



FINAL REPORT

PACIFIC REGIONAL FORUM

SEPTEMBER 30-OCTOBER 2, 2016

WAIKOLOA, HAWAII

Dear A.A. Friends,

Please mark your calendar for the next Pacific Regional Forum, which will take place in San Jose, California, September 7-9, 2018 at the DoubleTree by Hilton San Jose Hotel.

HOW TO CONTACT US:

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

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

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INTRODUCTION

The 2016 Pacific Regional Forum was held in Waikoloa, Hawaii. Registration for the Forum was 449. This included 309 members attending their very first Forum—many were welcomed at the Forum Orientation on Friday evening. In addition, the Pacific Regional Forum marked the 201st Regional Forum since its inception in 1975.

UNANSWERED ASK-IT BASKET QUESTIONS

- Q. The 2016 66th General Service Conference Final Report was not received until mid-September at our District. Why so late? My September District meeting had passed by then. The October District meeting has elections. This late timing makes it difficult to digest at the District and group level. Can we expect an earlier distribution in the future?
- R. Printed copies of the Final Conference Report in English, French and Spanish usually are delivered to Area Delegates in early September and the Delegates then distribute a copy to each group howsoever they choose. Because of the rather extensive review and translation process for the Final Report and the Service Manual, this is the best that can be done with the available resources. However, many-to-most of the portions of the report were included in the Conference Manual folder, which was available to your delegate last April via the Conference Dashboard. We suggest that you speak to your Area Delegate about the portions of the Final Conference Report that you believe are vital for you to have prior to a September district meeting, and how you might obtain them.
- Q. Will the translation committee translate the Big Book into Simple English despite the recent Conference's decision?
- R. We would first like to clarify that we do not have a "translation committee." The translation of A.A. Conference-approved literature is under the purview of A.A. World Services and implemented through the G.S.O.'s Publishing/Translations Department. You can read more about this on G.S.O.'s A.A. Website at: http://www.aa.org/pages/en_US/intellectual-property-policies

As you may know, the annual General Service Conference ("Conference") is the closest we have to a group conscience for Alcoholics Anonymous in the U.S. and Canada. Changes to (or development of) all Conference-approved literature follows a path where an expressed need is first received from within the Fellowship, generally through one or more general service areas in the United States and/or Canada. Then there is a process involving trustees' and Conference Committees, G.S.O.s Publishing Department, etc.

As was reported, the 2016 Conference thoughtfully discussed the request to "develop a plain language version of the Big Book, Alcoholics Anonymous, and "developing a plain-language Big Book was not appropriate at this time." Neither A.A.W.S. nor G.S.O. Publishing would take actions contrary to the Conference's decision.

- Q. The cost of pre-paid postage returned mail is very high. Does the General Service Board have any plans to reduce or eliminate the cost?
- R. Currently there are no discussions to reduce or eliminate the cost of pre-paid postage returned mail by the General Service Board. However, it may be looked into.

WORKSHOP REPORTS

7:00 – 8:15 p.m.

Supporting La Viña: From your Story to Service (Moderator: Irene D./Reporter: Eddie D.) Workshop members suggested and agreed upon 3 themes to discuss regarding La Viña. Themes selected:

1. How to improve the renewal of La Viña subscriptions.
2. How to solve problems on the distribution of the LV magazine.
3. La Viña as a 12th Step tool.

1. How can we improve the renewal rate of La Viña subscriptions?

Members suggested that RLVs in each group remind subscribers to renew. It was suggested that large A.A. events place LV subscriptions as part of their welcome folder. If that were so, every time the event happens, renewal would occur automatically. Another member suggested that more information was needed at the district level about the importance of renewal to keep the self-supporting effort afloat.

2. How can we solve problems regarding the distribution of the LV magazine?

Members and RLVs from North California, area 06, expressed their frustration because they do not receive the magazine. Some members suggested a change in the distribution company. LV editor also recommended that LV customers call the customer service 800 phone number (available in Spanish) in order to receive the complaints and solve them.

Another member said that not receiving the magazine creates much distrust among the community. Members asked if GV magazine had the same distribution problems. Editor responded, “yes.”

A.A. Grapevine Executive Publisher, Ami B., explained that 3 companies are involved in distributing the magazine: Customer service in LA, printing in Kentucky, and U.S. Postal service. Ami stressed that it was important to bring detailed information regarding problems in delivery to customer service. This way, the problem can be tracked and solved.

3. La Viña as a 12th Step tool.

Members expressed how the magazine helps and saves lives of many people. One member shared a story about how a newcomer learned about A.A. in jail through La Viña. Another member shared how amazed he was to find such a diverse group of people with alcohol problems in the magazine. “The magazine speaks for itself,” said a member from central California. Members said that the magazine was distributed to many places, including hair salons, laundromats, and bus stops. Members concluded that there was no doubt that the magazine carries the message of A.A. to many remote places.

“Financing A.A.’s Vital Services” (Moderator: Renae H. / Reporter: Teddy B-W.) Two issues were focused on during this workshop:

1. *How can we increase the percentage of groups contributing?* In response, members suggested that we talk more about money when visiting groups; review splits; communicate a “case statement” — connect the individuals with G.S.O. services; clear out treasuries; change meeting scripts to include “vital services”; add 7th Tradition responsibilities to group budget; communicate financial need directly to Fellowship with a greater frequency; invest in better software to process contributions; have a contributing group “adopt” a non-contributing group; make more use of member pro bono services and support G.S.R.s with info and morale.

2. *What are our vital services?* In response, workshop attendees offered suggestions such as: Structure is a vital service — it’s a good return on the dollar; we can’t do 12th Step work without the supporting structure; instances we share about the 12th Step; funding your G.S.R. to attend service meetings.

“Making the A.A. Message More Accessible” (Moderator: Jane G. / Reporter: Thomas B.) The workshop group shared their experience and thoughts regarding how to make A.A.’s message more accessible. To this end, members discussed two questions. The first question invited attendees to discuss “what are the barriers against making A.A.’s message more accessible—and how do we remove these barriers?”

In response, members noted that some barriers to communication of the A.A. message were: language, technology (or lack of), handicaps or disabilities, need of childcare, needing ASL but not having funds to provide it, and homebound members. In answer to the question, “How do we remove these barriers?” A.A.s responded with many solutions, among them were: Reaching alcoholics where they are (i.e., scheduling meetings in a home), work of C.P.C. committees and actual work in contact with professionals, correctional services. Also, work more consistently in public information—letting general public know what A.A. is and what to expect; C.P.C./treatment—accessibilities; new media technologies; interconnection of local committee work with committees of all other areas, sharing and integration of collective experience; avoiding rigid interpretation of committee duties to make sure actual needs are met. In addition, working with wet drunks, 12th Step calls; reaching out to seniors and young people and reaching out to under represented ethnic/cultural groups without diluting the need to carry message to general public.

The second question posed to the group members, “How can we make A.A. more accepting and inclusive?” was answered with many ideas, including: Making the group more inclusive and accepting; using the Traditions checklist, taking a group inventory, and avoiding any rigidity and exclusion that may be driving “non-conforming” newcomers away.

It was also noted in this workshop that the following areas have “Accessibility Committees”: 92, 93, 42, 09, 03, 72, 42, 05, 06, and 08.

“Safety and A.A.” (Moderator: Lisa / Reporter: Roxanne) In this workshop, members’ experiences were varied in regard to safety in A.A. and in the discussion on the topic of physical/emotional violence. Many admitted no plan was in place for protecting the members who are targeted. Some thought that individuals and groups were responsible for their safety and the safety of others. Incidents of violence in meetings prompted some to take actions to insure safety for others. In looking at the “A.A. Group” pamphlet, members noticed that under inventory topics “safety” is not mentioned. Though G.S.O. has been asked to provide guidelines, groups have created their own safety guidelines when G.S.O. declined. It was mentioned that safety guidelines should be systemic in all our literature, not just in a single pamphlet.

Furthermore, it was stated that the use of the phrase “13th step” should be discontinued and replaced with “predatory behavior.” Safety topics have been agenda items but have not made it past the committees. It is up to the group to bring the topic to light. Adding a safety statement to a preamble and other “grass roots actions” are creating awareness of the problems within A.A. It was also stated that G.S.O. is not the cure-all for what ails A.A. The groups are, and have been, responsible. Unresponsiveness is not being responsible. The more we talk about it, the more we all take responsibility. Clearly, there are problems with violence and predatory behavior when groups need assistance. Protecting A.A. must be all our responsibility and violent behavior should prompt a call to the police.

Finally, members stated that this conversation must be ongoing. No matter how much we stand by our primary purpose, we still owe it to our members to provide a safe place to get sober. In response to dangerous situations, groups should have a plan in place that all can adhere to. Don’t put the groups at risk by allowing risky behavior.

In closing, the following insight was shared as a guide for behavior: It is best to strive for humility and being right-sized. We are responsible citizens and should act accordingly. We are not above the law and we are not below the law.

D.C.Ms, G.S.R.s and Effective Communication” (Moderator: Mike M. / Reporter: Carol B.) The workshop attendees discussed three topics in regard to this workshop:

- Importance of conveying that we must dig deep for the 7th Tradition:
 - Share what G.S.O. does for your group and A.A. as a whole;
 - Use a cup from a coffee shop for a 7th Tradition basket;
 - Mention various entities as you pass the basket;
 - Lead by example.
- G.S.R. participation with District and Group:
 - Implement G.S.R. training roundtables;
 - Use group sponsored workshops;
 - Give new G.S.R.’s positions on Committees;
 - Focus on full agenda;
 - Have D.C.M. go to inactive groups;
 - Attend or hold a District inventory;
 - Go to District sponsored events.
- What is important to take back to the home group?

- Remember, when sharing with the group, timing is essential, so keep it short and precise. When meeting chair asks for A.A. announcements, an example would be:
 - Did you know? We just voted for this (insert item)
 - Did you know? We just spent a lot of money (on x, y, z)
- Ask to chair a meeting. A good topic is General Service. Tell A.A.s about Forum, PRAASA, Conference items, etc.
- What touched my heart: key words “Enthusiasm” and “Mentoring.”

Sponsorship (Moderator: Darren F. / Reporter: Steve C.) The workshop opened with a reading of “What is sponsorship?” in the A.A. pamphlet “Questions and Answers on Sponsorship.” Next, two questions were selected for discussion:

1. How do we learn to be better sponsors?
2. How far do we go with sponsees who aren't following direction or who are balking on working the A.A. program?

Here are some of the ways we that we have learned to be better sponsors:

- Become a better sponsee and keep ego out of the process;
- Be vulnerable;
- Establish and maintain a safe environment;
- Avoid giving medical advice;
- Read the Big Book, Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, “A Newcomer Asks” (A.A. pamphlet) and the Sponsorship pamphlet to ensure that we understand and talk about what others are talking about;
- Learn to become more compassionate;
- Do not evaluate or judge the sponsee;
- Be flexible and share experience, strength, and hope; adjust the process to meet different needs of different people;
- Ask yourself “is there something to learn here?” if you keep receiving the same feedback over and over again.

Here are some ways we respond when we encounter newcomers or those we sponsor who aren't following directions or who are balking on working A.A.'s program:

- Avoid evaluating and judging the sponsee;
- Remember that our Higher Power is in charge — we cannot save or change anyone;
- Mention that the energy and effort for recovery has to come from the sponsee;
- Recognize obstacles that the sponsee faces and explain how you got beyond those obstacles when you faced them;
- Be prepared to manage your time and focus on those who want what we have;
- Watch for a spiritual awakening. When that happens, encourage the sponsee to pass on their experience as a sponsee.

8:30 – 9:45 p.m.

Supporting Grapevine: From Your Story to Service (Moderator: Jane G. / Reporter: Maryland N.) The workshop opened with a suggestion to share the editorial dateline so the district GVR can be more effective. In addition, suggestions were solicited for how to make the GV app a bigger reality throughout the Fellowship — can more features be added to the app?

What's your story? To demonstrate the accessibility of the Grapevine, members shared many ideas regarding story ideas they could write for the Grapevine, such as:

- How I stayed sober and survived eight of life's most difficult things in 5 years;
- Turning the lights back on;
- Hiding a drink in a banana suit;
- General Service Conference experience;
- Who people wanted me to be;
- Wisdom, power, love — The Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions, and Twelve Concepts;
- Moment of clarity: a white-collar drunk who didn't know it;
- Experience in Correspondence Service;
- Experience attending conventions;
- Life as a chair, or "Isolation to Community";
- Amends as a mother;
- Freedom of acceptance and choice; sobriety through a child's suicide;
- Surviving a suicide attempt and getting struck sober;
- Universal respect is the key to Concept Nine.

If all present wrote the story they already had an idea about, there would be enough for an entire issue — and then some.

Story guidelines are available on aagrapevine.org. You can also call the Grapevine, and the office will send you a copy via U.S. mail.

The editorial calendar follows a schedule, and the full calendar is available within the magazine, as well as online. The special section, it was noted, was eight stories.

Workshop members also discussed how to become a better Grapevine representative. Some ideas were to follow leads from grapevine.org, such as sharing the Grapevine info and products with the group (such as books, audio, subscription gifts, and grow your Grapevine). Also discussed was Grapevine costs and how to get the magazine to places like Cuba.

A.A. and Mental Health (Moderator: Dave B. / Reporter: Mike L.) Workshop attendees discussed the topic “A.A. and Mental Health” and chose two questions to focus on:

1. How do we educate A.A. members about mental health issues and medications?
2. How do I sponsor someone with mental health issues?
 - In response to educating members about mental health issues and medications, workshop attendees immediately suggested that anyone with questions should be handed or told to read the A.A. pamphlet “The A.A. Member — Medications and Other Drugs.” In addition, members should inform those with questions about this topic that outside help is OK in A.A. Members can also share personal experience with getting help for alcoholism in A.A. and help for mental health issues from other professionals. Share your own experience of finding someone to talk to, share with others to get rid of the shame. Hopefully, the new pamphlet helps people recognize that A.A.s have mental health issues and this will encourage inclusiveness. If someone needs outside help, encourage him or her to find it. There are outside sources, professionals, who help people with alcoholism and people with mental health issues. Remind people that Bill W. tried many medications for depression and wrote about it. Read “Pass It On.” One member stated that, as an alcoholic, I have a mental illness. So, if I can see myself as sick, then I can have more compassion for those who suffer another (or an additional) illness.
 - In response to the second question, “How do we sponsor someone with mental health issues?” workshop members came up with several solutions; such as I am responsible to show up, help, offer love and tolerance, be available. We can give workshops on sponsorship; bring in C.P.C. or P.I. for information. When someone shows up in distress, offer to talk, to listen, and offer to help. Be more patient. One attendee shared: “I learn a lot if I listen, if I don’t understand, I say, ‘I don’t understand, help me to understand.’” Another workshop member shared personal experience in working with an alcoholic with schizophrenia. She shared that the woman had a family who didn’t understand schizophrenia and didn’t understand alcoholism. As a result, the newcomer felt isolated. The workshop member shared what she, herself, did: “I listen to her, and ask basic questions to get her to think. Most of the time she doesn’t drink and she’s still talking to me — that’s progress.”

Concept Nine: Leadership in A.A.” (Moderator: Joe C. / Reporter: Jim B.) After opening remarks by moderator, workshop attendees shared their responses to three questions about Concept Nine and leadership in A.A.:

1. *“Do you groom leadership?”* It’s important to mentor, recognize, and take an interest in the new person, and help them find a position suited to their talents. But there are no second-class citizens in A.A. We are all leaders. With grooming comes expectations. “Choosing” someone to “groom” is really up to a Higher Power.
2. *“Should we pick a position we are good at, or something we can grow into?”* In response, members shared: “God does not call the qualified. He qualifies the called.” Just put your hand up for every position and let that service body decide where they want us.
3. *“Eligible vs. Qualified?”* Qualifications are listed in the Service Manual. Eligible can mean “are you really available to fulfill that commitment?” Furthermore, how can someone who is standing for a position convey his or her qualifications to an electorate that may be composed of many new people who have not previously known the person standing?

“How to Strengthen the Home Group” (Moderator: Scott R. / Reporter: Jim F.) Workshop members shared their experience in how to strengthen a home group. The discussion began with some members detailing problems that were common in many groups, such as cell phones, knitting, unwillingness to do service, and newcomers being left alone at the back of the meeting room. Others included landlord relations and dealing with rapid growth. Seventh Tradition was often cited as needing improvement. “We knew something was wrong but could not identify the cause.” One member summed it up with: “If your home group is not the best, do something about it.” The group inventory was regarded as the key to understanding the problems within a group. Emphasis was placed upon thorough and rigorous inventory, with many people reporting that their group took several meetings to complete such an inventory.

To prepare for the group inventory, one group sent a notebook around, soliciting suggestions. The inventory often included the Traditions Checklist and questions from the “A.A. Group” pamphlet. The results were transformational. Once home groups identified their weaknesses, they took actions for improvement, including new service positions, pot lucks, electing an event coordinator, refocusing on the newcomer, new group guidelines, providing written guidelines for each service position, providing chips for newcomers, special guidance for attending the first business meeting, recommitment to 7th Tradition, and many more. Cited repeatedly was a renewed personal commitment to “leading by example.” Members agreed that the key to all of this was a rigorous group inventory.

Central Office/Intergroups: Cooperation Amongst Service Entities (Moderator: Wayne J. / Reporter: Mary N.) Discussed among workshop attendees were two main topics. First, members discussed district and intergroup communication plans, such as a liaison to intergroup. Members also mentioned the need for G.S.O. to communicate more with intergroups. It was noted, however, that a policy was in place for this. In addition, making sure that there is no duplication in efforts at communication was cited as important. Furthermore, cooperation amongst service entities fared better if the structures and guidelines already in place were adhered to. For instance, a D.C.M. is a voting member. The D.C.M. must show up to vote and to remain informed about area business. Workshop members also asked themselves and each other, “Are you going to business meetings?” Going to business meetings is a key to remaining informed.

Members of the workshop also canvassed how other areas run their central office and solve various problems. When issues with money arise (such as fundraisers), attendees shared that all three legacies must be present to solve such issues. In addition, some gave specific examples, such as not paying for an expensive office when a locker would work just as well. Others noted, however, that a physical office does have benefits – especially to a newcomer. Other problems noted were that splintered intergroups do not serve the unity of an entire area. To solve these issues, some offered the idea of an intergroup sponsor (perhaps a former delegate) to keep all on target of unity and to attract more involvement from A.A.s. Finally, one member shared about an intergroup being run completely by volunteers, holding a monthly potluck meeting with a speaker. The endeavor was so successful that all literature is now sold at cost.



PRESENTATIONS



The Meaning of “I am Responsible”—Cheryl N., Panel 65 Delegate, Area 17

Aloha Kakou. This translates to “May there be friendship or love between us.” My name is Cheryl and I am an alcoholic. I am truly honored to be serving as the Panel 65 Delegate for Area 17 Hawaii. I serve on the Corrections Committee and the Committee on International Conventions/Regional Forums at the General Service Conference. My topic is “The Meaning of ‘I am Responsible.’” I started with a little research on the origin of the phrase. I googled it and I’m happy to say that the A.A. Website, www.aa.org, was the first site listed in the search results. The history of the Responsibility Statement is one of many questions addressed in the “Frequently Asked Questions about A.A. History” feature found under the Archives and History tab. The Responsibility Statement—“I am Responsible. When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A. always to be there. And for that: I am responsible.”—was first introduced to the Fellowship of A.A. in July 1965, where a crowd of 10,000 gathered at the 30th Anniversary Convention in Toronto. It was written by a former A.A. trustee, Al S.

In the souvenir book for the 1965 Convention, Dr. Jack Norris writes, “We must remember that A.A. will continue strong only so long as each of us freely and happily gives it away to another person, only as each of us takes our fair share of responsibility for sponsorship of those who still suffer, for the growth and integrity of our Group, for our Intergroup activities, and for A.A. as a whole. It is in taking responsibility that real freedom and the enduring satisfactions of life are found. A.A. has given us the power to choose—to drink or not to drink—and in doing so has given us the freedom to be responsible for ourselves. As we become responsible for ourselves, we are free to be responsible for our share in A.A., and unless we happily accept this responsibility we lose A.A. Strange, isn’t it?”

I am reminded of an area assembly where a longtimer reminded us that the statement is “*I* am Responsible,” not “**You** are Responsible.” He was concerned that most of the discussion that weekend was about what “you” and “they” were going to do for “me” and “us.” Let’s keep in mind that “I” am “you” and “we” are “they.” So, with the “we” version—“We are Responsible. When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, we want the hand of A.A. always to be there. And for that: We are responsible.”—we need to remember that we are **all** responsible for:

- Reaching out to the newcomer and welcoming them, offering phone numbers, and inviting them to the “meeting after the meeting.”
- Participating in our home groups and volunteering for service positions that need filling.
- Sponsoring other A.A. members and sharing the importance of our Twelfth Step work and unity.
- “Walking the talk” and “living” our primary purpose.
- Supporting our Intergroups or Central Offices—often the first contact a potential member, a suffering alcoholic, has with A.A.

- Generously contributing to the Seventh Tradition and ensuring our home group contributes to all portions of the pie chart—Intergroups, districts, areas, and G.S.O. Without our support:
 - ❖ Phones would go unanswered at Intergroup/Central Offices.
 - ❖ The vital connection between A.A. members, home groups, districts, areas, and the General Service Office would be lost.
 - ❖ A.A. as a whole would suffer. Without the General Service Office, we wouldn't have our literature or the translations of the Big Book into sixty-eight languages (with more on the way), as well as other literature in about 90 languages. The work of G.S.O. reaches out our collective hands to suffering alcoholics all over the world.
- Those of us in general service are responsible for sharing our experiences with enthusiasm to help spark interest in those who have not yet discovered the magical feeling of unity that comes from working with others for a common purpose.

During the midsixties there was an emphasis put on the responsibility of the Fellowship to work together as a whole. This followed articles in *Harper's* and *Atlantic* magazines that were critical of A.A. Bill W. urged unity and said in *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, "The unity of Alcoholics Anonymous is the most cherished quality our Society has." The Declaration of Unity was written for A.A.'s 35th Anniversary International Convention in 1970. It reads, "This we owe to A.A.'s future: to place our common welfare first; to keep our Fellowship united. For on A.A. unity depend our lives and the lives of those to come."

Alcoholics Anonymous has literally saved my life. And, even better, you have shown me how to live. I will never forget my first area assembly when we joined hands to pray before lunch. I looked around and though we looked different—tall, short; men, women; yellow, blue, and green in color—I could feel the magic of the unity and love in that circle and I got "chicken skin." I have a life today that is filled with love, light, and laughter, and I will be forever grateful. In closing, I want to say A.A. has saved my life—how could I not give back? How about you?

Carrying the A.A. Message with the Grapevine—Raymundo L., Delegate Panel 65, Area 06 Northern Coastal California

Hello everybody. My name is Raymundo L. and I am an alcoholic. I have the honor and privilege to serve as California Northern Coastal Area Panel 65 Delegate and I serve on the Grapevine Conference Committee. My topic today is to talk about "Carrying the A.A. Message with the Grapevine." I would like to mention that in June 1944, the Grapevine was established as a newsletter through the individual efforts of six New York City A.A.s who were concerned about what seemed to be a "lack of understanding" among groups in the metropolitan area. Mailed by the six editors to all known groups in the United States and Canada, and sent free to A.A.s in the World War II armed forces, the Grapevine soon caught on nationally. In 1945, by vote of the groups, it became the principal journal of the Fellowship as a whole, and since the January 1949 issue it has been known as the international journal of Alcoholic Anonymous.

Bill W.'s most-quoted description of the Grapevine appears in *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*: "The Grapevine is the mirror of A.A. thought and action, worldwide. It is a sort of magic carpet on which all of us can travel from one distant A.A. outpost to another, and it has become

a wonderful exchange medium of our current thought and experience.” Bill wrote so many articles on the language of the heart. All these articles provide a good entryway for alcoholics to find a solution as we grow together in the world of Alcoholics Anonymous. I remember back in the early 1990s I was reading the Grapevine, and I noticed that there was a Spanish article. As the time went by there was a need to carry the message and to reach out to not only Spanish-speaking members, but to other non-English-speaking members as well. So now we also have La Vigne. La Vigne in French serves people like us in a different language.

What I would like to say here today is that for me the Grapevine has been a blessing. When it first got my attention to serve in the Grapevine I was serving my group as a coffeemaker. I was also serving my district as a D.C.M. It got my attention how one of the Grapevine reps used to give her report with enthusiasm, and for me that was an inspiration. I started thinking that someday I could probably do the same, and to make a long story short I was elected rep the following panel. Then I served other positions on my district, including D.C.M.C. When I made myself available for the area I was picked out of the hat to serve on the literature, Grapevine, and La Viña committees, and my journey started right there.

I have become very passionate about the Grapevine because it has been a blessing in my life. It has taught me a lot of different ways that we can reach our newcomers. For instance, I remember in the past we tried to introduce this magazine to our inmates who needed to read our meeting in print, and the way for us to do that was to take out the stapler. We found a way that we can introduce the Grapevine and La Viña into the institutions, which means somebody somewhere in those facilities is able to have a meeting in print. As you probably know, last year for corrections we received so many requests from inmates asking for correspondence. Some of these people were able to receive a Grapevine issue from some of us who were giving out gift certificates. Our area has received about thirty so far, and I’m very grateful that most of our members have responded very well to their requests. CNIA 07 and CNCA 06 have been working together on creating seven-minute Grapevine Workshops at the NCCAA Conference of Northern California every four months, with great success. We also had a Writing Your Story Workshop at La Viña Anniversaries. We just celebrated the 20th Anniversary of La Viña in Phoenix Arizona Area 03, also with great success, and Area 93 will be the host for the 21st Anniversary.

One other thing that I want to share is that a story from my daughter was published in the Grapevine, and it was attributed to an anonymous writer. H&I committees brings about 3,000 monthly subscriptions for the Grapevine and more than 1,000 subscriptions for La Viña into the facilities of Northern California Area 07 and Area 06. Up until now the Grapevine has published many books. The most recent one in Spanish was *Un Día a la Vez (One Day at a Time)*, which was published in May. We have sold about 900 up until July. Our senior editor is excited about how the new Grapevine book, *Our Twelve Traditions: A.A. Members Share their Own Stories of Experience*, came out. He says that he focused on choosing stories that approach the Traditions from the level of personal experience.

Grow your Grapevine activities and record those on an Arbor Card. You are a team if you say you are a team. For more information, go to AAGrapevine.org. We have reached out to so many people, we have so many stories, and we believe in the future of Alcoholics Anonymous. In seventy-two years we have published about 864 monthly issues for the Grapevine, and since 1996 about 120 bimonthly issues of La Viña. I have met so many wonderful people

during the events. I met a member in Area 72 who is one of the guys that really inspired me with the Grapevine. When we hosted PRASAA in Area 06 in 2009, he brought a whole bunch of registration forms for subscriptions, and we set them in each one of the chairs for people to subscribe. He had all these great ideas on serving in the Grapevine and carrying the message in any way possible. Grapevine and La Viña are lifesavers, because when you read them you won't even imagine the things that you'll find and you wonder how they get all these ideas into each issue. The staff does a great job. The Grapevine has been manifested in my life. When I met my sponsor, who served in Panel 45 in the Grapevine Conference Committee, it was during the time that La Viña was approved, and now I am serving in Panel 65, twenty years later. I had a dream, and I am following that dream.

I would like to close my presentation with some humor that we found in the Grapevine Digital Archives. Someone submitted this true anecdote that I am sure a few of us should have no trouble identifying with: She and her A.A. boyfriend both have senior citizen mothers who still can't understand why their grown children need to keep going to "those" meetings. The last time the subject came up, her friend's mother kept at him, saying she couldn't believe he was really an alcoholic; she'd never even seen him drunk. Finally the A.A. son replied, "Mom, you know I was a telephone repairman for thirty-four years, and you never saw me up on a pole either!"

Sound familiar?

Thank you so much for allowing me to be of service and for this great opportunity to "Carry the A.A. Message with the Grapevine."

Bringing the Concepts to Life—Reilly K., Panel 66 Delegate, Area 58 Oregon

The Concepts were adopted four years before I got sober. At that time they were so new and so far beyond the understanding of most of us that we didn't pay much attention. When the short form was introduced at PRAASA in 1971, we started learning the story of how they were formed. Most discussions wondered why the short form wasn't much shorter than the long form. When we finally learned about the principles of the Concepts, they began to come alive for us.

When Dr. Bob fell ill in 1948, we were suddenly face-to-face with the mortality of A.A.'s co-founders. The Traditions were not yet adopted. The General Service Conference did not exist. We had trustees to help Bill and Bob run the Alcoholic Foundation, but they were isolated from the A.A. groups and they had their hands full.

A.A. members relied on the force and fire of Bill's communication. He was the link between trustees and groups, and nobody in the groups seemed to even care what was being done at headquarters. But Bob's illness raised important questions. If we lost Bill, who would tell us what was going on? How would we communicate with other groups, calm the inevitable storms of controversy, and—most importantly—how could we make sure the A.A. message was carried intact everywhere?

A.A.s then, as now, reacted with faith, hope, and action. The Traditions were adopted and a General Service Conference convened. A.A. groups agreed to take full responsibility for the

whole organization through their delegates. *The A.A. Service Manual* was developed to describe how the general service structure operates.

But Bill found that he still needed to explain the structure and the practices, and the principles of A.A.'s world service were not easily understood. So he set out to put the experience of the past on paper in a way that it could be useful in the future. He knew that future generations would want to change and improve our structure, but he was afraid that they might over-enthusiastically lose the lessons of the past. It took Bill about three years to write down A.A.'s experience in what he called the Concepts. They are the guide to why we do what we do. He numbered them in—what else?—a list of twelve.

Bill reminded us that when we take **responsibility** for our actions and our service, we can rely on the people we **delegated** to do the work. We empower them to carry out our will. We believe that our trusted servants know their groups well enough to make **decisions** on their behalf. The trusted servants then transmit that new information back to the groups in order to educate and inform the group conscience.

There are no second-class A.A.s. We rely on the information and experience of everyone. Staff, directors, and trustees who work on our behalf throughout the year have equal **participation** in the Conference. The number of delegates is always at least two-thirds of the Conference vote, so we don't have to worry that the trustees will hijack the Conference and run off with it.

Rooted deeply in the Steps and Traditions is a profound respect for every member. We listen with empathy to the newcomer and with interest to the experienced. So that every voice could always be heard, we enabled **minority appeal** to prevent the loudest voices from dominating discussions and to allow the quiet voices to be recognized.

We asked our trustees to do a lot of work for us, and we gave them the **administrative responsibility** to use their various and considerable skills as they would in the business world. The General Service Board does have real legal power as a corporation chartered in the state of New York. We are confident that trustees and the Conference work together in **cooperation** and mutual trust, and always rely on the Twelve Traditions for unity and guidance. Of course, the real **balance of power** lies with the A.A. groups, who can simply shut off the money.

For many years we depended on the **leadership** of Bill and Dr. Bob to steer the Fellowship in the right direction, avoid problems, do the planning, the writing, the explaining. It took the greatest act of faith for Bill to step down from that post, even though he did continue to be visible and was still a big part of our lives.

In January 1971, the telegram bringing news of Bill's death arrived. That moment was frozen in time. We all clung together in our grief. And then, group by group, we began to feel the responsibility for this great Fellowship. We knew we were not leaderless. The Conference was working fine. All levels of service had **responsibility for their actions and the authority** to go along with it, in order to carry out any part of A.A.'s service and pass on the message of hope and recovery.

The **structure** was in place. The Trustees Committees were in place. We followed a business model for working efficiently, with a foundation based in our Twelve Traditions.

The Concepts spell out the spirit of the contract that the groups eventually made with the trustees in 1955. We are assured that the spiritual principles and Traditions on which A.A. was founded will continue to be protected. We have **freedom** from the majority and from the minority, and from government-like actions. We have freedom to seek our spiritual ideals, to voice our concerns, and to be heard. No one at any level of A.A. has the need to punish anyone. If it all goes wrong, the ultimate penalty is death for the individual and dissolution for the group.

When Bill finished writing his essays on the Concepts, he knew he had given the Fellowship enough information to carry on without him. We could recognize the spiritual tools of responsibility, authority, trust, equality, and balance. We would be guided with wisdom, prudence, respect, and compassion. The structure of Alcoholics Anonymous was now safe and free to move confidently into the future, ensuring freedom and recovery for those potential desperate alcoholics who have not yet been born.

Concept IX: Leadership—The Beacon to Our Future—Vikki R., Delegate Panel 66, Area 07 Northern Interior California

My name is Vikki and I am an alcoholic. I currently serve California Northern Interior Area as their Panel 66 Delegate. I would like to thank Ivy for allowing me to speak on this topic: Concept IX: Leadership—The Beacon to Our Future.

“Good service leaders, together with sound and appropriate methods of choosing them, are at all levels indispensable for our future functioning and safety. The primary world service leadership once exercised by the founders of A.A. must necessarily be assumed by the Trustees of the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous.”

When I first went through the Twelve Concepts with my service sponsor, we started off with the Conference Charter. I thought for sure I would die of boredom. The thought of studying *all* of the Twelve Concepts was *not* appealing at all. We muddled along the first eight Concepts and I sort of understood their meaning. However, when we got to Concept IX, it changed my mind about all the rest of the Concepts. For one thing, it was easy to understand.

Bill is talking about choosing good leadership and what kind of qualities a good leader has. Growing up in a small town, I did not admire the so-called leaders I came in contact with. The leaders I met were arrogant, self-centered, unfair, and inconsiderate. I wondered if there were any nice leaders in the world.

Concept IX paints a beautiful picture of what a real leader looks like. In his essay “Leadership in A.A. —Ever a Vital Need,” he says (and I quote), “Our Leaders do not drive by mandate, they lead by example.” Wow! What a concept!

He goes on to say that a good idea can come from anyone and even the very prideful or angry people can be dead right.

Bill teaches the importance of choosing good leaders, G.S.R.s, D.C.M.S, area officers, and delegates. When I was elected G.S.R. I had a little over a year sober. I was the only one in my home group willing to volunteer. I knew nothing about general service. Shortly after my election I went to my first PRAASA in Tucson, Arizona. I was encouraged to go to the mic, so I went up and asked “What’s a service sponsor?” The room roared with laughter. I was so embarrassed. But about twenty-five people took me aside and explained to me what a service sponsor was. I never dreamed for a second that someday I would be elected delegate.

But my experience has me wondering about how carefully we are choosing our leaders of the future. Are we electing G.S.R.s solely because they have their hands up? Are we informing our G.S.R.s about the time commitment, that it is a privilege to serve the group, and that the position requires a degree of humility? Or are we electing our leaders because they are popular and good-looking? In my area, we have a past delegate read the résumé at election time so that someone who is articulate and presents well does not have the edge over a person who is shy and nervous. If I had to read my résumé or talk to the crowd when I was elected area secretary, I’m pretty sure you would have someone else giving this presentation today.

My point is that our future is only as strong as our leadership. Our future absolutely depends on who we elect today.

“Leadership—The Beacon to Our Future.” When I looked up the word *beacon*, the definition I preferred was “a lighthouse or other signal for guidance.”

The long form of Tradition Nine states in part, “For true leaders in A.A. are but trusted and experienced servants of the whole. They derive no real authority from their titles; they do not govern. Universal respect is the key to their usefulness.”

We follow out of respect of character and our desire to maintain our unity as we move toward an unknown future.

At the first General Service Conference in 1951, there were two familiar topics of discussion: how to get the groups to contribute more money to the General Service Office and how to increase Grapevine subscriptions. While some will say it is important that we continue to talk to one another, it is equally important that we find a way to make progress. How often have you heard that the definition of *insanity* is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result?

Leaders must have the courage and vision to take risks and inspire others to follow. Concept I clearly states where the ultimate authority and responsibility lies. The future is our hands. Are you willing to take action?

I will end with this quote from Norman Schwarzkopf. Stormin’ Norman once said, “Leadership is a combination of strategy and character. If you must be without one, be without strategy.”

Home Group Inventory—Scott M., Delegate Panel 65, Area 05 Southern California

Early in the year I was asked to facilitate a group inventory for a group that I was quite familiar with and had attended only a handful of meetings in the past. It was an amazing experience. Some of the inventory questions pertained to how we welcome newcomers and make them feel comfortable. It became apparent that some long time members were a little too tough on those who may be very sensitive. There were long time members who would pass on the AA message through being tough, since that is how they were taught when they were new.

We have all heard the stories about how it used to be when a newcomer was told to sit down, shut up and that they had nothing to offer. Or how a new sponsor would open up the Big Book to the first blank page and explain to the sponsee that he or she knows just about as much as there is on this blank page. Their intent was good, but times have changed. We have become a much more sensitive society. We are sensitive to all sorts of things and some may even say that we are overly sensitive, but our feelings are ours, they are real and we own them.

I believe that we have a responsibility to our home group to ask ourselves, what are we doing to reach out? Are we making our meetings safe? Are we uncomfortable around those who may not look or act like us? Are we still so closed minded or immature that we aren't welcoming to someone with a different sexual orientation than ours? Do we do anything when someone comes into our group to take advantage of another member or, even worse, a newcomer? What are we allowing to go on in our group that may drive someone away? After taking part in this group inventory, I saw the immense value in it and would highly recommend it to all groups.

I found early on in my sobriety tremendous value in that the pamphlet, **"The A.A. Group – Where It All Begins" (P-16)**. There is a section on page 29 that encourages A.A. group inventory.

Quoted from the pamphlet, it states that many groups periodically hold a "group inventory meeting" to evaluate how well they are fulfilling their primary purpose: to help alcoholics recover through A.A.'s suggested Twelve Steps of recovery. Some groups take inventory by examining our Twelve Traditions, one at a time, to determine how well they are living up to these principles. The following questions, compiled from A.A. shared experience, may be useful in arriving at an informed group conscience. Groups will probably wish to add questions of their own:

1. What is the basic purpose of our group?
2. What more can our group do to carry the message?
3. Is our group attracting alcoholics from different backgrounds?
4. Are we seeing a good cross-section of our community, including those with special needs?
5. Do new members stick with us, or does the turn-over seem excessive? If so, why? What can we as a group do to retain members?
6. Do we emphasize the importance of sponsorship? How effectively? How can we do it better?
7. Are we careful to preserve the anonymity of our group members and other A.A.'s outside the meeting rooms? Do we also leave what they share at meetings behind?

8. Does our group emphasize to all members the value of keeping up with the kitchen, set-up, clean-up and other housekeeping chores that are essential for our Twelfth Step efforts?
9. Are all members given the opportunity to speak at meetings and to participate in other group activities?
10. Are we mindful that holding office is a great responsibility not to be viewed as the outcome of a popularity contest, are we choosing our officers with care?
11. Are we doing all we can to provide an attractive and accessible meeting place?
12. Does our group do its fair share toward participating in the purpose of A.A.—as it relates to our Three Legacies of Recovery, Unity, and Service?
13. What has our group done lately to bring the A.A. message to the attention of professionals in the community—the physicians, clergy, court officials, educators, and others who are often the first to see alcoholics in need of help?
14. How is our group fulfilling its responsibility to the Seventh Tradition?

Have we become too strict and rigid in our openness to those who may suffer from other problems? Do we take our traditions so seriously and hold them to such a high standard that we drive those away who may have other problems but really want to stop drinking? Do we shun those who want to share the part of their story that pertains to drugs or religion or anything else that may not sit so well with some of our pure alcoholic members? So let's take a step back and have a look at ourselves and ask, 'What have I done today to make my group and AA as a whole attractive to the person walking in the door for the very first time?'

These are many questions we can ask ourselves but if each group were to take the responsibility to do everything possible to assure that our group is being inclusive to all who have a desire to stop drinking, we may have a much greater chance of being self-supporting through growth in membership.

I sometimes reflect back on my very first meeting. I am still very grateful to those who welcomed me with open arms and asked me to keep coming back. They may not still be sober or even remember me, but I'll never forget them and, most of all, how they made me feel welcomed and a part of.

Benefits of General Service—Laura H., Panel 66 Delegate, Area 02 Alaska

I am writing this as I sit on a boat in Tonsina Bay near Nuka Island in Alaska. My husband is filleting fish and our friend has taken his dog to shore for a "comfort" stop. Dave took his gun, since we saw three black bear on the beach as we pulled into the bay. It's Fourth of July weekend and we are out for a three-day fishing trip. I sit here in tremendous gratitude!

What does this have to do with the benefits of general service? These blessings, or benefits, are a result of my involvement in general service and my service in general. I am still sober, happy, and in the middle of A.A., and I am a part of carrying the message. It doesn't get any better than this!

The life I lead today started with the winners I hung out with when I first got sober; because of a sponsor that *made* me get into service. I soon found I *wanted* to take my turn at the next service opportunity. I was asked to be a part of. This drunk found she added value. This drunk found she was uniquely qualified to be of service to other alcoholics. This drunk woke up one day with more self-confidence than she'd ever known was in her. This drunk was finding there were more and more ways to carry the message.

From the "Introduction to General Service" in our *Service Manual*: "The Twelve Traditions make clear the principle that A.A., as such, should never be organized, that there are no bosses and no government in A.A. Yet at the same time, the Traditions recognize the need for some kind of organization to carry the message in ways that are impossible for the local groups—such as publication of a uniform literature and public information resources, helping new groups get started, publishing an international magazine, and carrying the message in other languages into other countries. The US/Canada Conference structure is the framework in which these 'general services' are carried out. It is a method by which A.A.'s collective group conscience can speak forcefully and put its desires for Conference-wide services into effect."

And also from the *Service Manual*: Bernard Smith, nonalcoholic, chairperson of the board of trustees said, in part, "We may not need a General Service Conference to ensure our own recovery. We do need to ensure the recovery of the alcoholic who still stumbles in the darkness one short block from this room. We need to ensure the recovery of a child being born tonight, destined for alcoholism. We need it to provide, in keeping with our Twelfth Step, a permanent haven for all alcoholics who, in the ages ahead, can find in A.A. that rebirth that brought us back to life. . . . We need it to ensure that the doors of the halls of A.A. never have locks on them, so that all people for all time who have an alcoholic problem may enter these halls unasked and feel welcome."

As my group's general service representative, or G.S.R., I began to participate in the upside down triangle of our general service structure. My group expected me to represent them and take our group conscience to district meetings and area assemblies. I learned what an informed group conscience was. I learned about the minority opinion. I also began to learn about the Concepts and that, through Right of Decision, if I learned something new, I could change my vote. BUT, I also needed to be accountable, and when reporting back to my group, own up to any votes that varied from the course my group had expected me to take. What was the benefit here? I became more responsible. I gave thoughtful consideration to all matters before me and ultimately, through discussions, joined a larger group conscience that invariably settled on what would provide the greatest benefit to A.A. as a whole.

*Through general service and the C.P.C. committee, I have shared the tools and the message of hope with professionals who come in contact with us.

*Through public information and literature work, we help answer questions about the disease and invite members, friends of A.A., and family members to learn more about our program.

*I also learned the value to our Fellowship's knowledge of A.A.'s history. Doing group histories and oral histories help us learn what it was like and what happened; what worked and what didn't work.

*In corrections work, we carry the message to jails—this time with the ability to get out when an hour is up. What a gift to be able to carry the solution into a facility where at least some of the women are looking for a way to change their life.

Okay, hand cramp. Where's my laptop? Who knew I would have time to write about this topic on this trip?! Who knew my gratitude would come bubbling forth from my spirit? Wait just a second—I want to look for the bears again.

Other benefits of general service? You get to rotate every two years! You may feel like you're finally figuring out what you are supposed to do, *but* there is the added benefit of "Right on! What do I get to learn next?" With every general service position, I have learned more and more about how A.A. reaches others. With all these opportunities to be of service, you never get bored!

In my latest service role as Area 02 Alaska Delegate to the General Service Conference I participate in the process of taking agenda items, which may have come from individual members, groups, delegates, trustees, or staff (to name a few), and discussing whether or not the item should be acted on by the General Service Board. Concept One states, "The Final responsibility and ultimate authority for A.A. world services should always reside in the collective conscience of our whole Fellowship." Through my years in general service, I have had the great benefit of watching this conscience move from the top of the triangle with the groups down to the trustees at the bottom. I heard these trustees thank us, and you, for the thoughtful consideration we gave the issues before us. I continue to see the fruits of our actions in public service announcements with millions of audience impressions; a corrections video that will both inform corrections personnel and give hope to individuals in and out jail; I have witnessed progress made on pamphlets to show inclusiveness to more potential members; and I've seen the availability of our Big Book in sixty-nine languages with fifty-eight translation projects in the works.

You know, we have always had choices. When I was drinking I didn't make choices that were good for me, let alone you. I cared very little about how I could help you. Today, I see the benefits in my life of general service; I see what this program did for you and countless others. I want it to be around for a very long time. I choose sobriety and a life next to none. Thank you.

PAST TRUSTEES' SHARING

Ken B., West Central regional trustee, 2008-2012

I would like to offer encouragement and insights from over the years. I was touched by the man at the mike who talked about his experience in service and spoke of being accused of doing service just to get attention. I went, "Oh!" I've heard that before. It's not a new thought. Those who don't can easily take shots — it's safer in the crowd. But we don't do this for popularity. My own case in point: I was treasurer when the Grapevine finances bottomed out, and I had to report to the finance committee. It's not the kind of thing that makes you go, "Service!" My point is that it is just a snapshot — there are things that you will find discouraging in service — there is no question about it.

I see many outside issues creep in today. It is necessary that we stand forward and keep A.A. on track. A long time ago, I discovered from my sponsor that no matter what I was doing in A.A. there were a couple of basic foundational principles that I had to adhere to. As long as I did that, everything else would be fine. Step 12 tells us that we have had a spiritual awakening and the spiritual nature is what we have to maintain. We do this by working with alcoholics and maintaining our singleness of purpose. So, we deal with alcoholism and alcoholics and we live a spiritual life — which, in my experience, translates to going to jail when I don't feel like it. I go into prisons, despite the frustration and inconvenience. Because I have had good sponsorship, I have continued to do those things that enhance quality sobriety and then the service work itself. I have never found a time when there wasn't another opening in service. As long as I am willing and remain focused, it all flows naturally. Thank you.

Greg M., Pacific regional trustee, 1990-1994, past G.S.O. General Manager

Hawaii is home for me. In 1967, I had a good crop of hair and the San Diego police department was after me and I decided that maybe this young man ought to go west. So I got on a plane, but unfortunately, I took my alcoholism with me. An A.A. group here did a Twelfth Step call on me and I had to say the hardest thing I've ever had to say, which is, "Please help me I can't stop drinking." From that day to this day, I have not found it necessary to have a drink of alcohol or any other mind-altering chemicals. My home group is the Language of the Heart group, and we read that book all the time. It is amazing to read the history of A.A. through Bill W.'s articles. When I was getting sober, I did the Steps immediately and I was introduced to a book that changed my life. It was a book where I was introduced to God, and that is A.A. Comes of Age. It is a history book of the first 20 years of Alcoholics Anonymous. For me, this is the book. And when you build structures or re-energize structures, the key is in that book. The key is the awakened spirit of the Twelfth Step.

I go to book studies all the time, both Big Book and Twelve and Twelve, in the ninth month, we study Tradition Nine. A quote hit me straight in the face. I will read it, it is germane to what we are doing here: "Just as the aim of each A.A. member is for personal sobriety, the aim of our services is to bring sobriety within reach of all who want it." Bill chose his words wisely. It is not "*who need it*" it is "*who want it*." A.A. works for people like me that had to ask for help. I wanted something different than living on the streets and doing the things that I did. And eventually, through that personal recovery process, I had an awakened spirit and I finally

developed a way to balance my life, to stop thinking about me all the time, and to spend more time thinking about you. I've come to believe that the design of life, at least for drunks (and maybe for all of us), is unconditional love and service to others. It sounds good to me to do what St. Francis suggested we do, which is to love and serve each other. I know my sponsor did that to me by his constant: "Get in the car, kid. We are going to go help somebody." I was on a Twelfth Step call my second or third day sober. I was the guy in the kitchen cleaning up the stuff while the two guys with longer time tended to the drunk.

I fight "viewing for alarm the good of A.A." because I know in my gut that A.A. will live forever — or for as long as He deems it. I know how to find someone and help him or her get sober and he or she can help me stay sober. I've been given that gift. But I sometimes wonder, what is going on here? My central office averages two calls for help a month. And it is a vibrant district with many groups. So, I wonder, whom are the newcomers calling, because there are newcomers coming through the doors all the time. Has the business of treatment become so successful that now you have to go through treatment before you get ready to go to A.A.? My wife is a therapist and she says that is what treatment is — it gets people ready to come to A.A. This may or may not be true. The spirit of a CPC committee has touched me, and I want to go help them carry the message of A.A. and make sure it's planted within reach of alcoholics who want it.

Julian R., Pacific regional trustee, 1994-1998

The other night I became intrigued with some conversation about the upside down triangle. I have been chasing the upside down triangle for quite some time. I was told early on that the regional forums had a dual purpose. One was to give people in the field an opportunity to meet with, speak with, and gather information from the New York office — live, not over the telephone. Conversely, the New York people also have a chance to ask questions of people in the regions and to get questions answered for them. That has been well satisfied this weekend.

Now, when we talk about the General Service structure, what are we talking about? What is it, how did it come about, how is it unique, and why is it important to us in our recovery? Those are four questions that I want to focus on here today.

First, it is necessary to look at the book Alcoholics Anonymous in the mid 1940s. In the mid 1940s, after the publishing of the Big Book, our growth was slow — until 1941 when the Jack Alexander article came out in the Saturday Evening Post. Immediately, membership began to soar. The Fellowship began to grow rapidly. Soon it was flooded with questions in the mail from all over the country. And this rush of members seeking information and guidance on the program of recovery in Alcoholics Anonymous hastened the birth of our Twelve Traditions. In February of 1946, the first of Bill's Traditions articles were published in the Grapevine. During this time Bill became increasingly concerned about the future of the Fellowship. Doctor Bob had already been diagnosed with an incurable disease. Who would lead the Fellowship after their passing? Who would answer the hard questions? Who would have the strength and sobriety to weather future storms?

Another question they had was if the groups would follow the recommendation of the new office that Bill was thinking about creating to serve after his passing. These were two of the

concerns that led Bill to seek an organizational structure to meet the needs of a bunch of struggling sober drunks. He sought a new approach to leadership in Alcoholics Anonymous that would provide the Fellowship with unity, recovery, and service. Thus began the search for an organizational structure that was to be known as the General Service Conference. Bill began drafting a plan — complete with an organization chart — that would become famous in our Fellowship as the upside down triangle. What made this plan different from the traditional organizational charts was that this organization — A.A. — would not be led or managed by a president, a chairman, CEO, or board. It would be managed by the collective conscience of an entire Fellowship. To start with, area delegates at an annual General Service Conference would represent individual members. This is indicated on the topmost line on the upside down triangle. At the very bottom of the inverted triangle would be the service offices: The corporate board, the general service board, and the chairman.

Thanks to these efforts, A.A. became a program of equals, where no one person had power or authority over another. Collectively, one designated service group might appoint or elect a qualified member for a specified term. Then, in the spirit of rotation and at the conclusion of the term, another member would replace that member for another term. The result of this changing landscape is the current total of United States and Canada of 93 delegate areas. Delegates, elected by the conscience of individual groups, serve their areas for two years at the General Service Conference in New York. The continued success of this general service structure is dependent upon several things, one being that a high percentage of groups must remain active participants in the Conference process. Since the G.S.R. serves as the link between the conscience of the group and the individual members at the annual service conference, all is for naught if this link is broken.

CLOSING REMARKS

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

My first meeting was way back in 1975 when I was in charge of a treatment program. One of our staff said, “You have to really see how our people stay sober.” So they invited me to an A.A. open meeting and I found twelve of the happiest, cheerful people I had ever met. It was wonderful. Afterwards, I was introduced to each of them and I had this strange compulsion to continually say, “I’m not an alcoholic, I’m just visiting, I’m not an alcoholic, I’m just visiting.” Of course, the warm smiles I saw in response to that statement I thought were just love and welcome. Well, they probably were.

Ten years ago, I was invited to do a professional presentation for a group of attorneys who were studying whether or not alcoholism was a problem in the legal profession. After the presentation, a man came up to me and said, “Hi, I’m John, I’m an alcoholic, and I was wondering if you would have any interest in serving on the general service board of Alcoholics Anonymous?” I said, “I’m sorry, I’m just visiting. I’m not an alcoholic.” That man told me the story about how class A nonalcoholic trustees had been a part of A.A. history for a long time. So, ultimately, I did interview and I was selected. I had great ideas about what I could contribute to A.A. and what I learned was that I had a whole lot to learn from A.A. And I have gotten so much more than I have had a chance to give.

I see a lot of magic in A.A. — that indefinable magic of one alcoholic talking with another. I also see a lot of miracles, like the miracle that an alcoholic can find another chance at life through recovery. There is also the miracle of the A.A. group, that each operates with autonomy except for the group conscience. And then there is the miracle that for eight decades, A.A. has been able to maintain a consistent message of recovery and hope. It is a Fellowship that operates without rules or mandates, and with no criteria, save for the desire to stop drinking.

A recent book recounts 80 days that changed the world. And one of these days was Monday, June 10, 1935. We recognize this as the birthday of Alcoholics Anonymous. A.A. now has a presence in over 180 countries, with General Service Offices operating in about 60 nations. Today, A.A. is the most successful mutual help group providing help to people with a common problem anywhere in the world. At the International Convention in Atlanta, it was a privilege to be able to share the Serenity Prayer with 56,000 other people. But it has no less meaning or power when said in the basement of a dusty church somewhere.

There has been a lot of talk about the rate of change in A.A. and as I near rotation, I acknowledge being impatient, at times, wishing ideas would move through more quickly. You have taught me that delay on good ideas could occur for a variety of reasons. Maybe I didn't do my homework, maybe I haven't prayed sufficiently about it, maybe I need to consider another possibility. Maybe, just maybe, it's not all about me. I can be confident that when a Higher Power decides, the idea will move forward.

Each of us has an obligation to keep the doors of A.A. open for those who need A.A. so desperately — no matter where they are, who they are, what their background is or what language they speak. As we warmly welcome the newcomer, we have an obligation that the message stays strong and consistent. This was one of my key takeaways from the group inventory presentation. I was recently invited to be a facilitator for a group inventory. I responded that I couldn't — I said, "I'm not an alcoholic, I've never done that. In summary," I said, "I guess I'm clueless." They said, "you're perfect. See you Thursday at 8:00."

To be effective in service, one must surrender. I must surrender to myself to gain strength within myself; I must recognize that individual talents are inadequate for the tasks that God has given. To be effective in service we need to have a communications process and continuous unity and we must realize that individuals cannot survive on their own, that there are tasks for all of us, and that survival depends on cooperation with others.

Dr. Bob summarized that all we do is love and service. If we don't practice love for the still suffering alcoholic, then our Steps, Traditions and Concepts are hobbies, not really the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Thank you for letting me visit and for your loving service and ideas.
