? Can I move forward from my proud assumptions that I know best, can I move forward towards a trust and a faith that works? What about the times when I cannot even bring myself to support a position I maintained, a position Area 51 supported? The 72nd General Service Conference offered me a number of spiritual experiences. Perhaps my favorite was around a floor action to reaffirm the 1995 Advisory Action that the Preface, Forewords, Dr.'s Opinion, our 164, Dr. Bob's Nightmare, and the Appendices remain as is. I was raised in the Big Book, and you will find no one who believes more strongly in the integrity and importance of our basic text. I know the profound attachment across Area 51 for the Big Book, and for preserving it as it was preserved for us. But I found that I couldn't support this, despite my desire to. And trust was ironically the reason why. Our Big Book says to "abandon yourself to God as you understand God." It doesn't say abandon yourself to God and here's who He is. Because alcoholics today are just as capable as ever of tapping into that unsuspected inner resource, of forming a relationship with God. I was trusted by my Area to speak with their voice, and to make decisions on the issues of this day. And my response to that trust is to trust fully in our future servants to make decisions on the issues of their day. As trusted servants, universal respect is the key to our usefulness, and we show that respect by refraining from tying the hands of our future through reaffirming past action. Article 12 of the Conference Charter says that the Conference shall perform no act of government. Rather we trust each Conference by saying that no Conference Action is binding upon a future Conference. God is constantly disclosing more to us. We have not reached some perfect pinnacle of understanding. What we have is, in Bill's words, "a spiritualized society characterized by enough enlightenment, enough responsibility, and enough love of man and of God to ensure that our democracy of world service will work under all conditions." In the Communications Kit for the General Service Conference, there is a reading "On Trust." It is a statement of purpose and intent, designed to help Conference Members listen like they have no opinion, to prepare them to consider the fact that they could perhaps be wrong, and to engage in open-minded fashion with the formation of a group conscience. I would like to end with a portion of that reading. "We trust that a democratic process engaged in by people acting in good faith will be in the best interest of our Fellowship, even though we may not agree with all of the decisions made. We trust that future Conferences will carry on A.A.'s wonderful legacy of service, just as those who came before us have placed that same trust in us." "Therefore we expect that our Conferences will always try to act in the spirit of mutual respect and love — one member for another. In turn, this sign signifies that mutual trust should prevail; that no action ought to be taken in anger, haste, or recklessness; that care will be observed to respect and protect all minorities; that no action should ever be personally punitive; that whenever possible, important actions will be taken in substantial unanimity; and that our Conference will ever be prudently on guard against tyrannies, great or small, whether these be found in the majority

or in the minority. The sum of these several attitudes and practices is, in our view, the very essence of democracy — in action and spirit.

### **How to get More People Involved in Service---Shannon C., Area 64, Tennessee**

This is certainly a loaded question and by far the most frequent question that I am asked as someone involved in our service structure. I wish there was a “one size fits all” answer as this would make this presentation significantly easier for me but unfortunately, every Area, district, and group are different and makes this a more multi-faceted issue. It is truly wonderful that each is so unique and different as this allows us to reach more alcoholics and carry the message to a wider and wider audience. This, in turn, allows us more voices at the table to help with our continued growth for those interested in our program of recovery. Though I do not believe myself to be an expert in this topic by any means, I am happy to share my experience, strength and hope with this subject.

The most obvious answer that I have found effective is to do exactly what this program has taught me and instead of focusing on exterior environments, instead focus inwardly on me and focus what needs to be changed within myself. Is it my attitude, perspective, tone of voice perhaps? My job is to create the fellowship I crave but I am unable to do this without the guidance of God, working through you. By focusing on what God can change in me, I can then hopefully spark excitement in others. So, the questions I ask myself when I am perhaps getting frustrated that others are not as excited about service as I am are as follows:

Am I making service look attractive? Am I enjoying myself in service or am I complaining about the work that I volunteered to do? Am I sharing the intrinsic joy that I receive from helping others or am I only sharing the parts that are inconvenient? What does this tell the new person walking in the doors of A.A.?

Am I applying principles of A.A. into my service affairs? It can be very easy for me to “hideout” in service and feel that I no longer to remember to do the basics of this program. This is simply my ego and a lack of humility on my part. Our literature specifically tasks me with fitting myself to be of maximum service to others. Not to point out other individuals shortcomings, though I am really very versed in this measure. Service should be available to all – am I making sure that is possible?

What are my motives in getting involved in service? Am I signing up for all the service positions to boost my A.A. resume? Am I remembering the Anonymous part of our program? Am I trying to be the “next big name” in our Anonymous program? Our traditions speak to our humility as a spiritual principle that is of the utmost importance to us. I can normally tell that I am taking on a position for ego feeding purposes when I find myself complaining about it. That is a sure-fire way to tell me I am trying to run the show and not being a trusted servant with a genuine humility.

Am I an A.A. policeman or am I a Guardian of our program? Am I a bleeding deacon hemorrhaging all over my home group, district, or Area or am I an elder statesmen that can sit back and listen to every voice in the room with the same vigor? Can I trust

the group conscious or do I actively try to dismantle the discussion so others can see it my way? Do I take my toys and leave if “they are doing it wrong?” Can I be wrong sometimes?

Lastly, there are so many facets where we can be of service in Alcoholics Anonymous. Do I personally believe that everyone’s path is general service? No. Do I think that we should all give it go to find out? Yes, I do. Do you remember your first business meeting? I was lost and uncomfortable and had no idea what was happening other than Robert had a lot of rules. It was very stuffy and serious and not a lot of laughter. It was petrifying with fear of making a mistake. What I loved was the drama of it all – seeing people getting so upset about \$20 was very entertaining. It was the passion that I loved and after a few business meetings I started to understand some of the process. I continue to learn the process today, over 20 years later. I have also learned there is a different way to be involved in service which includes almost continuous laughter, making frequent mistakes that we can all laugh at, and a multitude of genuine humility. The beauty of our Fellowship is our ability to try new things and make needed changes when we make mistakes. I do not always have to agree with the group conscious, but I hope I can support it. This is what I aim for presently, but I am grateful for the process that got me to where I am today.

In closing, there are certainly a multitude of avenues that I have not explored in these past few minutes, and I encourage you to think of other ways of how to combat this topic as we move on from this weekend in order to allow our Fellowship to have the very best future leaders in Alcoholics Anonymous.

# PAST TRUSTEES SHARING

## **Newton P.**, past trustee-at-large/US, 2017-2021

Regional forums are among my favorite events; I love the sharing of first-time attendees and the questions that we get to ask the people that some of us think are on a pedestal, and some of us think are in the trenches. The questions that we get are my favorite.

My first sponsor started the first young peoples' group in Raleigh, NC. I was 26 years old, and I needed a young peoples' group, but back then it was a special interest group and I told him how many Traditions he was violating. He said, "Why don't you write G.S.O.?" And I said, "Okay, buddy. You asked for it." I was supposed to be a lawyer at that time, so I didn't write a letter — I wrote a brief. It was cited and everything. It invited them to come down to Raleigh to get rid of this guy who was killing young people in Alcoholics Anonymous because they were going out to Pizza Hut after the meeting.

You know, I got back one of those wonderful G.S.O. letters. It was 1981 and they were still writing them out. The letter said, basically, that our experience has been that young people's groups have fared very well and have helped many people. But in our experience (the letter went on), if the group doesn't follow the Traditions, then it will fold, just like every other group.

So, it's been forty years and I am still waiting to be right on that. I have a problem with trying to control things. Trying to have my way and trying to be right. Trying to be somebody more than I am. As a past, past whatever, that's always a temptation to get up here and use the microphone to tell people what you need to do better. But that's where I grow. Not only in the Fellowship, but in unity and service. It's a privilege to get to do this, and to see all y'all and know that Alcoholics Anonymous is in great hands.

## **The Hon. Ivan L.R. Lemelle**, past class A (nonalcoholic) trustee, 2013-2019

I am a grateful friend of A.A. I always enjoy coming to A.A. Newton, I share your control issues. As a federal judge, I think I am in control of everything. When my wife first saw the difference you made in my life, she said I should go to more meetings. I've been hanging out in the rooms of A.A. for quite some time, even before my position as trustee. I grew up in Opelousas, Louisiana, and I saw the effect A.A. had on my friends, family, colleagues, and according to my wife, me. You saved some of my family, friends and colleagues, and I guess, in my wife's opinion, you saved me and I thank you for that.

My first board weekend, you were facing some controversial issues; I guess that's why you put me on the board. (*Remainder of judge's remarks indecipherable due to event noise/interference*)

### **Billy N.**, past trustee, 2013-2017

Today I am remembering my friend Rich, who I just buried. I hope there is someone else here who feels like the idea about having to agree on an issue in order to be friends is ridiculous. I brought this up because Rich and I hated each other's sports teams and he was such a sh\*\* talker when it came to one of my teams versus one of his teams. He would ring my phone the second there was a score. We also had a difference of opinion in A.A. But we were best friends.

There are two groups I think are very misunderstood in A.A. The first is the unfunded G.S.R. The G.S.R. from the group who can't afford a phone. We spend a lot of money in A.A. sometimes—some of us think everyone has as much money as we do. Look at the difference in gas prices right now and what it costs the G.S.R. to do their job. We keep creating new gatherings...I wish we would be very conscious of that.

Second, I want to say on behalf of the board and the staff and everyone who is gathered here, that the board is a difficult place to sit. If you ask what my favorite part of being a board member is? I served as an alternate committee member, a non-trustee director, and a general service board trustee. I want to pass on this—that the qualities a leader should have tolerance, flexibility, vision and responsibility. Those are hard qualities [to cultivate], but you cannot be inflexible and intolerant and have no vision *and* be responsible for A.A.'s future. The toughest job of the board is A.A.'s future. Thank you.

### **Don M.**, past trustee, 2014-15

The spiritual nature of the service on this board cannot be better characterized than sitting and listening to my friend Judge Lemelle, a United States District Judge—a federal judge. I've been in Judge Lemelle's court and have been asked hard questions by him for my professional job and "it's going to be okay" has never been a good answer.

I'm not surprised when I hear there is a little tension in our service structure; it's built that way and there just *is*. You've got a board chair and volunteer trustees who put in a crazy amount of time for our Fellowship, so I am not surprised there is tension.

But a lot of things are designed to work under tension. I love the Golden Gate Bridge, but if you snapped a cable on that bridge, think of what would happen?

The basic question I keep coming back to is what my wife asked me, "What are you doing there?" What is the thing we are supposed to be doing? What is our purpose?

The relationship the trustees have is one of trust and one of leadership. Bernard Smith wrote an essay about leadership in A.A. It is a fiduciary responsibility, but it is also a spiritual responsibility. It's about the person who is not here. This is what the trustees do and more

importantly, this is what you do. With events like this, the trustees and the G.S.O. get the information from you to take care of their responsibilities.

I spend a lot of time taking care of my mother. She's elderly and she needs me. She has never needed me to take care of her before, so I am happy to have that responsibility. But I've got more than that, I've got a spiritual responsibility. With A.A., it's a responsibility to the continuity of A.A. And just like that young man who attended his first regional forum; it's about the person who isn't here, yet. This is what the trustees do, and more importantly, it's what you do, and this event shares that communication. I promise you it goes to the board and the G.S.O., but we need the information from your groups. Thank you.

**Michele Grinberg.**, past class A (nonalcoholic) trustee, General Service Board Chair, 2017 - 2021

I want to thank the chair and committee for making me feel welcome as a "has-been." It's a real joy to come visit with you and have no responsibilities. I've learned to go where my Higher Power takes me.

For those of you who would care to share, who is here for the first time? Wow. I say "wow" for a couple of reasons. First because you are the ones who are going to keep A.A. going, and I am so grateful. The second reason I say that is because usually, at this time on Sunday, there are about twenty people left in the room. And they are usually the people that I know. Please get to know me, please come talk to me because I learn from you.

I thought I would talk a little about what it was like to be a board chair during the pandemic. In 2020 I had about ten trips planned in my last year of service to you. We listen and we take it back. There I was. Life was grand, I had worked hard for three years, and I had the best board ever. And then the pandemic hit. It was March of 2020. We had the General Service Conference coming up. We had the International Convention. And everything shut down. The general manager at the time, Greg, said "Michele, we've got a contract for \$100,000 for food and whether the Conference happens, or not, we have to pay for that food." We did what we were supposed to do. We had board meetings, we learned about Zoom (thank the Lord for technology), we had meetings with Conference chairs, we gathered all the input we could in a very limited amount of time. Then I learned a new word: epidemiologist. We got some opinions from some professionals—who turned out to be exactly right about what was going to happen, so we made that really tough decision to cancel the Conference. It was one of the toughest decisions I've ever had to make, and I've had to make some tough decisions in my life. But there was something about that—because it was a spiritual gathering that happens in Conference. But we made it, and from that day on, the three boards worked together closely. We had 13 meetings in 11 months, and we kept in really close communication the entire time, and the A.A. spirit was never lost. Yes, it



was really hard, we know it is really hard to connect remotely when you are looking at that flat screen for 8 or 9 hours. But, in A.A. we do. It is a very resilient Fellowship, as we know.

I am incredibly grateful to serve with the boards and I will never forget it. Now it's your turn. Now we are coming out of the pandemic and there is work to do. Some of you went back out during the pandemic and now you have come back in the door. How awesome that you are here and that you survived. I get to see all of your beautiful faces and yes, you have some hard work to do. It is a joy for me to watch that process. Please grab someone at your home group and stay involved. In this room, we know we need A.A. Maybe more now than ever. There are reports out there that alcoholism is on the rise and A.A. is so desperately needed. I look forward to laughing and crying with you—keep trudging.

## CLOSING REMARKS

**Linda Chezem**, Class A (nonalcoholic) trustee, General Service Board Chair, 2021 - present

Thank you to each one of you for being here this morning. Thank you to each person who organized, led, and participated. 'Thank you' are small words, but heartfelt. We all owe thanks to those who came before.

This weekend, in the hallway, some of you asked me why I've served. In my jurisdiction as a judge—not just criminal, but general jurisdiction, I saw the impact of alcoholism on every docket from adoptions where a child needed a set of parents, to bankruptcies, and beyond. Alcohol influences every docket, in every court, in this country and in Canada whether we recognize it or not.

Ronald Greenleaf (I've come to consider myself a student of his), said that the most serious ethical failure is the failure to foresee. He was a great friend of Bill W., and you will find his articles in the Grapevine. The two of them understood the need to foresee and if you look in the Grapevine archives, you will find six Greenleaf articles. So, I ask you that you leave here today, foreseeing the future that needs A.A. more than you can imagine. We are here today because Bill W., Dr. Bob, as well as Robert Greenleaf, foresaw the need for A.A. and a whole lot of people devoted a whole lot of time in order to keep the love of A.A. flowing, so that the hope of A.A. is there for anyone who reaches out for help. If you think of something wonderful, please reach out and tell me. Let's close with the Declaration of Unity.

*"This we owe to A.A.'s future: To place our common welfare first; to keep our fellowship united. For on A.A. unity depends on our lives and the lives of those to come."*

**Bob W.**, A.A.W.S. General Service Manager, 2021 - present

These weekends are a super-charge for my sobriety; they renew my spirit and I hope they do that for you, too. I'm grateful that we are active in service, and we get to do this. Thank you for all the past trustees who have shared. Often, we hear in sessions that we "stand on the shoulders of giants," although we also work pretty hard to avoid putting people on pedestals. We heard the word "vision" quite a bit here and we think about our future often. I think that's a very consistent thing that Alcoholics Anonymous has done since it came into existence in 1935. I've shared on this and I think about it a lot.

I got sober when I was 22 years old, in 1993. I looked around the room and there were a lot of old fuddy-duddies. That's what it seemed like, and it is sometimes difficult to get sober when you are young. I was like, "Who is this guy John Barleycorn?" For three years I didn't ask that question, so I didn't know the answer. At the end of the day, the truth is. . . Those "fuddy-duddies" taught me how to get sober because the principles had not changed. We have our Steps, Traditions, and Concepts that came at various times in our Fellowship and that is what has gotten me sober and that is what has kept Alcoholics Anonymous together. So, our General Service Board, our office that serves them and serves you, at the end of the day, what it comes down to is relevance, and that is what these forums bring—staying relevant in today's society.

The Steps, Traditions, and Concepts don't change. But where we go to meet people has changed, whether it's technology with Gen Z or Alpha, or whatever. It comes down to the same thing that it has always come down to: Powerlessness, a power greater than ourselves, inventory, character, introspection, the right to be wrong, humility, acceptance, and inclusivity. All of these things have culminated into carrying the message, and Alcoholics Anonymous needs to stay that way.

This forum has been wonderful for me, and I am grateful to be here. I try to remember that many of us have someone back home who is carrying the bag for us while we serve Alcoholics Anonymous. I have a wife and six children who have supported me unequivocally over the years I've served A.A. I'd like to acknowledge them specifically, but all of you as well, too. For all you do for those six children who might need Alcoholics Anonymous one day. Thank you all for filling my heart, I hope you can come and visit us in New York City, we are open for visitors.