

FINAL REPORT

EAST CENTRAL REGIONAL FORUM

NOVEMBER 17~19, 2017
SPRINGFIELD, IL

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

Dear A.A. Friends,

Please mark your calendar for the next East Central Regional Forum, which will take place in Detroit, Michigan July 12-14, 2019 at the Sheraton Detroit Metro Airport Hotel.

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INTRODUCTION

The 2017 East Central Regional Forum was held in Springfield, Illinois. Registration for the Forum was **371**. This included **192** members attending their very first Forum—many were welcomed at the Forum Orientation on Friday evening. In addition, the East Central Regional Forum marked the **206th** Regional Forum since their inception in 1975.

DELEGATE PRESENTATIONS

Atheists in A.A.—Carlyle W., *Delegate Panel 67, Area 33 Southeast Michigan*

Good morning. My name is Carlyle, and I am an alcoholic. Currently, I serve as the Panel 67 Delegate for Area 33 Southeastern Michigan, host to the 2020 International Convention of Alcoholics Anonymous. I am also the alternate chair of the Conference Committee on Corrections. Thank you to the G.S.O. staff members for your continued dedication to our great movement. In particular, I would like to say thank you to G.S.O. staffers for their prompt attention to my requests as I prepared for today's presentation on "Atheists in A.A."

Allow me to start out by mentioning that because of the men and women in the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous, good sponsorship and the gift of desperation, I have not found it necessary to take a drink since approximately 7:30 a.m. on Friday, April 21, 2006. Somehow, honesty, action and some good people conspired to make me well again. For this, I owe a debt of immeasurable gratitude. I have volunteered to talk about atheists in A.A. for a number of reasons—some of which are not completely formed at this time—but primarily because my journey in recovery and my obligation to pass on what has been so freely given to me compel me to do so.

Like many Americans, I grew up in a religious home environment. My parents talked about a spirit, a father "creature" who was a man (they called him "he") but who was not human; who had created the heavens and the earth in six days; who watches, keeps score and judges my every move and thought; who is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent, and with the help of his sidekick, the holy spirit, came down from heaven and into the world through the womb of a human female named Mary. And of course, he was an old white man with long hair, a long beard and fiery red eyes—powerful images that shaped and dominated my thinking overall for decades. I had also been groomed in the tradition of believing in Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, and the Tooth Fairy. To me, this all seemed very natural and normal, primarily because everything and everyone around me supported, encouraged and confirmed the motif.

In fact, I believed in the god of my religious upbringing during my entire prodigal and alcoholic life. Yes, theists, I once believed as you believe. It was not until after I joined A.A. and began working the Steps with a sponsor to develop an honest relationship with myself that I finally came to the realization that I actually did not believe anything—not one word of what I had claimed to believe about the existence of a supernatural, overseeing or intervening entity, being or spirit. I had heard many times of people praying and asking others to pray for loved ones who were to undergo a lifesaving surgical procedure. The requests would usually include something along the lines of "pray for god to guide the hand of the surgeon." I can remember thinking to myself, "What's the point of asking god to guide the hand of some lousy surgeon, a man (or woman) subject to human frailty? Why not simply ask god to heal the sick person outright and be done with it—cut out the imperfect (possible hungover) middle man?" Or why is god tampering with red lights and traffic cops in my favor so that I can get to work on time unmolested? Was it really god answering a desperate prayer from an unmanageable drunk, or are the traffic lights actually just some sort of automatic, preset timing device? And perhaps most of the time when people speed, they don't get caught.

Prayer provides a basis for belief in a god through the perception of answered prayer. My deconversion—or my letting go of god—was not a one-step process, because, in the mind of

any sophisticated believer, the concept of god is a mega-belief. It is a belief that is held together by many small beliefs—many small experiences that accumulate and form one larger belief. If at any time one of the beliefs is attacked, I can still, in my own mind, rely on the strength of the other beliefs. It is only when a sufficient number of the beliefs that form the mega-belief are countered that a Christian, for example, will really start to question his or her faith.

This is what I like to call “graceful degradation.” It is a concept in network theory where multiple nodes in a network can be knocked out but the network as a whole can still stand. A simplified model of the concept of god for me might be a hexagram, having nodes such as prayer, creation, logical arguments, other Christians, personal relationship and morality, with the Bible as the center node. “Some of us have tried to hold on to our old ideas, and the result was nil until we let go absolutely.” I realized that I had to either let go or continue lying to myself, pretending to believe in things that were untenable to me. I soon discovered that *It* was the synergy of the rooms, working with others on a common solution, following suggestions and the strict attention to being honest with myself, as “How it Works” implores me to be, that allowed me to see who and what I am, and—most importantly—what I believe and what I do not believe. This was probably one of the most life-giving and life-renewing experiences of self-awareness I have ever enjoyed. And it has sustained me through good times and bad.

For a while, I kept my newfound self-awareness hidden from public view. My realization that I am atheistic, free-thinking or secular, I imagined, would carry with it certain penalties if made known to other A.A. members. While Alcoholics Anonymous professes to be “not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization, or institution,” I have witnessed many religious (specifically Christian) A.A. members shamelessly proselytize newcomers, often “threatening” them into a theistic mindset (real or imagined) lest they die the alcoholic death. I have even heard longtime members, when sharing with newcomers during an A.A. meeting, refer to their Christian Bible as the BIG Big Book—continuing that after going through the Steps, they will need to turn toward to this book (meaning the Holy Bible) for real peace, serenity and joy through a relationship with Jesus Christ. Others have opened their share at A.A. discussion meetings with an acknowledgment of their higher power by name—Jesus or God.

Is one’s choice and name of a higher power not an outside issue? Why does the entire table or group need to know who or what another member’s higher power is? Could that/should that not be considered an outside issue? When asked about it, the person confronted more often than not reacts with hostility or righteous indignation. I often wonder how these same types would feel or react if another member took the same liberty to thank his or her higher power Lucifer, for example. One just might begin to see how unnecessary and perhaps disruptive to our primary purpose such disclosures can be. As an atheist and as a member of Alcoholics Anonymous, I consider discussions of these matters to be a worthwhile exercise in humility and vital to our development in service as we extend the hand of A.A.

As recently as May of this year, an A.A. group in my area found itself in a bitter conflict over how it should close its morning meetings: should it close with the Lord’s Prayer or with the A.A. Responsibility Statement? One of the group’s Jewish members objected to the Christian prayer and made his sentiments known by calling for a change. This sparked strong criticism and opposition from many of that group’s Christians members and some left the group and started a new one, which now meets at the same time just a bit down the road.

Clearly, each group is autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole. But, I had to ask myself, “If we, as a fellowship, truly believe that we are not affiliated with any sect or denomination, why the intransigence on this matter?” The Lord’s Prayer (also called the Our Father, amongst other names) is a venerated Christian prayer that, according to the New Testament of the Bible, Jesus taught as the way to pray. This group finally agreed to a compromise of sorts, allowing the group’s various chairs to decide at the conclusion of each meeting how it would close.

My sponsor (who is a practicing Catholic) and I decided that bringing my atheistic temperament into this seething caldron of debate and hostility within that group (a group we both attend) would be imprudent and even disastrous (especially with my serving as area delegate). So I stayed away from the mayhem and let the group members handle the matter without my interference. One certainly could argue that that group had been engaged in a controversy (though not public) and that some were endorsing or opposing a certain cause. Many could say that Alcoholics Anonymous (or many of its members) is in some sort of denial about being religious. In my estimation, if anyone could claim that the so-called Lord’s Prayer did not violate the A.A. Preamble, then that individual has an obligation to explain what the Preamble secretly means, as opposed to what it clearly states.

Moreover, our Third Tradition tells us: “The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.” It does not state: first-class membership for Christians, second-class membership for everyone else. Step Six in the “Twelve and Twelve” instructs us that, “If we would gain any real advantage in the use of this Step on problems other than alcohol, we shall need to make a brand-new venture into open-mindedness. We shall need to raise our eyebrows toward perfection, and be ready to walk in that direction. It will seldom matter how haltingly we walk. The only question will be ‘Are we ready?’”

I generally encourage newcomers to pray, particularly when I see that they have or have had certain religious leanings. I share that I too have used those methods in the past. The men whom I have sponsored tend to grasp enthusiastically on to the idea of the A.A. group as their higher power. I always disclose the fact that I am an atheist to the men who have asked me to sponsor them—not always immediately, but eventually it comes up.

On the back of each anniversary token I have been given, I have been reminded of this admonition: “To thine own self be true.” Thus, I have an obligation to the next sufferer to share *my* experience, strength and hope and to help others to recover from alcoholism. To the extent that I began to let go of my old religious ideas of a supernatural old, bearded white man in the sky—who was controlling, or at least had the power to control, my thoughts and actions—I became more steadily guided and governed by sound reasoning.

Once I started to take A.A.’s suggestions, confusion gave way to clarity, bitterness to gratitude and chronic suffering to serenity. The joys of recovery proceeded into my life at once. And the feeling was indescribably wonderful. I am certain I had been rocketed to the fourth dimension. One of the greatest gifts I received was the gift of being honest with myself about what I believe and what I do not believe. I no longer feel the urge to people-please on this matter. And this is great progress for me.

To pretend to be something and someone I am not would surely dampen my joy and cause me to be miserably ineffective. I have ceased fighting anyone or anything—even alcohol. For by this time sanity has returned. I live free from alcohol as a problem today. And I do it one day at a time without prayer, religious abstractions or the need to convince, or force, someone over to my point of view. It is precisely due to this freedom that I am able to demonstrate to other agnostics, atheists, freethinkers, secular humanists and the like that the joys of recovery are waiting for them, too, that working with others is the central dynamic of our entire movement—where we find out how to enter into proper relations with our fellow man, and that isolation and ostracism need not be a way of life for anyone in A.A. simply because he or she has a different take on the higher power god concept. This is my experience, my journey, my story—the great fact for me.

The Twelve Concepts—Barb W., Delegate Panel 67, Area 75 Southern Wisconsin

Hi. My name is Barb and I'm an alcoholic serving as the Panel 67 Delegate for Area 75, Southern Wisconsin.

My topic today is the Twelve Concepts. This topic was picked because it is not heard about as much as the Steps or Traditions. Also it was the topic most requested from the 2015 East Central Regional Forum survey. Actually, I have been hearing more about the Concepts lately. More workshops, more panels. So awareness of the Concepts and the desire to learn more about them seems to be on the rise, which is a good thing.

The need for the Conference came about because Bill thought some kind of advisory board would be needed to connect the fellowship to the then almost-unknown trustees. The Concepts are a part of what Bill saw as the glue that held the blueprint or structure together.

While Concept XII is part of the original conference charter, it seems the rest of the Concepts were written over a number of years. In his closing remarks to the 1956 Conference, Bill introduced four of the principles, hoping that they may someday be used in all of A.A. services. They were the “Right of Participation” (IV), “Right of Decision” (III), “Right of Appeal” and petition (V).

In his closing remarks to the Conference in 1957 Bill highlighted the fact that our boards are incorporated so they are legally empowered, but the Conference has traditional power through their connection to A.A. as a whole and through the power of the purse (VII). He also talked about how service responsibility should be equal to service authority (X). The process for selecting trustees (XI) was part of Bill's talk regarding the restructuring of the board at the 1958 Conference.

The need for good leadership (IX) was a part of Bill's closing remarks to the 1959 Conference. At this Conference he also mentioned putting together twelve points of service—that he had a draft of these ideas, but some points needed further work, and for which comments would be welcome. He presented a draft version of the Concepts to the 1960 Conference. The final draft of the Concepts was approved by the Conference in 1962, and I have summarized them as follows:

- I. The final responsibility and ultimate authority for A.A. world services should always reside in the collective conscience of our whole Fellowship. The groups, through their G.S.R., carries their group conscience.

II. The General Service Conference of A.A. has become, for nearly every practical purpose, the active voice and the effective conscience of our whole Society in its world affairs. The groups delegated their authority to the Conference.

III. To insure effective leadership, we should endow each element of A.A.—the Conference, the General Service Board and its service corporations, staffs, committees, and executives—with a traditional “Right of Decision.” Our trusted servants are able to vote their own conscience, doing what is best for A.A. as a whole, being fully prepared to report back why they voted as they did. Further, each level of service may decide which issues they will resolve on their own and for which issues they will consult widely.

IV. At all responsible levels, we ought to maintain a traditional “Right of Participation,” allowing a voting representation in reasonable proportion to the responsibility that each must discharge. At the Conference level, it is made up of area delegates, who represent the groups that do most of the Twelfth Step work; trustees who are the principle planners and administrators; corporate directors from A.A.W.S. and the Grapevine and G.S.O. staff members who provide services requested from the groups.

V. Throughout our structure, a traditional “Right of Appeal” ought to prevail, so that minority opinion will be heard and personal grievances receive careful consideration. Minority opinion must be heard. In Bill’s talk to the eighth General Service Conference he stressed that the minority voice should be heard loud and clear. His example on petition is regarding a group of friends outside of A.A. who thought the idea of a Conference was a bad one. They petitioned the groups to stop the Conference idea from going forward. He went on to say that every A.A. member inside or outside our services has the right to petition his fellows to redress grievances or improve conditions.

VI. The Conference recognizes that the chief initiative and active responsibility in most world service matters should be exercised by the trustee members of the Conference acting as the General Service Board. Delegated authority goes from the Conference to the General Service Board, similar to the groups delegating authority to the Conference in Concept II.

VII. The Charter and Bylaws of the General Service Board are legal instruments, empowering the trustees to manage and conduct world service affairs. The Conference Charter is not a legal document; it relies upon tradition and the A.A. purse for final effectiveness. The General Service Board is granted legal powers as necessary to carry out its business. The Conference is the board’s link to the fellowship. Their powers stem from that link and from the ability to cut off the money.

VIII. The trustees are the principal planners and administrators of overall policy and finance. They have custodial oversight of the separately incorporated and constantly active services, exercising this through their ability to elect all the directors of these entities, some of which are the trustees themselves. In relation to the

corporations, the trustees have delegated responsibility to the corporate boards of A.A.W.S. and the Grapevine for doing the actual services in the same way the groups have delegated authority to the Conference (II) and the Conference has delegated to the trustees (IV).

IX. Good service leadership at all levels is indispensable for our future functioning and safety. Primary world service leadership, once exercised by the founders, must necessarily be assumed by the trustees. The importance of good leaders needs no further comment. Safety in this case is referring to our future security as a society as Bill outlined in his closing remarks to the 1959 Conference.

X. Every service responsibility should be matched by an equal service authority, with the scope of such authority being well defined. Everyone needs enough authority to do the job. The scope of the authority, as with any other position, should be well defined. When there are disagreements over authority, new agenda items are proposed and the group conscience helps to clarify how much authority should be granted and to whom, or, in some cases, bylaws, handbooks or guidelines are updated.

XI. The trustees should always have the best possible committees, corporate service directors, executives, staffs and consultants. Composition, qualifications, induction procedures, and rights and duties will always be matters of serious concern. As in any other organization, it is important to have the best people for the job. This is especially important for those who do the work and form the visible image of A.A. The world will measure our value by what they see and feel in them.

XII. The Conference shall observe the spirit of A.A. Tradition, taking care that it never becomes the seat of perilous wealth or power; that sufficient operating funds and reserve be its prudent financial principle; that it place none of its members in a position of unqualified authority over others; that it reach all important decisions by discussion, vote and, whenever possible, by substantial unanimity; that its actions never be personally punitive nor an incitement to public controversy; that it never perform acts of government, and that, like the Society of Alcoholics Anonymous it serves, it will always remain democratic in thought and action. The Warranties of Article 12 are a series of solemn undertakings that guarantee that the Conference itself will conform to A.A.'s Twelve Traditions, all of which are counsels of prudence. This Concept is also a part of the Conference Charter and cannot be changed by the Conference unless there is written consent of three-quarters of all the directory listed A.A. groups.

The Concepts can be found on page 574 of the fourth edition of the Big Book, in the book *The A.A. Service Manual/Twelve Concepts for World Service* and in the pamphlet "The Twelve Concepts Illustrated."

Archives Service: Purpose, Value and Approaches—Bruce C., Delegate Panel 67, Area 22 Northern Indiana

Good day to you all. My name is Bruce, Panel 67 Delegate for Area 22 Northern Indiana serving on the C.P.C committee. I am a past Area 22 archives chairperson.

Like any other A.A. service, the primary purpose of those involved in archival work is to carry the message of Alcoholics Anonymous. Archives service work is more than mere custodial activity; it is the means by which we collect, preserve and share the rich and meaningful heritage of our Fellowship. It is by the collection and sharing of these important historical elements that our collective gratitude for Alcoholics Anonymous is deepened.

A.A. members have a responsibility to gather and care for the Fellowship's historical documents and memorabilia. Correspondence, records, minutes, reports, photographs, newspaper and magazine articles from the past and the present should be collected, preserved and made available for the guidance and research of A.A. members and others (researchers, historians and scholars from various disciplines)—for now and for generations to come.

"We are trying to build up extensive records which will be of value to a future historian. . . . It is highly important that the factual material be placed in our files in such a way that there can be no substantial distortion. . . . We want to keep enlarging on this idea for the sake of the full length history to come." —Bill W., 1957

VALUE

After many decades of tireless organizing and arranging, the G.S.O. Archives room was opened with a formal ribbon-cutting ceremony in November 1975. Since then, the G.S.O. archivists and the trustees serving on the Archives Committee of the General Service Board have encouraged the importance of archival service, which is vital to the survival of the Fellowship. As a result of that work, today almost all areas have set up archival collections, and there is a significant growth at the district level. Historical records help us to sift through our day-to-day experience in recovery and reach back for the shared experience from the past. As we sort out the myth from the facts we ensure that our original message of recovery, unity and service remains the same in a changing, growing, expanding Fellowship that constantly renews itself. Archives are frequently associated with the past, but they are also to be linked with true value. We maintain records of permanent value so we can go back and consult the original sources again and again. In our history lies our hope.

APPROACHES

How do we do this? What can you do to help?

There are many ways to participate in this rewarding aspect of A.A. service:

- Ask oldtimers to record their stories—the G.S.O. Archives can help you get started with this by sending you an Oral Histories Kit, with suggestions for how to conduct a successful taped interview.
- Create a history of your home group, through research and interviews, to learn how, when and why your group got started—then share this history with your area and district.
- Volunteer your time to sort through archival material and help organize files. Almost every archives has a backlog of material to be sorted and inventoried. While this can be tedious labor, there is nothing more important in archives work.

Without meaningful organization and an inventory, the archives are basically unusable.

Basic categories that we use: Books, G.S.C. final reports, area minutes, area newsletters, meeting lists, group histories, area pamphlets, correspondences, audio/visual histories

Fifth Tradition and Other Maladies—Frank G., Delegate Panel 67, Area 53 Central & Southeast Ohio

Most emphatically, A.A. has but one single purpose: to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers. We can approach the sufferer as no one else can. Together we have found a substantial remedy for a terrible human-destroying malady. Our experience says as a society we should not enter the fields of education, research, neurosis and the like. We know that theology is for clergymen and that the practice of medicine is for doctors. However, we should cooperate and never compete with these men of science and faith.

In early A.A. development there was a great deal of fear of alcoholics that were odd or different. In A.A.'s second year a man came to an A.A. group and said he was the victim of another addiction, one that was even worse stigmatized than alcoholism. Discussing if the sufferer was welcome or not, Dr. Bob (the oldest member) said, "What are we really afraid of? Is it our reputation?" He went on to ask, "What would the Master do?" With no other discussion the man was allowed to be a member. After all, isn't fear the true basis of intolerance?

Today many professionals are sending their clients to A.A. Many sufferers are showing up with a sincere desire for sobriety from all substances. Some come just to start trouble. There are those who just don't know what their problem is but somehow suspect that the answer is in the A.A. rooms. Remember: *hope* is found here!

Something great happened when I first called the district 800 hotline. I was not court-ordered and I was not homeless; I had, however, drunk away a business and a home that I had almost payed for. I was terribly sick of the madness of having to drink and had started to use street drugs in the last years of my hopeless alcoholism. The man that A.A. sent to my wreck of a home set me down, talked to me and took me to my first meeting. There was great relief in saying "Frank, alcoholic." However, I really did not know what an alcoholic was and what it meant to be one.

I was ashamed of myself and had no understanding of how the progressive destruction of alcoholism turned to drug abuse. I was given a Big Book and was told to read it and reread it. There was more hope to find that I was just an everyday alcoholic. Drugs are mentioned in Bill's and Dr. Bob's stories. The Big Book informs us, "What about the real alcoholic? . . . at some stage of his drinking career he begins to lose all control of his liquor consumption. . . . As matters grow worse, he begins to use a combination of high-powered sedative and liquor. . . . [doctors give] him morphine or some sedative . . . he begins to appear at hospitals and sanitariums." The pamphlet "A.A. Member—Medications and Other Drugs" warns us that our automatic response will be to turn to chemical relief for uncomfortable feelings and to take more than usual. The best safeguard against drug-related relapse is an active participation in the A.A. program of recovery. So apparently many real alcoholics have had a terrible time with drugs. I have found when sponsoring others that most members had abused additional substances—it was hard for them to admit their drug abuse because they did not get them off the street. As we dug deeper and got more honest, surprisingly some admitted getting them illegally. For me it doesn't matter what the alcoholic misused, only that he gets honest for sobriety.

Today it appears that one of the biggest factors that disturbs the meetings is when the sufferer introduces him- or herself as an addict in an open meeting. They might later share in the meeting about how many times they almost died or that their drug of choice is the worst. A responsible member may state something like, "Let's keep our subject to alcoholism; perhaps you may want to go to a different twelve-step program." Newcomers, outnumbering the A.A.ers who understand the Steps and Traditions, can out-vocalize the sober members, saying something like, "The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. You can't kick me out of A.A. I can say and do anything I want to in A.A., it is my right." The meeting becomes ineffective, and perhaps maybe even damaging to both the newbie who doesn't understand and the sober alcoholic who means well.

The drug addict/alcoholic I am afraid is here to stay in the rooms of A.A. How can we introduce the Fifth Tradition and not run the duel-addicted out? Let's look at our literature. Bill W. acknowledges that drug users and alcoholics happen to be first cousins of sort. A drug user who has an alcoholic history can become a member. A *non*alcoholic pill or drug user cannot be a member; however, that person can be brought as a visitor, either for help or for inspiration. Bill also states that there is no way of making a nonalcoholic addict into an A.A. member. Voice that opinion in a meeting today and see the meeting go to chaos and confusion. Newbies will voice their personal opinions fueled with fear and little understanding, other members will walk out, there will be unkind crosstalk and if there is not a strong chairperson the meeting never gets turned around to our principles and our solution.

In doing Twelfth Step work, I experienced several times needle addicts who wanted to stop the needle and then did. They just went to a few meetings and declared that alcohol was not a problem. They claimed they can drink lightly to steady their nerves, and then turned into real alcoholics shockingly quickly. I've also experienced trying to work with a real alcoholic who was more interested in dating than freedom from alcohol, who then died from drugs six months later. My ex-wife, very much against drugs, drank with me, as much as me. She stopped drinking when I did, worked no program and died from several years of ingesting doctor-prescribed pills. Does it matter which came first—alcoholism then the drugs, or the drugs then alcoholism?

A new person enters into the meeting with other issues, claims they are not an alcoholic, is defiant and stubborn, does not care if they hurt the meeting or not. Selfish and self-centered, just like the alcoholic. There are those who have a terrible drug past and never looked at their alcohol history. Denial, minimizing, an attitude of "you don't understand, I suffered more than you." Sounds just like an alcoholic mind to me. The newcomer alcoholic, just like the addict, often says nonsense and disturbing things when they share during the meeting. Quite often a person might talk in detail of their drug use, wind up talking too long, becoming too engulfed in grandiosity of their sad story. A responsible chairperson or home group member might state "We all have similar miserable stories, let's get to a solution." The newbie walks out, and is approached by a person outside who tries to explain our program and ask key questions so that the newbie might consider that they could have alcoholic issues also. If they are very upset, the member could encourage them to come back with an open mind and perhaps give them their number. If the newbie stays in the meeting, you can approach them after and inform them about alcoholism and ask them questions to make them think; even if they are standoffish you could be making progress. Give them your number. We must be calm and

friendly, with an attitude of wanting to be helpful. No one likes to be approached by someone that hates their issues. The Big Book calls it stupidity. Point out we have no defense from the first drink, and that the main problem is in the mind rather than the body. How do I get the power not to pick up that first one?

A member might state, "I cannot relate to the drug user and their needle or pipe." Consider this instead: Can I relate to the following? The obsession; the insanity of not wanting to steal from the wife's purse but having to; swearing I am not going to drive but driving anyway; the doctor saying that my body and my heart are worn out and that I don't have long to live, but that having no impact because the obsession is so strong; I am helpless and hopeless; I want God to help me but I can't get conscious contact because alcohol is my master. Can we relate to this?

In early times, a member named Ed who did not want to hear about God and disturbed the meeting for a long time came to believe after a terrible relapse. Remember, John Barleycorn is the great persuader.

As individuals and groups grow and develop we follow the Steps because we must or die. Then we follow the Traditions because they are right, even though we resist some. Then finally we follow the Steps and Traditions because we really want them for ourselves and A.A. We genuinely want to change to be free. Alcoholic Anonymous is a process. We must be firm in honoring our Traditions! Let's inform and be lenient for the newcomer's sake. They don't know what they don't know. Many come in the rooms resistant and to scoff, and many do finally admit, "Yes I am an alcoholic," and they remain to stay and pray.

Service Sponsorship—Derek T., Delegate Panel 66, Area 74 Northern Wisconsin/Upper Peninsula of Michigan

My name is Derek, and I am an alcoholic. I am currently serving as the Panel 66 Delegate from Area 74, Northern Wisconsin/Upper Peninsula of Michigan. I serve on the Literature Committee. When asked by the regional forums coordinator to review the list of topics, "Service Sponsorship" jumped off the page. While I can't pretend to know how it all *really* works, I would make an informed guess that sponsorship has been a vital ingredient to the outcome for this alcoholic. One of the first things my first sponsor asked me to do was to read the pamphlet "Questions and Answers on Sponsorship." It is one of the first things I suggest when working with a newcomer. I have always enjoyed the style in which the pamphlet is written. I find that the pamphlet sidesteps controversy and takes a balanced, common-sense approach to most issues that can arise when working with a newcomer. We can be driven to extremes at times, and having a measured outline in black and white can be very useful. Further, the pamphlet explores the topic of service sponsorship. I don't hear a lot on this topic and I have found it invaluable on my journey.

One of my first cogent thoughts as a newcomer came when I was sitting in a regular meeting, and it was "Who's running this thing?" I believe today that was in part a spiritual experience. I started asking questions, internally and externally, about the structure of groups and how things were organized in A.A. Soon after, I started getting involved and here I stand today. I've had the same recovery sponsor for my entire sobriety; I've had a more varied experience with service sponsorship. I got involved in general service early on in my sobriety, but I did not use a service sponsor. I had one for a period of time, but rarely called him. After a

relocation in 2009, I tried to coast a bit in the program and just “be a member.” Things did not go well. I found myself back involved in general service after a visitor showed up at my hometown meeting asking if the group had a G.S.R. That visitor turned out to be my future service buddy. From this experience I discovered that service may not be for everyone, but it is definitely necessary for this alcoholic.

By the time I was elected D.C.M., I found it necessary to seek out service sponsorship. I had experienced a profound shift in my willingness to serve Alcoholics Anonymous. I had often considered only positions that interested me or that I “thought I could handle” based on my schedule and perceived availability. Those old ideas went out the window and I began to be willing to serve in whatever capacity *you* chose for me. For me, service sponsorship became a necessity because I knew I was entering uncharted waters on the journey. The following is taken from the pamphlet “Questions and Answers on Sponsorship”:

A service sponsor is usually someone who is knowledgeable in A.A. history and has a strong background in the service structure. The A.A. member is introduced to a new language: G.S.R., D.C.M., area assembly, minority opinion. They will become familiar with the Traditions, Concepts and Warranties, as well as The A.A. Service Manual/Twelve Concepts for World Service, Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age and other A.A. literature. (“Questions and Answers on Sponsorship,” p. 26)

I’ve actively utilized two different service sponsors and both have helped me immensely. My current service sponsor has been extremely active in helping other alcoholics involved in service. He has organized conference calls to study service-related literature, including *The A.A. Service Manual/Twelve Concepts for World Service* and *A.A. Comes of Age*. He has also facilitated a retreat weekend for many years that has helped countless trusted servants to a better understanding of the Twelve Concepts. I do not always agree with my service sponsor and we sometimes see things quite differently. This is wonderful—I need to hear experience different from my own and I need to be challenged.

The experience of coming to the table with a willingness to keep learning has allowed me to grow more than I ever thought I could when I first came to A.A. A passage toward the end of the sponsorship pamphlet sums things up nicely:

The basis of all sponsorship is to lead by example. Service sponsors can impart to their sponsees the pleasure of involvement in the work of Alcoholics Anonymous. This is best done by stressing the spiritual nature of service work and by pointing out the usefulness of simple footwork and faith. (“Questions and Answers on Sponsorship,” p. 26)

At the end of the day, I have had to show up and I have had to pray. This was no more apparent than when I was at the General Service Conference these last two years. I repeatedly turned to God throughout the week because that was really the only place to go. Charged with making the best decisions for A.A. as a whole, there was nothing left but to show up, put one foot in front of the other and pray. As I prepare to rotate off as delegate and (hopefully) not become a bleeding deacon, it is my hope that I will continue to remember the usefulness of simple footwork and faith.

WORKSHOP REPORTS

7:00—9:00 p.m.

“Supporting Grapevine: From Your Story to Service” (Moderator: Ami B., Executive Editor/Reporter: Tom H.)

Attendees were given a story introduction and moved on to a discussion of topics:

1. Diversifying content was discussed. Attendees discussed how to diversify content and offered ideas such as: the use of YouTube; videos; thought-provoking articles; a format for discussion; opposing views. (Response: La Viña has this format. Readers of Grapevine have resisted this format)

Members suggested the personal stories of General Service Office staff be used as magazine material. In response, it was mentioned that the Grapevine has a section in it called “A.A. News,” and such an article would most likely find its way here.

2. Past experiences in Workshops:

- A. Have created enthusiasm for writing and recording stories;
- B. Have been used for intergroup plays;
- C. Have been inspiring experiences;
- D. Michigan has a statewide G.V. committee that presents to the state conference.

3. Aural (auditory) edits vs. written edits were discussed among members

“Event Planning Tips—District Workshops and Events” (Moderator: John C./Reporter: Henry C.) 7:00 p.m. workshop

The workshop began with introductions and a reading of the workshop guidelines. Attendees were asked two questions. The questions and responses are as follows:

Question: If two workshops a year were offered to the Fellowship, what are possible topics? Safety, sponsorship, Tradition Three, and The Twelve Concepts for World Service. The D.C.M. for each district would visit each group and facilitate the workshop. What would increase the success of this event?

Workshop attendees answered with their experience, strength, and hope:

- a. Two districts teamed up on (service) G.S.R. school. The result? All chairs full.
- b. No idea how to put on a workshop; so members asked and got help from another area
- c. Feed them and they will come
- d. How do young people fit in?
- e. How much notice did you give? (Answer: 2 months)
- f. Our flyers are not anonymous — but we are
- g. Service topic is the hardest topic to draw people to a workshop

D.C.M. and committee chairs do not know what to do about the lack of attendance and interest in service topics. Group attendees shared their experience strength and hope regarding this topic:

- a. Education — what are your duties: sponsors, G.S.R.s and chairs?
- b. Bring in the community / go to the community
- c. Draw people from different groups
- d. Delegates’ workshop/pre-delegate workshop/pot luck
- e. Use the Service Manual

“Event Planning Tips—District Workshops and Events” (Moderator: John C./Reporter: James S.) 8:00 p.m. workshop

Attendees to the workshop were asked to share some popular topics for workshops. Attendees gave the following suggestions:

- Safety in your meeting place
- Take it to your group to get a topic
- Sponsorship. Sponsorship service and self
- Concepts
- GSR school
- History workshop involving archives
- Young people and social media

In response to the question: “How do you get people to come?” members suggested:

- Ask them what they want.
- Feed them.
- Involve the delegate or alternate delegate.
- Get them fired up!
- Use “Tricky topics”
- Have a theme.
- Have a workshop chairperson
- Create a buzz.
- Workshop committee flyers
- Plan ahead!
- Pay attention to inclusion and fair representation
- Use Grapevine books

“A.A. Service” (Moderator: Laura G./ Reporter: Jenny C.)

Session 1 and 2 reports are combined from the hour-long workshops that ran from 7:00-9:00 p.m.

In this workshop, two questions were chosen for discussion under the topic of “A.A. Service” but time permitted for only one to be answered: “How do we stimulate interest in general service and get people to the assemblies?”

In response, members said: “Each of us doing service has to make it attractive; as it is about attraction rather than promotion.” Others claimed that it “fit into the framework of sponsorship” and “people need to get sponsored early on.” In addition, workshop attendees felt that people in service need to communicate the benefit of service to their personal recovery. Some specific comments were, “Lead by example with enthusiasm!”; “I get to do this — it’s an honor”; “Have fun and show it!”

There was also some discussion about ways to help people know what is going on. Some ideas were having workshops, using education, sharing the Service Manual and staying

with newcomers at service events to help them understand what's going on (and why), and allowing them to feel comfortable about asking questions.

Since the question was about increasing participation and interest in General Service (based on a question from a D.C.M about how to get more G.S.R.s to the district meeting), a number of people addressed that question specifically. Some suggestions were:

- Announcing district meetings
- Offering workshops
- Being patient

One person shared that that they took their small number of G.S.R.s to two different meetings so that groups would get familiar with them. There was more discussion and stress on "attraction" and the "importance of sponsorship." A few members said that "ego" drove them into service; but then they began to see and feel differently. One man said, "I finally felt part of something greater than myself. Every voice has power."

"G.S.O.'s Group Records and FNV" (Moderator/Reporter: Karen Hale, Senior Manager Administrative Services)

Session 1 and 2 reports are combined from the hour-long workshops that ran from 7:00-9:00 p.m.

Karen began with an introduction and a review of the meeting's agenda. She then introduced the items on the agenda:

- Search feature
- District changes
- G.S.O. responsibilities
- Website
- Training incoming area registrars
- Ideas for FNV improvements
- Reviewed group status orders - displayed info on screen.

Attending this workshop was a mix of incoming registrars; outgoing registrars; alternates and A.A. members who were interested in the G.S.O. record-keeping process.

The group posed questions about new position kits and how they were generated as well as questions about how to ensure group forms go to registrars. The current Area 20 chair, Chris, shared how he used Adobe to alter the group forms to redirect them to the registrar instead of to G.S.O. Attendees also posed questions about change notifications that came from G.S.O. and what they represent. Karen demonstrated database features, such as finding vacant positions, identifying corrections groups and what makes groups go incomplete.

“A.A.W.S. Publishing and the G.S.O.’s Website aa.org” (Moderator: David R., Publishing Director/Julie Anderson, Staff Assistant Communications Services/Reporter: Melissa D.) 7:00 p.m. workshop

What is the Publishing department at the G.S.O. working on?

A.A.W.S. literature catalog (2018); audio version of Big Book; Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions; Living Sober (English; French; and Spanish); Twelve Concepts for World Service; video recording ASL for the Big Book and “Twelve and Twelve” (the people portrayed are NOT A.A. members); revamping large print books; and redesigning pamphlet covers.

Workshop attendees posed many questions about translations and literature, such as, “Are Big Books available for countries experiencing a surge in A.A. membership?” In response, staff answered that they are available here, but that the country in question is translating it within their country, so that it is available in that country and members can buy it in their own country. Attendees also asked for status of Russian Big Book. Staff shared information, such as when translation occurs (for the Big Book), Chapter 5 is done first. Members also asked if royalties or copyrights were charged on translated books (‘No’ was the answer). Another item discussed was if ASL was the only signing — or was there French or Spanish? In response, staff answered that “ASL is the most recognized, so that is what is being started.” Other questions by workshop attendees:

- How many pamphlets in print? (Answer: 75)
- Are there translation requirements or errors? (Answer: *Dr. Bob’s Nightmare* and Appendices)
- Can A.A. donate their platform to Areas? (Answer: In the process of revamping)
- Can our website be navigated through a microphone (Answer: It is a good question, and will be noted.)

Other questions by workshop attendees concerned requirements of website vendors and A.A.’s exposure to them, as well as the visibility and accessibility of downloadable media to search engines.

“A.A.W.S. Publishing and the G.S.O.’s Website aa.org” (Moderator: David R., Publishing Director/Julie Anderson, G.S.O. Staff Assistant Communications Services/Reporter: N/A 8:00 p.m. workshop

Workshop attendees were introduced to publishing and communications staff at G.S.O. who shared what was “in the works” such as international translations, making the catalog more user friendly, using more images, voices, and humor to moderate “boring” sounding recordings. Also discussed were various projects and responsibilities of the publishing and communications staff, such as:

- Recording the Concepts in 3 languages on aa.org
- Serenity Prayer in ASL
- Large print pamphlets (allowing for plenty of notes)
- Review of pricing on literature
- New pamphlet cover designs
- Big Book available in 70 languages
- A.A. literature in 90 countries

- Presented with first Croation Big Big off the press
- Julie, in Communication Services, shared that she was interviewing website designers
- 70% of visits to the website were done on a mobile device
- “Communication Services” is a spin-off or outgrowth of “Group Services.”

“A.A. and Corrections” (Moderator: Pat W./Reporter: Maggie C.)

7:00 p.m. workshop

The meeting opened with two attendees sharing their experience in doing Corrections work. One member started going to prisons in 2003. She reported that the meetings, conducted as regular A.A. meetings, inspire those on the inside to do service work. Another member, Arlene, shared her experience in bringing meetings to one correctional facility for over five years. She reported that if anyone was looking to do service work, this particular kind was very rewarding and very humbling. She was grateful for other service workers who encouraged her to get involved, as it has been a great piece of her recovery.

The first question posed to workshop members was, “Do you coordinate with Bridging the Gap?” In response, the two members referred to in the previous paragraph stated that they were not approved for any information in prison except for Big Books. Other members who served in different facilities had different experiences. One member suggested trifold pamphlets. Still another shared that he sends information to the prison through personnel. Individual laws or customs within the prison system are different. Another suggested using “Bridging the Gap by sending a letter to G.S.O. They will send information, correspondence, and literature.” Still another member shared that his district (in Area 74) has a Bridging the Gap liaison who gets 14 requests per month.

Other members in the workshop had many suggestions for increasing communication, literature, and participation in A.A. programs, such as working with prison chaplains and commanding officers in order to educate them (through literature) about A.A. and what it offers, as well as receiving training themselves as required by particular institutions.

“A.A. and Corrections” (Moderator: Pat W./Reporter: N/A)

8:00 p.m. workshop

Members in this session on Corrections work shared their experience, strength and hope in various capacities within Corrections work. One attendee from Area 22 shared a part of his story and told members about how he had heard the message of A.A. in prison. Attraction was a big part of the draw, he said. When he was released, he became active in service work and now serves as the Corrections Chair for Area 22. Other workshop members shared some difficulties they encountered in trying to bring A.A.’s message to those on the inside. Some difficulties were: lack of respect and trust by prison officials (though this was mitigated by time and experience); anonymity concerns; lack of uniformity across prisons regarding requirements and ease of bringing in literature and meetings; trust is come by slowly — those on the inside are often transferred between prisons, and if they continue to see A.A. members bringing meetings in, trust is built. Others spoke about the need for Spanish literature behind the walls and others requested that A.A. books be placed within the prison library. One member related that many prisons have eliminated their libraries.

Many attendees reported successes in their endeavors to bring the message of A.A. behind the walls. Some shared that flexibility and patience were needed, another shared about touching many lives with the work that is done, and still another member (Area 20) shared that she was “very blessed to deal with good staff.” Another shared that those on the inside want to do the Steps. Some shared about how talking with corrections staff about ‘what A.A. is and isn’t’ is essential, as is any kind of information, training, and literature for the staff at the facilities. All agreed that more work needs to be done.

“Supporting La Viña: From Your Story to Service” (Moderator: Irene D./Reporter: Nancy S.)

Workshop members discussed the cultural differences between English and Spanish speakers in A.A. and noted that “crossing barriers happens when we are speaking the Language of the Heart.” It was proposed that if the two language speakers (English and Spanish) were put together, and if they began to hear each other, they would then begin to speak the “Language of the Heart.” So, “instead of two workshops, could we combine them [at Regional Forums]? [Although] some areas would still need two, but some have full rooms. Maybe try?”

La Viña forums were announced: We are a Fellowship of stories. We share our experience. A member shared that stories have been told about how (particularly in California) much fun and learning was at the Forum with districts supporting the forum.

A question was raised about why groups/districts resist financially supporting people for service functions? In response, members shared that fun at events helps attract more biannual events. An increase in such events “would be good.” A member suggested that delegates could do more to reach out to hispanic groups. Another member asked how stories translate between English and Spanish — are there considerations of accents and language? What about cultural differences? Finally, workshop members discussed bettering the methods used for attracting Spanish-speakers and future readers of La Viña.

FULL FORUM PRESENTATION/WORKSHOP

Principles Before Personalities—Kelly L., Delegate Panel 66, Area 20 Northern Illinois

Hello, my name is Kelly and I am the Panel 66 Delegate for Area 20 Northern Illinois, serving on the Grapevine Committee.

I picked the topic “Principles Before Personalities” since this was and sometimes still is a subject I have to work on and pray about often. One of the definitions of *principle* is a rule or code of conduct. We in Alcoholics Anonymous have thirty-six rules of conduct, or principles, we need to live by. *Personality* means the distinctive collective individual qualities of a person. You don’t have to be in A.A. to know that there are many, many different personalities that everyone deals with on a daily basis. Step Twelve says to practice these principles in all our affairs. Practicing those first twelve principles wasn’t too hard for me, since they were taking care of the glaring character defects and helped me make things right with others and my Higher Power, and they helped me remember that everything is a daily reprieve contingent on my spiritual maintenance. For me this means, for example, talking to my sponsor about all the Steps before making amends and applying this to not only volunteer service for the fellowship of A.A. but to relationships at work and in my family. I’ve heard that it is easy to practice the principles of A.A. in a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous, but when I am around others who are not in the Fellowship, that is when I really have to work them. The workplace at times is also relatively easier for me, since I am fairly sure that others are not working a twelve-step program.

In Tradition Twelve it states, “At this altitude (press, radio, films, and television), anonymity—100 percent anonymity—was the only possible answer. Here, principles would have to come before personalities, without exception.” I have to be willing to give up my need for attention and money and to be humble enough to do the work of the Fellowship without expecting anything in return. The way I understand this Tradition is that humility prevails in all our actions related to the Fellowship.

Putting principles before personalities means withholding judgment. We all have buttons and we all get our buttons pushed when others rub us the wrong way. We all know the people who got to us—the person who was loud and wouldn’t stop talking; the guy who kept gossiping and badmouthing others; the young man who knew it all and couldn’t hear anyone. So, yeah, we’ve all run headlong into different types of people that irritate and annoy us. This is exactly where the “principles before personalities” element comes into play. The trick is to see the bigger picture; to see how our own sobriety is tied to following the highest principles; to think first and to not take the bait.

So to me, “principles before personalities” is simply letting people be where they are and who they are, and showing them respect just as any other human being. Some of the principles

that most of us try to practice are honesty, willingness, faith, trust, forgiving, patience, kindness . . . the list goes on and on. When we—or rather I—practice these principles in all areas of life, they allow me to treat folks the way I would want to be treated. And with that being said, I feel like it is living by the Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

In the book *Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers*, it mentions the plaque defining *humility* that was on Dr. Bob's desk. It read, "Perpetual quietness of heart. It is to have no trouble. It is never to fretted or vexed, irritable or sore; to wonder at nothing that is done to me, to feel nothing done against me. It is to be at rest when nobody praises me, and when I am blamed or despised, it is to have a blessed home in myself where I can go in and shut the door and kneel to my Father in secret and be at peace, as in a deep sea of calmness, when all around and about is seeming trouble."

Having humility to that extent is something I would love to have. Since becoming involved in general service at the area level the last few years and a delegate the last two, I believe I have gotten what I heard the oldtimers mentioned as tough skin. Not only do I feel that my skin got tougher, but I also got a softer heart toward others, which helps me with humility.

I also believe that the Twelfth Tradition is closely interlinked with the First and Second Traditions, in which our common welfare should come first (rather than our only personal one) and that our Higher Power is our sole conductor through the group conscience (not our sole conscience) as we are but trusted servants. Well, we already know our own personality traits—the ones that violate the principles we'd like to honor and adopt. That's one reason we work *the Steps*. The clash is obvious there. But it's harder to see our own part when the personalities of others block communication and understanding.

Each and every one of us gets recovery through the Fellowship, and part of recovery is offered through carrying the message to the still-suffering alcoholic. So I believe that the key lesson here is to focus on the message of strength and hope rather than our own accomplishments or run-riot wills. It is not about who we are, what we did or what we can do, but how we are a messenger for recovery.

I would like to close with the last part of the long form of Tradition Twelve: "[T]hat we are actually to practice a genuine humility. This to the end that our great blessings may never spoil us; that we shall forever live in thankful contemplation of Him who presides over us all." Thank you for allowing me to share with you.

"Principles Before Personalities" (Moderator: Mark E./Reporter: Carol H.)

The presenter covered many ways that judgment can foster the idea that we know better than others. However, there were many examples of how practicing the Golden Rule and focusing on our strength and hope can help bring the outcome in line with the 36 Principles of our A.A. program. Although there were no questions from the attendees, 21 people shared their experience in situations where a "principle" had to be applied — rather than using a response allowing "personality" to determine the outcome. Examples include an emphasis on the group conscience and importance of the spirit of rotation. Members shared that sometimes we would rather be liked than right, and this can be detrimental to the group. Although we are glad there are no "A.A. police;" "we all need to check our egos and remember our primary purpose."

PAST TRUSTEES SHARING

Clayton V.: *Southwest Regional Trustee (past, 2011-2015)*

I was a past trustee from the Southwest region, and this is my third East Central Forum. I appreciate the work the General Service Office has done in increasing our ability to serve our active military and veterans. They are probably our largest underserved group. They have taken some steps to remedy that and I am thankful.

I am going to tell you a story about my first Regional Forum where I caught service. It was in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in 1991. They had the "crisis du jour," which was that they had just fired the General Manager of A.A. who was a past trustee from that region. And to try to calm the waters, they sent out George D. and Tom J. who are ex marine and ex NYC cop. And it was quite spectacular. Almost as spectacular as some of the other crisis du jours I have been to. But that wasn't what got me hooked on service. What got me hooked on service was a poker game. It took place on Saturday night and it was put on in the room of the delegate for D.C.M.s. at that Regional Forum.

I am from rural Missouri, about 30 miles from the southern tip of Illinois. The other D.C.M.s were from St. Louis, so I really didn't know anybody that well. But I went to this poker game with these guys and we got to be good friends. Out of that one poker game came 6 or 7 people. Five became delegates from the eastern area of Missouri. There were also two trustees that served on the General Service Board. Then, the third member to come out of the poker game became the East Central regional nominee for trustee-at-large/U.S. So what happened was this: We liked A.A. a lot and we liked each other a lot, so we bonded and supported each other all the way along through the service structure. I hope you caught some of that magic this weekend. I'd like to thank you for the warm welcome I have received.

Bob M.: *East Central Regional Trustee (past, 2005-2009)*

I'd like to talk about is "why service?" For me, general service had to come from inside of me out. It had to be something that I wanted to do. And it had to be something I needed to do and something I read in our Old Timers book. It carried the message, and I needed to do it if I wanted to live. And I wanted to live, because when I sobered up, there wasn't much left in my life. And I'd already tried alcohol twice, because I had to – I found those pages in the big Book and I went out and tried it again. And I knew alcohol wasn't the solution anymore and one night I got to the point where Alcoholics Anonymous has to work. And so I grabbed a hold of it and I read stuff and listened to people, and I kept hearing this common theme about service and for some reason I was drawn to those people. It wasn't in my vocabulary when I sobered up. I liked Scott's talk, the other night to me it was another country have we done our share? And we would sit around after our meeting and have a group conscience meeting and talk about who's not here, why aren't they here? What can we do to bring them here? How can we carry the message out a little more? The majority of the message was about each other.

One of the things we did was to go around to the hunting hotels during hunting season and put our group name and number on there so if somebody needed to call someone and talk, they could find us and call us. And that is what comes from within, we didn't feel any obligation,

it was something that all of us believed we needed to do in order to live. And so, as I went through the service structure, and got to the bottom, I learned to live by being in the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous. Not only in rooms of service, but in the rooms of recovery. Any time I had a brilliant idea, I tried it out in the service structure first. And see how it was accepted. Sometimes it didn't go very well and I knew it wouldn't be so good for me to use in my private world. I found out that you couldn't call people imbeciles. I learned everything.

As I progressed down the service structure, my life got better, and I started to do things I never ever thought I would do. I served on the Board. Then, all of a sudden, you are at the top of the service triangle. Now, I sit and look. Today, it seems to me is that the excitement needs to be at the group level and the A.A. member. All focus should be on them. One of the things this weekend I heard this weekend is "What is the responsibility of A.A.?" What is the final responsibility of group members? I heard this quote during this Forum: "What occurred to me was that traditional power, exercised by the General Service Conference, by the Traditions, was given by the groups to the Conference. versus the legal power, as guaranteed by the powers of an incorporation." And that is what is happening right now, it is the spiritual struggle of the groups speaking and working with the Conference. So, we can keep butting heads, or we can find a common spiritual solution. It must come from the A.A. groups and A.A. members. I know if we meet and talk and share and A.A. members step up, I think the solution will come. Thank you.

Dorothy M.: *East Central Regional Trustee (past, 2001-2004)*

When I came into A.A. I was the kind of person who had to be busy. And when I was drinking, I was busy doing that, and when I came to A.A. I needed something else to do. I found service work. I did everything in my service group that I could do and then in the district and then the area. I would hear the trustees' report and I was curious about that and I decided, or my group decided, to put my name in. When I was elected to east Central regional trustee, I remember getting on my knees and thanking God. Because he was giving me an awesome responsibility and one that I knew one day at a time I would fulfill it. I had some big shoes to fill. And I found that was the best experience that I have ever had in Alcoholics Anonymous. It wasn't so much being in New York but the other people from around the country, the trust from my area that I would do what I needed to do. And I am one of the people who doesn't like to speak in front of groups – I turn it over to my Higher Power. At the time, I was still working on a lot. At the time, wanting kindness it was wonderful for me, because I got out of Dorothy. And whenever I get out of Dorothy, I am happiest, so when it comes and goes. comes back around, think about it.

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

Over half of my resentments, when I sobered up, were toward institutions. They are bigger than me; I can't control them, they have huge amounts of internal conflict that manifested itself in huge amounts of external conflict. I don't know if anyone is familiar with that question. The thing that struck me this weekend is if my only solution to quelling the conflict within myself is getting my way then I am in a lot of trouble. I love something that we do in here — go through the Concepts and Traditions. First I get to learn to keep my conflicts in perspective. We have bona fide power struggles in A.A. If we didn't have those things we would lose our life. Have you ever been around anyone who doesn't have any conflict in his or her life? I'm not so sure it doesn't come from apathy. Don't get me wrong; I think it's a great ideal to get to. But conflict is inevitable. I make so many mistakes that one more isn't going to hurt my percentage.

Where in the world did I get the idea I was supposed to feel good all the time? I remember going to the interview to be a non-trustee director, and they selected me. My first six months my thought was, "Oh my God, what are you people doing?" I did the spiritual equivalent of pulling rank on the people who picked me, as if to say, "what a mistake you made." And then this thing came up from Harry Truman, where he said something like, "you know, there may be a million people in the country who would make a better president than me, but I got the job." So I am going to do the best I can. Next, I came to believe, that I am better off focusing on the way forward. And if I get enough time and experience with the way forward, I will end up at a solution that is workable instead of fighting over what the right solution is. I am grateful. I think there is a lot of room here for some compassion, and I never had that before. Anyway, the service structure has allowed me to deal with my biggest levels of fear. One is that I am not enough. And the truth is I am not. You have taught me that my biggest fear is actually true. Then I have a fear of rejection, abandonment, commitment, and this and that. But, when I stand for election I get to deal with my fear of rejection and when I get confronted with a job you elected me to do, I get to deal with my fear of commitment, and when it is time to rotate I get to deal with my fear of abandonment. How does anyone deal with that except by showing up? Showing up knocks the rough edges off.

Ken B.: *West Central Regional Trustee (past, 2008-2012)*

What I would like to talk about is the informed, collective, group conscience and communication. I actually began to think about it when I learned, last summer, about a proposal that went to our Nebraska assembly that our G.S.R.s not be required to go to the Area Assembly, that they could just mail in their votes by proxy. After I scraped myself off the ceiling. I wonder if they came up with it after hearing my delegate's report on recent events. The one that occurred two years ago to change an Advisory Action via polling the Conference. Bill did it, and it has legitimate precedence. But it got a little muddy and a decision was made to reverse an Advisory Action via polling the Conference. Until just last year, another poll of the Conference, it had to do with moving from one meeting place to another and some six figure consideration fell into play there, what we are getting in the Fellowship is an accounting of decisions being made at the very bottom of the triangle that don't filter back up for a legitimate so I began to understand where somebody would get the idea that maybe we can just phone in our vote. The process is deteriorating. So, right after the Conference this year, I got an email from a friend in Arkansas, it pointed me to an article on a major media website informing me of an action that the board had just taken following the close of Conference. The issue is not so much the point, it was that within two years we had three decisions made that impacted A.A. operationally and at the public level. And there was no participation from the Fellowship, from the groups. Two Saturdays ago I was at a workshop. I got to the point where I was explaining the roles of the G.S.R. to the G.S.R. in participating in the formation of an informed group conscience. I got a really eerie feeling; I got afraid I was speaking theory as opposed to practice. Now, honestly, I have seen that look before. I am a retired English teacher. That look that says, "you are the only one in the room who cares." I know that look. But in this case, even more than grammar, I had an investment in that what I was trying to communicate to these G.S.R.s and the other members of the district about that something I felt so deeply about was maybe slipping through our fingers in a practical sense. Thank you for hosting a great Forum.

Don W.: *East Central Regional Trustee (past, 1993-1997)*

I was a Panel 34 delegate from Area 34. Litigation and A.A. is nothing new. When I first came in there was litigation over the circle and triangle. We had to vote whether we were going to continue the legal aspect of things because they were moving the case from Cleveland to California. The lawyer said we had a chance of winning in Cleveland, but no chance in heck of winning in California, because they were so much more liberal. We gave up the circle and triangle when we started putting it on t-shirts and mugs. We did not lose the circle and triangle with the words, "Service, Unity, Recovery" on it. We still have that. In those four years, we got pulled into litigation because Mexico had two service offices; they wanted to know which we honored as representative. They went to Germany and tried another one. Litigation is nothing new in Alcoholics Anonymous. It's just something to keep our squirrel cages running. My first service work was sweeping the floor. I had a day off from work and I was about three weeks sober. I walked into the place where we were holding our meetings and I wanted to get a cup of coffee. The guy handed me a broom and said, "Here sweep the floor, it may help your disposition and your ego." I wanted a cup of coffee, so I swept the floor. That's the way it goes. Someone asked me, how did I get involved in service, and I answered, "They let me sweep the floor, wash the cups and ashtrays." After a while, I began to listen to what went on around me. Once I heard a guy talk about how he had a position for eight years, cause no one else would take it. He was trying to get his sponsee to meet him and go to this meeting on a Sunday. So I just showed up and went. I went to area assembly. I liked the meals. I liked meeting the people. Eventually, I met Jack and I started to get an education. I asked Jack about a decision that was in discussion, when a meeting should be, how long. And I asked Jack what he thought. He said, "Well...I guess whatever they decide, I will be there." What that told me was this: If I wanted to be in service, I had better show up and be there. If I wanted to carry the message, I'd better be there.

We had a class A trustee on Friday night talk about her job, what she learned about Alcoholics Anonymous, and about how she can do things for her clients. People that come before her because they have an alcohol problem.

After being East Central Regional Trustee, I got back going into prisons, that is what I was doing before I was elected. I sit in meetings with gentlemen, some who have life sentences, some don't. Some are the best meetings I have been to all week, because those guys are honest. Sometimes we sit on some of our issues and we don't want people to know about it. But those guys, they already know everything there is. And the fight they have, staying away from the alcohol and the drugs that somehow get into the prison system, it is not a farce — it is there. And they do. I have had lifers come out of jail, even as close as last week one about a month ago. He was so grateful we were there to answer the call. He comes to meetings twice a week because the parole officer lets him. He's got a job and a driver's license with a smile that went all the way to the top of his ears that day he showed us that driver's license. We can make a difference. Just step out and look — it's there. Give yourself a chance to be of service to another person.

Thank you.

Jack W.: *East Central Regional Trustee (past, 1985-1989)*

I have the chance of not taking the drink today because of you, and that is especially a miracle because I was a 24/7 drinker and a morning drinker. I often think, at forums, that we are talking to the choir. But we charge our batteries, and our job is to go back home and pass it on. I have a struggle--I am so used to looking out in the audience at this kind of function, and my wife would be out there. And she passed away a little over a year ago. She was a panel 37, Area 32 delegate — and the first woman elected delegate from our area. Just before she passed away, she was able to celebrate 37 years of continuous, uninterrupted sobriety. We were so happy we could get her to her group so she could get her token. My first meeting of A.A. was January the twelfth, 1973. But my last drink was in April of 1974. I was a slow learner. I didn't go to a treatment -- I had to do it the old fashioned way.

My wife and I met in A.A. I'm here to tell you that I did not meet her on eHarmony.com! She was a challenge and a half! And she served for two years of my trusteeship. Used to drive me nuts! But the beauty of it is A.A. allows us to get through those things and make it to the other side. God bless her and I know she is here in spirit.

was a panel 31 delegate. Charlie P. of the Charlie and Joe tapes was on the committee with me. Back in those days, the Twelve Concepts for World Service was in a separate booklet with the Service Manual, and it was proposed to combine them. We had great in-depth discussions about it. Someone said, "Hey, weren't they together at one point?" and someone else said, "Yeah." So, someone else said, "So, why did they take them apart?" And another said, "For the same reason we are putting them back together again." That's A.A. in its finest hour! If I had my way now, I'd have them separated.

I'll be 86 next month. This is my swan song. It took me an hour to put my shirt on. I keep saying, "I'm on the short list!" My daughter keeps saying, "Dad, you are going to live a long time." And I say, "Maybe so, but I've got my bags packed!" Service is my secret. It adds breadth and depth to your sobriety, a dimension that we get from service.

I can sympathize with the litigation stories. My first board meeting was when we lost the copyright to the Big Book. My God, we were frantic! This is the beginning of the end! We even sent Wayne, the Chairman of A.A.W.S. We sent him to Washington, D.C. to see what could be done. We found out we could have done something, by putting a bill in front of some people, and there was precedent, but we chose not to do it. Why? Because it would be asking for special privileges. But guess what? We seem to be okay. Who else is going to buy a bunch of Big Books except for us? And you don't exactly see a big bunch of fakes. If some get published, they don't last very long. But we lost the copyright through our own fault, we didn't renew. They did a test on alcoholics, and found out that they were above average intelligence. They did a test on the prison population and found out the same thing. Alcoholics may be intelligent, but they are terrible in business.

If you don't mind, I am going to say a prayer that was on the funeral card of the gentleman who was the delegate before me. I love it because it exemplifies, to me, what this program is all about. "I shall pass through this way but once, if, therefore, there be any kindness I can show, or any good I can do my fellow man, let me not defer or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again." God bless all of you.

Bill F.: *East Central Regional Trustee (past, 2009-2013)*

I got elected regional trustee and I didn't know what to do. I went to Detroit when I got elected, and then on to Janesville. And I started to become afraid. What if I could not do it? Thank God there was an Alkathon meeting in Janesville. I went there at 3:00 a.m. and said, "I am afraid, I just got elected and I am afraid I can't do it." Those people in Janesville said, "We believe you can and we are behind you 100%."

Monday nights I go to the county jail for an A.A. meeting. They wear orange jumpsuits and I tell them they are the bright spots in my life. Next thing I tell them is to turn off their cell phones or turn them to vibrate, and they start laughing. They ask me if I brought any of those little magazines, and those are called Grapevines. Boy, they love those. And if I run into anyone at the Speedway or wherever, they come up to me and shake my hand. They say, "Bill. You are the only one who visited me when I was in the county jail." And I am really happy when I see them at a meeting or I get a phone call. They are the bright spot in my life. I want to thank you, because I got it all from you. 38 years ago I was a hopeless alcoholic. I worked, before I was fired from three physicians and they said, "We don't think you will ever live to see the age of 30." Thank God, I found Alcoholics Anonymous.

“WE’LL GET BACK TO YOU”

Unanswered Ask-it-Basket Questions

1.) Why doesn't GSO come right out and say it condemns sexual assault and harassment within the fellowship? Why aren't there suggestions for sponsors to not tell sponsees that they have a part in assault and abuse committed against them?

G.S.O. is an information conduit, here to share A.A. experience to help members and groups carry the A.A. message. Condemning sexual assault and harassment, or making any such broad statements about inappropriate and potentially criminal activity, isn't the role of the General Service Office.

The A.A. pamphlet, “Questions and Answers on Sponsorship,” is an excellent resource. In the section starting on page 13 called “What Does a Sponsor Do and Not Do?” the first suggestion is, “A sponsor does everything possible, within the limits of personal experience and knowledge, to help the newcomer get sober and stay sober through the A.A. program.” On the general topic of legal matters and A.A., the Fall 2010 article “A.A. and the Law” in G.S.O.'s newsletter Box 4-5-9 provides this perspective: “With desperate pasts and difficult futures, many current and prospective members have found themselves on the wrong side of the law; yet A.A. as a whole has no opinion on legal matters, has no authority—legal or otherwise—to control or direct the behavior of A.A. members and groups.

“While we share in a spirit of trust, both at meetings and individually with sponsors and friends, A.A. members are subject to the same laws as every other person. Our communications are not privileged in the legal sense nor do we have any special protective status under local, state, or federal statutes. A.A. membership does not grant immunity from local laws and being at an A.A. meeting does not put anyone beyond the jurisdiction of law enforcement officers. As has often been expressed throughout the Fellowship, as individuals, A.A. members are also “citizens of the world,” and as citizens we are not above the law.”

2.) Why aren't there suggestions for sponsors to not tell sponsees to not use needed medication?

The pamphlet “The A.A. Member—Medications and Other Drugs” which provides experience to be shared by all A.A. members, including those who are sponsoring others, shares this: Some A.A. members must take prescribed medication for serious medical problems. However, it is generally accepted that the misuse of prescription medication and other drugs can threaten the achievement and maintenance of sobriety. It may be possible to minimize the threat of relapse if the following suggestions are heeded:

- *No A.A. member should “play doctor”; all medical advice and treatment should come from a qualified physician.*

Note: The A.A. literature items referenced, along with many other resources, are available at aa.org.

CLOSING REMARKS

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

Thank you to everyone. My job here is to listen — and I am listening. Thank you for coming to the mic and sharing what you believe and doing it with a lot of grace and dignity. That is so meaningful to me, because I may not always like what you are saying, but if you are saying it in a way that is from your heart and with gentleness, I can hear you. And I do hear you, I take a lot of notes, that's what I am typing away at.

By now you know who I am, I am Michele Grinberg, just another Class A amateur and I am here because I love A.A. and I love what A.A. does for those who find it. I want you to know that, to the best of my ability, one day at a time, I practice the Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions, and the Twelve Concepts of A.A. Sometimes I call them the Twelve Steps of Al-Anon, but it's how I got here. I had a great time this weekend, and I hope it shows. It's one of the great privileges of being a Board chair that I get to come to the Regional Forums. It is a good opportunity to interact.

What I do is this: I sit and listen, and I try to synthesize what I've heard, and if you don't know by now, I am about to tell you what the theme of this weekend is: *We don't know what we don't know*. Let's put that into the positive. How do we better communicate what we do know in order to carry A.A.'s message to those who don't know anything about us, or whose preconceived and wrong notions are keeping folks from recovery and spiritual growth? That is the question you have given me to think about as we move into 2018.

So, in relation to that theme, I am going to summarize a few things I've heard. From the delegate presentations: "Do we convey that all who suffer from alcoholism, regardless of whatever else separates us, are welcome into the Fellowship with any or no religion or with other maladies? How do we teach about service? Do we teach the Concepts in an inviting way? Do we make ourselves welcoming so that those who know nothing will want to learn more about our program and about our service?"

From the workshop on the whole, on "Principles Before Personalities," I hear that sponsorship is the key to exposing folks to the growth and spiritual experiences available through our service work. Do we teach about sponsorship? Should we do sponsorship workshops? These are great questions for me and, hopefully, for you.

From questions on the floor: If you identify the group that doesn't follow basic A.A. principles, what do you do about it? Do you reach out, do you go visit, or do you judge? Do you use or not use principles as a weapon?

And from the workshops: "People come in with all kinds of misconceptions, but there are no dumb questions. Encourage service by showing that we have fun. Have an orientation program for G.S.R.s. Encourage sponsorship."

I also heard lots and lots of gratitude this weekend. And I heard some of your concerns. I am asking you this, bring someone with you to the next Forum, put him or her in your car. I also

heard some great ideas today about starting funds in your group to help support someone who perhaps can't afford the hotel room. There were a lot of good ideas about how to bring new people to the Forum. For those of you who this is your first Forum, thank you for coming! I hope you caught that service bug.

So I started my participation in this Forum on Friday night by referencing the theme for the 2018 General Service Conference: "A.A. — A Solution for All Generations." I think this topic has two meanings. One is tolerance for all alcoholics who seek the A.A. solution. Bill wrote, in "As Bill Sees It," "Honesty with ourselves and with others gets us sober. But it is tolerance that keeps us that way." The other meaning is that A.A. is timeless and can be a solution for all the generations yet to come. That means, of course, that it is up to all of us who care about A.A. to keep A.A. strong for future generations. Listening to you, I know for sure that A.A. is full of passionate and smart people who will work hard, do service, and keep the hand of A.A. out there. Thank you.

