

EAST CENTRAL REGIONAL FORUM

FINAL REPORT

**November 17-19,
2023**

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

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INTRODUCTION

The 2023 East Central Regional Forum was held on November 17-19, 2023. Registration for the Forum was **404**. This included **292** members attending their very first Forum.

Dear A.A. Friends,

Please mark your calendar for the next East Central Regional Forum that will be held August 22-24, 2025, at the Marriott Indy Place, Indianapolis, IN.

UNANSWERED ASK-IT BASKET QUESTIONS

Q. How do we protect our members in treatment institutions from violent/unstable patients while still maintaining a relationship with the institution to be able to carry the message?

A. Alcoholics Anonymous is not able to protect members in any setting. Our members are individuals who have found sobriety through A.A.'s program of action, the Twelve Steps, and reliance on a loving Higher Power. We do know that many alcoholics have gotten sober and stayed sober in all kinds of difficult and even dangerous situations (in wartime, in correctional facilities, etc.).

In terms of the safety of A.A. members doing Twelfth Step work: members doing this important service have sometimes expressed concerns about safety in their work in hospitals, treatment facilities, correctional facilities and in pre-release and Bridging the Gap service work. For this reason, our Service Workbooks and other service materials frequently emphasize the shared experience that doing Twelfth Step work in pairs is important, as is following the rules and guidelines of the various facilities in which we might carry the message.

Shared A.A. experience also reminds us that if we are in a situation where violence seems imminent, it is important to get to safety and when appropriate, notify the appropriate authorities.

Q. When is the expected release of the 5th Edition Big Book?

A. The 5th Edition could be published as early as the fall of 2025. The subcommittee looks forward to continuing the story-reading process and other aspects of the development of a draft Fifth Edition and looks forward to presenting a progress report or draft in 2024.

Q. What can a district do when a central office (intergroup) overrides a district informed group conscience vote?

A. Both districts and intergroups/central offices are autonomous service entities, serving the A.A. Fellowship in different manners.

IGCOs serve on the front-line of A.A., providing some or all the following: answering inquiries about A.A. and meetings from the public and the membership; maintaining local meeting schedules; offering a retail location to purchase literature; and distributing monthly newsletters to the groups served.

Districts provide groups a point to come together to participate in the general service structure by staying involved in current Twelfth Step efforts, sharing group problems and solutions, and keeping the local Delegate informed about district's group conscience.

Occasionally the efforts of the District and the IGCO may overlap. For example, to service an upcoming health fair the District PI committee may agree to provide volunteers for the booth while the IGCO will provide the literature. It is our experience that whenever the actions of

one will impact the other, it is best to make informed decisions together in a joint meeting. Open and honest communication may eliminate differences before problems escalate.

The Trustees of the General Service Board and the delegates to the General Service Conference have explicitly instructed GSO to not interfere with local matters. GSO has no authority to direct the actions of members or groups.

Q. How might we get a revised edition of *Living Sober*?

A. If you have a suggestion regarding changes to A.A. literature, a good starting point would be to discuss your idea with your home group for a consensus. If there is support for your idea, then the GSR of the group would take it to the local district committee for a wider pool of discussion and eventually it could be discussed and voted on at the area level on whether to forward it for consideration by the General Service Conference, which takes place annually.

Changes in A.A. literature come about when there is a widely expressed need emanating from groups and members, and the result of having gone through the General Service Conference process. The Conference is the closest thing we have in A.A. to representing a group conscience of A.A. as a whole in the U.S. and Canada.

Q. What is the purpose of the Twelve Concepts for World Service?

A. Here is a description from the *Twelve Concepts Illustrated Pamphlet (P-8)*:

- Written by A.A. co-founder Bill W., the Twelve Concepts for World Service help to ensure that the various service entities remain responsive and responsible to the Fellowship they serve.
- As A.A. grew up, it began with the groups — first only a few, then hundreds and then thousands. Very early an Alcoholic Foundation, later renamed The General Service Board, was formed to be responsible for our affairs. And with Dr. Bob's death and Bill's facing up to his own mortality, a General Service Conference assumed the leadership which had fallen to the co-founders. Meanwhile, a tiny publishing operation and service office had grown in size and importance to the Fellowship, and a monthly journal, the AA Grapevine, was being published.

Which of these entities was supposed to do what? Little wonder there was confusion! What was their relationship? Who was in charge? What were their responsibilities — and what were their rights? Bill W. himself was sometimes part of the pulling and hauling that took place, and so he saw the need to "reduce to writing" his concepts of the "why" of the whole structure, the lessons to be drawn from experience, the relationships and, above all, the spiritual principles.

Also, the introduction to the Twelve Concepts describes them as "an interpretation of A.A.'s world service structure," and states that they "aim to record the 'why' of our service structure" to provide experience and lessons from the past so they aren't lost.

The Concepts describe how all the parts and pieces of our service structure and corporations can best work together in harmony, with a common understanding of roles, responsibilities, and relationships.

Q. What is required to become a part of the General Service Board?

A. The trustees' Nominating committee's composition, scope and procedure states:

"The Nominating Committee aids the trustees in discharging their prime obligation to see that all vacancies—within their own ranks or among key service directors or staff members—are properly filled with members and workers of the greatest possible competence, stability, and industry."

There are various pathways to become a General Service Board trustee. Nonalcoholic desiring to become one of seven Class A trustees submit their professional resumes and letters of interest for consideration. The four General Service Trustees are drawn from a pool of past non-trustee directors for the AAWS or AAGV boards. The trustees' Nominating committee evaluates these candidates and makes recommendations to the full General Service Board for approval. Candidates for the eight regional trustees and two at-large trustees are nominated by their respective areas and elected by Third Legacy Procedure at the General Service Conference. Each year the slate of General Service Board trustees is presented to the General Service Conference for disapproval, if any.

Trustees are expected to attend a minimum of three quarterly Board weekends, with meetings running from Saturday morning through Monday noon; a quarterly meeting combined with the General Service Conference (seven days) in April; a regional forum weekend approximately once every eighteen months; and any special meetings of the Board. While it is up to the corporate board to determine the term of service, it is possible that a Class A trustee may be invited to serve up to three years on either the A.A. World Services Board or AA Grapevine Corporate Board, which meet more frequently than the General Service Board. Trustees serve on committees of the General Service Board and may also serve on trustees' subcommittees or corporate board subcommittees, whose work often involves conference calls. Trustees may be invited to attend regional, area or local A.A. events. Class A Trustees serve two consecutive three-year terms. Class B trusteeship (regional, at-large and general service) is for four successive annual terms. Applicants are encouraged to discuss this time commitment with their family and employer. Trustees are reimbursed for travel, hotel and meal expenses.

Q. How much of the background material is allowed to be shared with the membership? Can the information marked confidential be shared?

A. Distribution of material marked CONFIDENTIAL as background for the General Service Conference is limited to A.A. members. Placement of this material in a location accessible to the public, including aspects of the Internet, such as websites available to the public, may breach the confidentiality of the material and the anonymity of members, since it may contain members' full names and addresses.

So, background can be provided to A.A. members, but not in any manner that might make it available to non-A.A. members.

There is a very big exception to this policy, though. Some materials, drafts of pamphlets, for example, may be marked "for committee eyes only," or "not for distribution." Conference members who receive these materials must not distribute them, even to other members of the General Service Conference, as they are incomplete works that have not received GSC approval.

Q. If a member dies, can the spouse or family make a donation to GSO?

A. A.A.'s Twelve Traditions guide A.A.'s internal and external affairs. The Seventh Tradition suggests that A.A. remain fully self-supporting through the contributions of A.A. members, while declining gifts from other sources. No matter how well-meaning a gift, we cannot accept it unless it comes to us from an A.A. member. If the spouse or family member is also member of Alcoholics Anonymous, then we can gladly accept their gift. However, if the donation comes from an individual or group who are not members of A.A., we must decline it in the spirit of our Traditions.

Q. What is the current status of the 8th Floor? Are we still renovating it? What is the cost of that floor? If we walked into that space today, what would we see?

A. The status is that these renovations were completed in 2019/2020 and came in within the budget of \$967K. We currently have an ad hoc trustees' committee, Location Plus, that is working with a consultant to get an accurate and objective assessment of our space needs as well as complete an analysis of various location options throughout the United States as associated costs. We have fully utilized the space on both the 11th floor and the 8th floor, but there may be opportunities to reduce or find other savings and we will have a report at the Conference in April 2024.

Q. Our Central Office does not have Al-Anon literature available, not even a list of meetings. Al-Anon doesn't have their own brick and mortar central office and it isn't easy to get our hands on their literature, except to go to their meetings and that isn't expedient or convenient. Does it go against any Tradition or Concept to have Al-Anon literature available in an A.A. Central Office?

A. Each A.A. group and service entity is autonomous and has the freedom and the responsibility to interpret the A.A. Traditions and set their own policies, formats and practices according to their informed group conscience.

To order Al-Anon literature use this link to their online bookstore <https://ecomm.al-anon.org/>

Q. When posting for open positions within AAWS/GSO that are required to be an alcoholic, how does GSO/AAWS comply with the Equal Opportunity Act? Are we protected from a violation of this act?

A. Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) compliance laws forbid discriminating against employees and job applicants based on protected characteristics including race, gender, age,

religion, national origin, disability, and several others. We comply with all EEO requirements when it comes to hiring, promotions, compensation, benefits, and other employment practices.

Only our General Manager and Staff Members on the GSO assignments are required to have at least six years of continuous sobriety; that is a requirement to fulfill the essential responsibilities of those roles just as a requirement for a UPS driver would be to hold a valid driver's license. Within the pool of candidates who meet the role requirements for any position, we practice EEO compliance, free from discrimination or bias based on any protected class.

Q. Has GSO ever been asked to remove the short version of the Traditions from the Big Book?

A. No. Changes to A.A. literature require Advisory Actions from the General Service Conference; we do not have a record of such a request from the General Service Conference.

DELEGATE PRESENTATIONS

Leadership - Ever a Vital Need, Concept 9 - Sherry S., Area 55, NW Ohio

Hello everyone, my name is Sherry S. I am the Delegate from Area 55 Panel 72 NW Ohio. I received a loving invitation to speak today and the topic I selected was Concept IX. "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."

Of course, this Concept refers to the selection of Trustees. This concept similarly applies to the selection of local service leaders found in groups, in districts, as committee chairs, and as panel members. You, or someone you know, possesses some, if not all, of the same characteristics we want our Trustees to possess. But the groups must search for these individuals and encourage them.

An overview of this Concept suggests there are certain characteristics good service leaders either naturally possess or may acquire. What qualities might a person need to be a good service leader in A.A.? If you made a list, what characteristics would you include? Bill did just that in Concept IX! He believed a Service Leader should be dedicated, possess stability, be responsible, have vision, be tolerant and be flexible. Bill stated: "A leader in A.A. service puts principles, plans and policies into such dedicated and effective action that the rest of us want to back him up and help him with his job."

Let me be clear, we don't need all these traits to be a good service leader. But the willingness to develop some, if not all of these, is a goal worth striving toward. Concept IX explains that the service structure of A.A. rests on the dedication and ability of its General Service Representatives (GSRs), Committee Members, and Delegates. The direct agents of the A.A. groups and the indispensable link between our Fellowship and world service.

Now, how are good service leaders chosen? Bill believed "Good leadership cannot function well in a poorly designed structure. But weak leadership can hardly function at all even in the best of structures." "Furnishing our service structure with able and willing workers has to be a continuous activity...We must...find the right people for our many service tasks. When making the choice of GSRs, the groups should have these facts in mind. Great care needs to be taken by groups as they choose the Representative. Hit or miss selection methods should be avoided. Who are the best qualified people we can name?"

What do we look for in a leader? How can an individual improve their own leadership skills? By doing, by learning from mistakes, by accepting constructive criticism, by growing and using those God given talents and skills we have but may have forgotten about during our drinking days. These are opportunities that can help to develop those leadership skills.

This is how it unfolded for me: My home group members nudged me into learning about service. They told me I needed to be of service. I asked, "Well how do I do that?" They told me to start out by making coffee. After I had mastered coffee making, I was told to lead by example. "How do I do that?" Well, now it's your turn to learn about General Service. Go to

the General Service Assembly, listen to reports, and bring back the information to our group. "Okay, I think I can do that, I'll try." So, I became our group's GSR. I learned to accept the responsibility of attending business meetings and reporting back to the group. I continued in service to the area and today I serve Area 55 as the Delegate. What does that mean? I gathered the conscience of groups in Area 55 from the GSRs. Then I traveled to New York taking with me the conscience of the area to vote on agenda items which determined the course of action Alcoholics Anonymous takes going forward. I learned during this process that I have good attributes and still have character defects that need to be worked on.

So, what is the takeaway from Concept IX? We need to develop leaders from within our home groups. Just how do we do that? It is suggested that we ask ourselves and our groups a few serious questions from the Concepts Checklist.

- Do we discuss how to best strengthen the composition and leadership of our future trusted servants?
- Do we recognize the need for group officers?
- What are our criteria for election?
- Do we sometimes give a position to someone "because it would be good for them"?
- Do I set a positive leadership example?

These questions and others might be raised during a group conscience meeting, for after all, you are deciding who will lead Alcoholics Anonymous into the future. Thank you for allowing me to speak with you today.

Our Great Responsibility - Peter W., Area 75, S. Wisconsin

Welcome everyone to the East Central Regional Forum. My name is Peter, and I am an alcoholic. My sobriety date is September 28, 1991, and I currently serve as the Panel 73 Delegate for Area 75 Southern WI. I am pleased today to talk about the book, "Our Great Responsibility, A selection of Bill W.'s General Service Talks, 1951 – 1970."

I purchased this book as soon as it was available and have found it to be not only an enjoyable read, but also a useful tool in my role as a Delegate to the General Service Conference. As a Delegate I have found myself in many "in depth" conversations on A.A. policy, structure, and future direction. I have found this book invaluable in developing thoughts and opinions that guide me in these conversations.

Starting with "History – The Road to the Conference," it becomes evident to me that the fact that we have a General Service Conference at all is a miracle. The original idea to hold an annual meeting between "good A.A. members," was widely panned as not advisable. In a 1948 letter to Father Dowling, Bill wrote, "in some frustration that the Trustees did not like the idea of sharing their prerogatives with a conference ... All of them talk a good line of democracy, but I fear some are totalitarians at heart." The harder Bill pushed, the harder they pushed back. Bill's table thumping manner caused a couple of Trustees to resign.

It is interesting to read that Henrietta Seiberling, who introduced Bill to Dr. Bob, led an opposition group which included some of the early Cleveland members. They felt Bill was making a power grab and trying to concentrate revenue and authority in New York. Clarence

S. wrote, "Bill has pulled his schemes on a lot of groups... but he is out of his head trying to do so here."

Obviously, minds were changed, in no small part, because Dr. Bob, who initially was skeptical of the idea, relented and agreed to give it a try. This initial History section of the book is very moving in some of the conversations between Bill and Dr. Bob. I could spend all my time talking on just the history section of this book, but really, the whole book is history, so I shall move on.

Chapter I is entitled "Origins," which includes talks from 1952, in which Bill expresses his hope for a future of bright sunrises for Alcoholics Anonymous, especially due to the adoption of the Twelve Traditions two years earlier in Cleveland at the first International Convention of A.A. Also included is a talk from 1966, that goes in depth on Responsibility, Principles and Personalities.

Chapter II "Responsibility" has talks from 1963, on The Group Conscious and the Trusted Servant. And from 1965, "Our Great Responsibility - The Guidance of A.A.'s World Affairs," where the Responsibility Pledge was printed on cards for that year's International Convention.

Chapter III, Transformation, includes talks from 1953, 1960, and 1961. You will notice that the book does not follow a chronological order. Rather the talks are grouped by topics. This chapter deals with Variations of the 12 Steps and 12 Traditions, and A.A. in an Era of Change. The 1961 talk on A True and High and Constant Purpose, ends with Bill saying, "One of the most glorious moments in my A.A. career was the day that I realized that in spite of my weaknesses and your weaknesses, we *were* going to do this – and that it would succeed."

Chapter IV is on Trust. Bill in 1958 shares on the Constructive use of Trouble, which was quite appropriate at that Conference which the Final Report from 1958 describes a "vigorous and vociferous debate" that took place at the Conference ranging from issues over producing the book in paperback to restructuring the number of Trustees and more. In the end Bill says, "What in hell are we afraid of?" 1959 found a "quieter" Conference, and his talk focused on Gratitude, Trust, and Joy.

Chapter V is on Service with 1956 touching on Four Principles of A.A. Service: Petition, Appeal, Participation, and Decision. All ideas that would evolve into the Twelve Concepts. 1963's Standing Alone delves into Leadership in Service. 1965, A.A.'s 30 anniversary, Bill raises concern for those who have not stayed with A.A. and those who have yet to be reached. He also addresses inventory as an individual and as a society.

Chapter VI, The Future, includes talks from 1955 on Holding Us in Unity, that 1955 Conference, in St Louis, held in late June, instead of April, to coincide with the second International Convention was where on July 3rd the Conference voted to adopt the resolution authorizing the General Service Conference to act for Alcoholics Anonymous and to become the successor to its co-founders. In 1968 Bill talked on Holding on to Traditions. In 1969 he shared on Banishing Evil Spirits, a short talk about the Circle and Triangle and reasons for trouble, such as power, prestige, and fear.

Finally, Chapter VII Other Voices contains three talks by friends of A.A. A 1966 talk by Lois W. speaks to A.A. history as well as the beginnings of Al-Anon. Lois often talked at Conferences, speaking just before Bill. In 1953 Bernard Smith, board of trustee's chair from 1951 to 1956 and an ardent supporter of Bill's desire to form a Conference, talked on the profound spiritual impact Alcoholics Anonymous could have on the world at large. 1971 saw Dr. John Norris deliver to the Conference a moving welcome address, drawn in part from the eulogy he had delivered for Bill, who had died earlier that year on January 24th. Dr Jack, as he was known, chaired the General Service Board from 1961 to 1978.

The remainder of the book contains three Appendices with stories and other remarks concerning Bill. There is also an index, the Twelve Steps, the Twelve Traditions (long and short form) and the Twelve Concepts. As I mentioned in the beginning, not only is "Our Great Responsibility" an enjoyable read, like many of our books it is a tremendous reference tool and insight into one of A.A.'s founders and its early days.

Thank you for allowing me to share.

Getting Active in Service - Andrea H., Area 56, SE Ohio

It's an honor to be speaking with you today on "getting active in service." As a second-year delegate on my way out of this position I can tell you that A.A. is not a spectator fellowship. It is a program of action and, goodness, I've been in action for a lot of years now.

When I was new in A.A. I was quickly told to help with putting away the chairs and washing the coffee cups. I thought, "Why do I need to do this? I'm new. Shouldn't they be doing all of this for me?" I didn't realize that what they were asking was for me to participate in my own recovery. To participate in the program that was designed to save my life. The fact that I felt privileged to not help was my disease talking. My disease didn't want me to get active in A.A. My disease wanted me to find every reason to resent A.A. so I would go back to drinking. But, for whatever reason, my higher power gave me the willingness to say yes to whatever was asked of me.

I recently spoke with a member of our Fellowship who has been coming to meetings for about a year now. He goes to lots of meetings and has gotten active at the district level. He serves as alternate GSR for his home group. He attended our mini-conference and state convention and loved them both. I asked him why he has gotten involved in service, and he said he feels comfortable doing it. He went on to explain that he had been in the program in the past but hadn't stayed with it and drank again. "I don't want to make the same mistakes I made before so I'm staying busy in A.A. and hanging out with the people who serve. I feel comfortable and safe."

I related to what he said. For me, I was getting lost in A.A. Something was missing but I didn't know what it was. I served my home group for a good many years, but I knew there was a bigger A.A. world out there. I eventually served as my district's treasurer. There I was exposed to others who served and even got to know some area officers. After that, I served as DCM and committed to going to the area committee meetings and assemblies. I became a committee chair at the area. After that, area registrar, alternate delegate/area chair and finally area delegate. I put most of my selfish interests aside and focused on what was

expected of me. As a result, I will be walking away in December having changed and having shed some of my defects that were making my life difficult. Only after serving in action to the Fellowship could, I have accomplished this.

Area 56 held our elections in September, having elected five new officers. Later, one of the officer elects said, after being asked why he stepped up, "Because I can. What a waste to be *able* to do things, but not *do* them." Isn't that the truth? We have all been given gifts that can be shared in service. In fact, some of those gifts are actually acquired after we begin serving in our positions and I was told after I was elected delegate that "God does not choose the qualified; he qualifies the chosen."

Another member recently elected said, "The best way to learn about General Service is to participate in whatever action my Higher Power presents to me!" Isn't that so true? We could all watch others serve, thinking, "I could never do that. Or that is way above what I could ever do." That's how I used to think. But once we become willing opportunities find us. The job will find us.

Step Three, "*Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him*" doesn't only apply as we work the Steps. As we have made ourselves available, we are reminded on page 35 of our book the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* that, "Once we have placed the key of willingness in the lock and have the door ever so slightly open, we find that we can always open it some more. Though self-will may slam it shut again, as it frequently does, it will always respond the moment we again pick up the key of willingness." Sometimes being willing to turn our will and life over to our higher power leads us to saying yes to service positions which we had not planned to take. That's where the magic begins. Pages 37 and 38 go on, "Each of us has had his own near-fatal encounter with the juggernaut of self-will and has suffered enough under its weight to be willing to look for something better. So, it is by circumstance rather than by any virtue that we have been driven to A.A., have admitted defeat, have acquired the rudiments of faith, and now want to make a decision to turn our will and our lives over to a Higher Power." So, each person who serves then becomes a "delegate in training."

I was a miserable, hopeless alcoholic who was drinking herself to death, alone in a trailer park. I was granted sobriety by no virtue of mine and was then led to an amazing journey of service. I am currently a "past delegate in training" as I serve the last few weeks as the Area 56 delegate. I hope that for those of you who are beginning your service journeys you remember that you too are delegates in training. Just remember the key is willingness. Thank you!

Using the Traditions When Making Decisions - Janet F., Area 23, S. Indiana

Group problems are often evidence of a healthy, desirable diversity of opinion among group members; and our business meetings are a great place for service opportunities to be announced, questions to be asked – ideas become sparked; as well as problems being solved. They give us a chance, in the words of Step Twelve, to "practice these principles in all our affairs."

A small sample of Group problems we might need to address include:

- Can we stop the new members from sharing their drug stories?
- What can we do about a member's anonymity break?
- Why can't we own property?
- Is it acceptable to have meetings and not pay rent (rent-free)?

How can we preserve UNITY? Unity is imperative to our sobriety. We have to act as a whole, not as individuals. The Traditions represent the principles which support the unity of the AA fellowship at the group level.

Bill W. wrote in our book the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, "AA's Twelve Traditions apply to life of the fellowship itself. They outline the means by which AA maintains its unity and relates itself to the world about it, the way it lives and grows."

The Traditions provide guidelines (not rules) that help A.A. groups now and in the future. They address relationships with the outside world and within Alcoholics Anonymous itself. It is vitally important that we know and understand these guiding principles that continue to provide A.A. groups with a framework for maintaining our Unity.

The following is a quote from a Grapevine article written by Bill W. in the April 1946 ... "Since personal calamity holds us in bondage no more, our most challenging concern has become the future of Alcoholics Anonymous; how to preserve among us AA's such a powerful unity that neither weakness of persons nor the strain and strife of these troubled times can harm our common cause."

Who can help?

Since each one of us are individual members of AA – we all can help!

Additionally, our General Service Representatives (G.S.R.s) may assist their groups in solving a variety of problems, especially those related to the Traditions. While serving their groups, they can draw on all the experience offered by other members within our up-side-down triangle.

Many groups periodically conduct a "group inventory" by examining our Twelve Traditions, one at a time, to determine how well they are living up to these principles.

While the Traditions Checklist was originally intended primarily for individual use, many AA groups have since used them as a basis for wider discussion and decision making.

Tradition One, it is recommended that we keep it simple, and not concern ourselves without side issues.

Tradition two reminds us that there is no such thing as individual authority. All decisions are arrived at by majority agreement and by trusting the group conscience in AA.

Tradition Three doesn't mention any additional requirements for membership.

Tradition Four teaches us to take honest inventory of our group, and when making group decisions check to see if they conflict with any of our traditions and will affect others before finalizing our plans.

Tradition Five focuses on our Singleness of purpose. we are bound together by one common responsibility.

In Tradition Six we focus on Cooperation but not affiliation. Experience has demonstrated that there are many goals, ambitions, and motives . . . and the good name of AA could not be smeared.

In Tradition 7, AA activity is self-supporting at all levels, and in every case the responsibility comes right back to us. the lure of money has led many astray and it could happen to us

In our Eighth Tradition, No AA member should ask for or accept payment for carrying the message to somebody else, person to person, or face to face.

Tradition Nine helps us to distinguish between spiritual Simplicity and functional simplicity...Chaos is not simplicity.

Tradition Ten promises us that Outside issues can tear us apart. Keep it simple . . . and refrain from outside issues.

Tradition Eleven reminds us that our beloved program is not a secret society, however no AA member should be the face of AA. Personal anonymity breaks in the public media could discourage timid prospects.

As we look at Tradition Twelve, it reminds us -- Principles first, people second. As well as anonymity is not taking credit for our own or others' recovery - it's humility at work.

Almost every group problem has a resolution, which usually can be reached through the mechanism of an informed group conscience, while practicing our A.A. Principles, and utilizing our Twelve Traditions. It maintains unity while emphasizing spirituality and placing principles before personalities.

Thank you for allowing me to serve.

Our Seventh Tradition - Self-Support - Kate L., Area 32, C. Michigan

A.A.'s Seventh Tradition states: "Every A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions." This means that only A.A. members contribute financially to A.A. – and even A.A. members are limited in the amount they can contribute. This keeps A.A. free of outside influences that might divert us from our primary purpose — to help the alcoholic who still suffers. The amount of the contribution is secondary to the spiritual connection that unites all groups around the world.

Specifically mentioning "the spiritual connection that unites all groups around the world."

The spiritual connection is made whole when that contribution in the basket becomes the hand of AA. *I know that some of us drunks are fond of magic tricks, but how does a basket turn into a hand?* It is through that contribution it helps ensure that "Our spiritual way of life is safe for future generations" Bill shares in *The Language of the Heart* and that those contributions are token that we are grateful for our blessings and evidence that we are eager to share what we have found with all those who still suffer."

At every meeting we are reminded that "There are no dues or fees for A.A. membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions."

Bill W. posed the question, "Now, where do A.A.'s services — worldwide, area, local — fit into our scheme of things?" According to Bill, "The answer is simple enough. Every single A.A. service is designed to make more and better Twelfth Step work possible, whether it be a group meeting place, a central or intergroup office . . . or the world service Headquarters . . .

How does that look at the group level? Groups may have to set plans for their contributions for their financial situations and needs. Once those are taken care of some may use a prudent reserve in the event of “emergencies” that may arise. Then those groups who are able may choose to support their service entities. Those include the district, area committee, the local intergroup or central office, and A.A.’s General Service Office.

Individuals can also contribute; however, there is a limit. \$5000/year and a \$10,000 limit if someone dies. There is also the Birthday Plan. Many people contribute \$1 per year of sobriety up to \$5000. You can even have your group credited.

If you are not sure what amounts, the Pamphlet “Where Money and Spirituality Mix” has a few suggestions to consider that may help.

If you are unsure how your contribution in the basket is carrying the message, get involved and share your thoughts. Go to your Home Group, District and Inter-group meetings and Area Assemblies. You can even find out about your contributions to G.S.O... It is also good to know that the General Service Board is the entity which receives all voluntary A.A. contributions and that GSO performs contribution processing. With that being said, A.A.’s financial affairs are an “open” book. A summary is published in each Quarterly Report and a full accounting is in the Final Conference Report.

Individuals and groups can pay online at aa.org. A mail contribution costs \$5.60 to process. An online contribution costs \$2.93 to process, a \$2.67 savings.

- Currently about 43.7% of groups contribute to the General Service Office.
- Costs of Services provided by G.S.O. (as of 2018) are approximately \$7.40 per member per year.

How exactly does your seventh tradition contributions help carry the message?

- Public service announcements (PSAs).TV PSAs have reached close to 600 million viewers, airing on more than 71,000 stations across the U.S. and Canada and on our YouTube channel.
- With correctional facilities going paperless, Grapevine and AAWS Publishing collaborated to make A.A. literature available on more than 200,000 tablets in jails and prisons.
- The new Corrections Correspondence Service (CCS) database helps match persons in custody with members who are able to write to them. The Corrections Coordinator answers 500 letters each month from members on the inside.
- Helping to make A.A. message accessible to all.
- The Technology Department created the “Submit Your Story” portal, to make it easier for members to submit their stories for possible inclusion in the Fifth Edition Big Book and A.A. pamphlets, and the new young people’s video project submissions.
- Regional Forums are fun, informative, and free weekend events that improve communication and unity.
- AA Meeting Guide App with a half-million monthly users throughout the U.S., Canada, and the world. It also has the current Member survey that closes November 26th.
- Each month Staff Members respond to thousands of emails, letters, and phone calls from A.A. members, professionals, the media, and alcoholics needing help.
- Complete redesign of aa.org. Since the launch in December 2021, visits to the site have doubled, reaching more than 5 million per quarter. It is also mobile-friendly.

- Cooperation with the Professional Community desk assists Professionals in the medical, legal, and human resources fields. There is a newsletter, A.A.'s LinkedIn page, and exhibits at professional conferences.
- A new scanner helped GSO archivists scan 10,000 pages of Bill W.'s correspondence and other documents important to our history.

All this being said. Is one dollar enough?

The value of \$1 from 1935 to 2023 \$1 in 1935 is equivalent in purchasing power to about \$22.38 today, an increase of \$21.38 over 88 years.

- Sugar, .23/5 lbs. (\$4.31)
- Truck, Chevrolet, half-ton pickup, 465.00 (Chevy Silverado 1500 starting at \$36,300)

How to Effectively Increase Better Communication at All Service Levels - Ed A., Area 53, Central/SE Ohio

My name is Ed A. - Area 53 Panel 73 Delegate. I serve as the 2024 Chairperson of the **Conference Committee on International Conventions and Regional Forums (ICRF)** & the 2024 Alternate Chairperson of **Conference Committee on Trustees**.

I'll be speaking on "How to effectively Increase Beter Communication at all service levels" today.

The first thing that comes to mind is that communication is a two-way street, that is; not only do we need to share our ideas/information BUT ALSO listen to those we are addressing. This goes a long way in ensuring that there is no miscommunication and that all questions are answered.

There are three *MAIN* ways we communicate in AA.

1. Oraly

Such as: Sharing our story, Announcements, Meetings (*both live & virtual*), workshops, and Presentations (Such as the one I'm giving now)

2. Electronic

Such as: AA.org, Gapvinve.org, Meeting Guide App, Grapevine app, area/district websites, and email.

3. Written/Printed

Such as: Our Literature (Books & Pamphlets, and Workbooks), event flyers, handouts and "snail" mail.

Oral, perhaps the most effective & useful not to mention the oldest form of communication in our fellowship, is my favorite. Not only am I able to convey the information in a way that makes sense to that particular individual/group but also afford the opportunity for questions to be raised and answered on the spot. This also offers the opportunity to converse on a more personable level that often results in more frequent contact with one another.

Electronic, the latest and perhaps currently the most widely used form of communication within the fellowship, offers the most cost-effective way to reach the widest audience in the quickest time. This has also allowed us to be in contact with one another in ways that used to be infeasible due to cost or distance, to name two of many factors. One example of this is

starting this year the Delegates are meeting quarterly (*every 3 months*) with the corporate boards instead of just once a year in April for up-to-date information and to have questions answered with input from other delegates. The downfalls for electronic communication include: Many areas have no/underserved internet access, members that are unable to use for reasons of lack of technical skill, financial means or personal limitations. The lack of human interactions that foster a deeper personal bond between members.

Written/printed is important to a large segment of our membership, whether so they can take notes in the margins or the ease of sharing with fellow members/ friends. Paper is even preferred by many with Accessibility issues, be it vision, need for the “tactile” feel of paper or another issue.

To sum it up, Communication is at the core of our program from that fateful day when Bill made that phone call from the Mayflower hotel in Akron, OH to Dr. Bob asking for help until today. We need to consider our audience before deciding the best forms of communication to use. Those younger in age seem to prefer the new technologies and respond better to electronic email and shun the paper “snail” mail while our more aged members may prefer/need the “Snail” mail over email. The frequency is also an important part, don’t overwhelm but if we take too long between contacts much of the information is lost/forgotten. This reminds me of our Responsibility Statement:

**“I am responsible, when anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help,
I want the hand of AA always to be there, and for that I am responsible.”**

We all are responsible for improving our communication within the fellowship, NOT just within the service structure. Just please keep these points and others that you will learn on your journey in mind as we continue to grow along our path.

Full Forum Presentations

Unity- “Trusting Your Trusted Servants”

Cheryl B., Area 33, SE Michigan

Hello, friends. My name is Cheryl B., my sobriety date is June 19, 2013, and I currently have the honor of serving Area 33, Southeast Michigan, as their Alternate Delegate, panel 73.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share on “Unity: Trusting Our Trusted Servants”. I have been equal parts excited and terrified to share on this topic. Neither unity nor trust are concepts that have come easily to me. My corporate mind, as it often does, immediately went to the black and white of it. Of course, we must trust our trusted servants, the structure is laid out in the Concepts – the lines are clear, the “rules” are there.

Thankfully this program has taught me the benefit of consulting with others before moving forward. In speaking with one of our past delegates, she said, “Cheryl, you’re going to do great, just remember to include your heart.” In talking with my service sponsor, I shared my insecurities about writing this – what could I possibly have to share with a group of delegates, trustees, and members of the GSO that they don’t already know? The smirk he had on his face was audible as he responded, “Your experience, Cheryl.”

When I entered the doors of Alcoholic Anonymous, as a matter of survival, I did not trust, and I was not worthy of trust. I was broken, I belonged to no one and nowhere. By taking the steps, the promises came true for me, the compulsion to drink was lifted and the chains of my disease seemed to loosen; however, I could feel something was still missing. It was in being introduced to all three legacies that I found true freedom.

The Traditions and Concepts are beautiful gifts for a drunk like me. The Second Tradition tells me I don’t have to be God - thank, God! Rather, I get to serve. The Ninth Tradition tells me I’m responsible *to* those I serve, not *for*. Concept III gives me the right of decision – me, a drunk who’s best thinking brought her to the brink of death, I get the right to decide how to “interpret and apply [my] own authority and responsibility”. Concept IV affords me the right to participate, to belong – me, a drunk who wasn’t wanted and didn’t belong anywhere.

In giving me the opportunity to serve in the AA General Service Structure, in trusting me, you have given me the opportunity to face uncertainty, fear, imperfection, and failure. In those moments, you have shown me what love and tolerance is and how to practice it – what an amazing gift. In sitting around tables with other opinionated and headstrong alcoholics to achieve a common goal while navigating the principles of our program, you have given me the opportunity to learn, in a way I could not have otherwise, humility and trust.

This program has taught me that I must give what has been so freely given to me; I must trust others. Bill wrote, “Our entire A.A. program rests squarely upon the principle of mutual trust. We trust God, we trust A.A., and we trust each other.”

In 1946, Bill wrote an article for the Grapevine that would be the foundation of our 12 Traditions, "Twelve Suggested Points for AA Tradition". He saw that as we were growing, that we were growing apart and we were in desperate need of unity – that if we lost unity in AA, personal recovery for the individual alcoholic would be lost. *Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon AA unity.*

In many ways, we find ourselves at a similar precipice – if participation in general service diminishes the vital work of our committees is stifled and it is the still sick and suffering alcoholic that will surely pay the price. We do not rule, we do not govern, we do not dictate – we cannot presume that any one of us knows what is best for A.A. Our program must be held in the hands of a *loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience.*

In Bill's words, "Nobody invented Alcoholics Anonymous. It grew. Trial and error have produced a rich experience. Little by little we have been adopting the lessons of that experience, first as policy and then as Tradition. That process still goes on and we hope it never stops.

Should we ever harden too much, the letter might crush the spirit. We could victimize ourselves by petty rules and prohibitions; we could imagine that we had said the last word. We might even be asking alcoholics to accept our rigid ideas or stay away. We never stifle progress like that!

Since personal calamity holds us in bondage no more, our most challenging concern has become the future of Alcoholics Anonymous; how to preserve among us AAs such a powerful unity that neither weakness of persons nor the strain and strife of these troubled times can harm our common cause. We know that Alcoholics Anonymous must continue to live. Else, save few exceptions, we and our fellow alcoholics throughout the world will surely resume the hopeless journey to oblivion."

I know, as a program, we must rebuild and evolve, so let us hold up the theme of our evolution as unity through love and tolerance so we can place the principles of A.A. before our own personalities and those of others to reach out our hand and help the still sick and suffering alcoholic. Failure to trust our trusted servants is to bind the hand of A.A. – it is to demolish our unity and return us to bondage.

My prayer, as we move forward, is that we remember to include our hearts, because that is where we trust, where we are bonded and without that bond, our beloved program will surely fall apart.

Thank you for my sobriety and for your trust.

Erik L., Area 20, N. Ohio

First off, I want to express my gratitude for being here with you this weekend and for the opportunity to share this afternoon on a topic that I believe is crucially important at this particular time in our Fellowship.

Trust is often thought of as being earned, but in our Fellowship of A.A. it is most often given. We've given our trust to our groups and our sponsors. We trust in the process of our program – or at least we surrender to it when it appears it's our only option. Some of us fight it till the

end, but ultimately, we have acquiesced. We've opened our minds and hearts to something greater than ourselves, and we move forward in recovery, and in growth.

Generally, that leap of faith, or that decision to trust, is made when there is an identification or a recognition that we are all in the same boat, that we have either a common peril or a common path forward. Or as is our case in A.A., both. Our initial trust derives from the idea that we are indeed alike, that we desire to help each other, and are unified in that effort.

Recently, in much of our discussion in general service the notion of trust has come up, and in some cases the discussion has reflected a sentiment that there is a lack of trust. We've all heard many comments that imply a division, an "us and them" dynamic. This is perhaps a sign of the times we live in – I personally believe it is. However, it is vitally important that within A.A., we continue to offer our trust to each other and, in particular, to the people we elect to represent and serve our Fellowship. Of course, this means that we all need to participate and elect the best possible people to positions of service. It should be clear that the idea of a trusted servant, as expressed in our Second Tradition, is crucial to staying unified in our efforts to help each other and in carrying our message.

At the Ninth General Service Conference Bill W. declared, "This society cannot operate without some kind of trust. Nor can we operate as individuals without some kind of trust." He reminded everyone that "trust has a pretty close kinship with love, and it is the essence of love." Bill went on to say, "I think the degree of trust we have in God, in our principles and in each other is something for wonder."

I believe that as we gather to discuss important topics in our groups, Districts, Areas, service committees, and at any level of general service, the best results occur (it's our responsibility/duty to) when we bring the spirit of love and service with us and make the decision to trust each other. Our discussion may at times be robust. We may not always agree or see eye to eye on the topic. We can choose, however, to trust each other and remain unified in this Fellowship that has saved our lives. We can trust that as we have these discussions in A.A. service, that God will indeed express himself in our collective conscience. We can trust that the people we elect to serve us will listen, reflect, share, and come to decisions that will be for the greater good of our Fellowship.

Bill W.'s words at the Ninth General Service Conference speak poignantly to us today: "We trust because we must. And having done that, we trust because it is right. And, finally, we trust because we want to."

As I move along in my journey in A.A. and as I head into next year as a Panel 74 Delegate, I choose to trust my fellow delegates, the trustees, the board, GSO staff, and each of you. Because I know as an alcoholic I need to, it's the right thing to do, and because I want to. Thank you.

WORKSHOP REPORTS

Growing Grapevine in a New Era

Moderator: Chris C., Grapevine Publisher

Updating Perception of Grapevine: “Not Your Grand-Sponsor’s Grapevine”

- Get out news of the fresh content, new ways of delivery including apps, podcast, Instagram.
- Update Grapevine video and send it out to GVRs for play at local events.
- Work to improve search engine optimization for Grapevine and La Viña sites.
- Work with larger treatment centers to have magazines or apps available to new people in recovery.
- Be sure GVRs are assertive about time for Grapevine at local events.

Local News outlets

- Get news about apps out to local newsletters and websites like the Akron Area Intergroup News or Cleveland Central Bulletin.
- Get Intergroup and District websites to link to aagrapevine.org.
- Grapevine Committees often have newsletters and are grateful for content.
- Create materials for GVRs to give presentations to groups.
- Scripts for announcements.
QR Codes on flyers for event handouts and bulletin boards.
- Grapevine office should continue to bring presentations and materials to Forums, other big events.
- Prepare Area Grapevine Chairs for presentations at local events.
 - Roundups
 - State Conventions
 - Assemblies
- Posters with QR Codes all over at events.
- Grapevine came to Founder’s Day in Akron, nearly 10,000 members.

Safety In Groups

Moderator: Mike M., Area 22, N. Indiana

Reporter: Jim M., Area 22, N. Indiana

Read safety card (F-211) and Safety and A.A. (SMF-09)

Questions asked:

1. When you are in an institutional meeting and there is a threatening situation how to handle it.
2. How should the group handle a member who disregards the group conscience and is disruptive?
3. Group members being stalked, how to handle it, resources, group conscience, courage, truth, sponsor, GSR, DCM.
4. How does a group handle a member being threatened, what resources are available?
5. Define bullying.
6. Is bringing religion into a meeting threatening spiritual condition?

7. How to handle threatening behavior outside of a meeting.

Discussion: Question 6 Religion

Promoting a religion does not belong in a meeting and is disruptive.

Secretary/ Chairperson to rein in the meeting/ outside issues. Avoid disparaging comments against religion when it may be a newcomer's faith. Sponsorship, home group members are responsible for speaking up.

Discussion: Question 2 Disruptive

"Somebody needs to talk with them" group members. Chairperson is responsible/ guidelines? Do not touch the person that is physically combative, let the police handle it. Immediate action required.

Be proactive; have a workshop or ad hoc committee to draft verbiage to the meeting statement. Ask home group members to raise hand and speak to a group member if you have a problem with the ongoing topic at business meetings. Having group structure. Taking a group inventory.

Service Sponsorship

Moderator: Jim H., Area 34, NE Ohio

Reporter: Laura J., Area 34, W. Michigan

Why do we need a service sponsor? Working one-on-one with a service sponsor brings service to life. Reading literature together helps us see more than reading alone. It helps us to better understand the Traditions, Concepts, service positions and committee work. It can keep us right sized and keep our egos in check by helping us focus on A.A. needs and not self. They help alleviate fear of general service and dealing with personalities. A service sponsor allows us to grow in service by guiding us along the path by walking through service sharing their personal experience.

How do we encourage our sponsees to get into service? Be a mentor and lead by example, enthusiastically and positively sharing how service has enhanced our sobriety. Be mindful of negative undertone when we share about our service work and stimulate interest by how we share about our sponsees strengths and weaknesses to guide them along the path of service by inviting and encouraging them, but never pushing them. Remind our sponsees there are many ways to serve and keep them engaged.

Who is Not in The Room- Do You Think You Are Different?

Moderator: Tom F., Area 19, Chicago, Illinois

Reporter: Jodi B., Area 21, S. Illinois

The trustee's Literature Committee is working on updating the pamphlet "Do You Think You're Different?" and requesting new stories. This workshop was to promote members to solicit stories (in their groups and districts when they go home) and to share their own stories of how they felt/ feel different. Additionally, the discussion included the topic of populations that are not in the rooms and why, and how to reach out to those people/ carry the message to them. One of the main themes of the discussion was that both sides need open-mindedness: those that feel different and those in the meetings.

Among those sharing their stories was a member with mental illness/ health issues that made him feel unwelcome; a member who got sober at a young age and did not see herself in the meetings he first went to; a member who was “the only black person in the room” for her first years of sobriety; a member who is from a rural area and discussed how many in service primarily from urban areas do not understand the challenges in rural areas; a member who did not feel people in the program could understand her pain over a personal tragedy, so could not help her, and lastly a member who felt unique in his unhappiness and inability to accept others not like him. “My uniqueness almost killed me.”

Other members shared their experience with people who leave the program or never come because their presumption of A.A. being unwelcoming of diversity, too religious, shaming, intolerant of cross- addiction, unaccepting of atheists and agnostics and too rigid/ old-thinking in our literature and minorities that are not coming. It was noted that if they are not coming to us, we need to go to them.

Communication and Information

Moderator: Chris D., Area 20, N. Illinois

Reporter: Patty F., Area 20, N. Illinois

Opening statements – Let’s have a conversation. Let’s ask the questions. As we ask for those ingredients, are we getting the full recipe? Is it “overcooked”?

Questions and answers:

GSR, IGS Intergroup, Web Coordinator- How is the chain of communications getting from GSO to GSRs?

Tech Chair – How many Areas are utilizing technologies to Technologies and communication committees for an information hub? How can we centralize database information? Can we standardize information? Technology isn’t for everyone. Reports are all online not being printed. It would be nice to have that direct communication. Web Admin – How to disseminate info, info can be misconstrued. Most people don’t respond when I send out all that information. But even if one does then it’s worth it.

What happens when the DCM does not use technology or email. No groups or GSRs get that information.

How much information should be shared and who should share it depending on level and how? How much information do you want? A member said all information should be shared.

Registrar - Delegates are sharing separate information, for example, financial letter, so ½ the attendees getting it, not all. A delegate is supposed to bring us the information. The role of a delegate is to gather the group conscious of that area and bring it to the GSC and bring the GSC information back to the Area and GSRs.

Delegate - Active members want to know everything and ask a lot of her, sometimes one member can require more than the whole. Share information on where to find information. Send it to everyone's emails in the Fellowship Connection and send all information. Some people appreciate it and some do not. I don't think we should be asking some of the little questions. But all questions should be given an answer.

Give reports and regular communications that are often misconstrued by the people information being provided to. "My delegate said..." and they are giving incorrect information.

Delegate reported that they send info to the DCM who then should send to the GSRs. What happens when we eliminate the DCM? There should be expectations for all positions. The GSR needs to know what and how to do that job. Learning how to bring an issue to the floor. It's up to groups and members to hold service servants responsible for the information that is supposed to be distributed. Groups don't know what's going on.

If we could get to the consistency of the information that may supply enough coherent, consistent information that would help fulfill that information request.

Can we categorize information? Break it down into service positions and committees so members get the information they are interested in (i.e. Corrections, Groups, PI, etc.). There is an abundance of information and presenting in a way that makes it simpler for the member to access what they are interested in would be most helpful.

The Discussion of Changing Bill W.s Writings

Moderator: Tom H., Area 21, S. Illinois

First, I would like to acknowledge just how difficult it is just to have this discussion. Many of us realize that our lives, and many other lives, have been saved from the disease of alcoholism, after study and practice of literature. Furthermore, as we begin to understand the influence of Bill W. and his writing in the development of A.A., our respect for his wisdom, generous service, and sense of purpose deepens. Some A.A. members even characterize Bill's writings as divinely inspired. It is difficult, then, to hear suggestions to change his writing, especially in the Big Book of *Alcoholics Anonymous* and the book *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*.

When some members say, "If we don't change, we die," in reference to such changes, they are often met with the response "It has worked for millions for 75 years, so best to leave good enough alone." Another similar position is "If one change is made, it will start a cycle to the point where the message is lost." A newcomer who says, "This stuff is outdated," is quickly advised "Take what you need and leave the rest," or "Look what you have in common, rather the differences;" or more crudely "Try taking the cotton out of your ears and put it into your mouth."

We can see the trend of resistance to the suggestions for changes to the Big Book by the actions of the General Service Conference since its inception. In the Conference of 1955, at the introduction of the 2nd Edition of the Big Book, Bill W. stated, "No iota of the first part of the text, dealing with the recovery principles had been changed." The statement seemed significant, as it was directly quoted again in the planning for the 3rd Edition of the Big Book. In

the Conference of 1995, the sentiment for no change for the 4th Edition remained, although with some altered language. This same language is used again for the upcoming 5th Edition of the Big Book. In addition, virtually any proposed changes or proposed edits for the Big Book have been rejected by the Conference. Based on the actions of the GSC, we can see the trend is overwhelming against making changes, and for the “No lota of change” concept.

Historically, there has been a similar trend for the book *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*. In the 1981 Conference, a change was approved to better define “staff.” Since then and until the 71st GSC of 2021, several proposed agenda items for changes were defeated by vote or did not make it out of committee for the Conference. Specifically, we can see this by the advisory actions of 1984, 1989, 2002, 2005, and 2019. Contrary to the trend for “no change” since 1984, the 71st GSC did approve changes in the narratives of Step 6 and Step 12.

After those changes in the book *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, there were many proposed agenda items for the 72nd and 73rd Conferences to rescind the changes made from the 71st Conference and return to the original language. In the 72nd GSC, the Trustees’ Literature Committee did not take action on the proposed items. In preparation for the 73rd GSC, the Trustees’ Literature Committee grouped agenda items “related to founders’ word changes,” then suggested to the wider Fellowship that a clearer policy be discussed/considered for such changes. The proposals were grouped and forwarded to the GSC Finance Committee, who then suggested to the Conference that the Trustees’ Literature Committee submit a survey to the wider Fellowship about changing Bill W.’s writings.

Members then shared their views from the microphone.

Suggestions on How to Get the General Member Involved in Service

Moderator: Jan V., Area 33, S. Michigan

Reporter: Cheryl B., Area 33 - Alternate Delegate, S. Michigan

The pamphlet, “Circles of Love and Service” was made available for attendees. The moderator briefly shared her experience with the topic. Questions were polled from attendees and a vote has been taken to select two.

1. How do we get people motivated? The overarching theme of many shares has been, “If you want enthusiastic volunteers, act like one.” Members shared the importance of sticking to Traditions and expressing your passion for the service you do. The importance of educating the Fellowship about service opportunities - GSR school, workshops - has been shared. There was an emphasis on each one/teach one - bringing new people with you into service, connecting with them individually.

2. How to remove barriers to service and reduce the learning curve - inspired a lively discussion. The importance of service sponsorship was included in many of the shares. Members shared that the biggest barrier they faced was fear and that we need to be sure to welcome new people and take them under our wing. There was an emphasis on educating and practicing patience when those new to service ask questions.

Many members shared passionately about the importance of getting more general members involved in service, including a member from the Spanish-speaking community through the use of an interpreter and a member of YPAA.

The sense of the room was that it is our responsibility to attract the general member to service through sharing positive experiences of how service accomplishes our primary purpose and by practicing principles before personalities. There was also a focus on the importance of educating members new to service, including Service Manual studies, service sponsorship and willingness to openly answer questions/explain our practices.

NEW GSR

Moderator: Tim H., Area 54, NE Ohio

The moderator cordially welcomed everyone to the presentation.

Presenting this information to new GSRs will help them know how to fulfill their position.

It was the goal of the committee that the information in the presentation can help begin to answer the question, "Now what?"

This quote of Bill Wilson can be found on the cover of the GSR School Workbook.

"...the whole A.A. service structure starts with the group and with the GSR that is elected..."

The group elects the GSR. GSRs are the link in the chain of communication.

- GSRs ARE THE GUARDIANS OF TRADITIONS AT THE GROUP LEVEL
- The GSRs job is to bring information from the Area to our groups.
- The GSR helps to maintain unity and strength, so vital to our fellowship.
- Patience and tolerance to listen to others share.
- Courage to speak up.

Wisdom to do the right thing for our group. We discussed the purpose of GSR school. We also had a discussion about the GSC approved literature.

PAST TRUSTEE SHARING

Mark E., past East Central Regional Trustee, 2017-2021 - Serving as your trustee was a valuable experience for me and my growth, my understanding, and love of this Fellowship. It was also just plain tough — not “fun.” In 2017 my name came out of the hat. That May, I got a message saying that we needed an emergency meeting of the Board, via telephone. Oh boy. It was followed up with email background — things like the history of who owned the manuscript of the Big Book and whether or not we wanted to ask a judge in New York to issue a restraining order on the potential sale of the original printer’s manuscript. I had some questions, and I would like to be fully informed prior to voting. But at that point, my questions had no answers. We continued the discussion. Finally, we all agreed to ask the judge to issue that stay. Then all hell broke loose amongst the Fellowship and within the press. It was an uncomfortable six months of legal actions, lawyer bills, and irritated Fellowship members. Some believed we were doing the right thing, some believed we were doing the wrong thing. For me, the saving grace was some of our Class As. We call Class As “amateurs” but Class As are hardly amateurs, they’re angels. We were hemorrhaging money, upsetting the Fellowship, and upsetting the press. How about we just drop it and let this thing go? And it took us a good while to get to that point, but we got there. It was uncomfortable, but things got better and my first two years serving as trustee were phenomenal. I met fellow trustees, got to do positive things for the Fellowship, and I got to grow myself. By February 2018 the whole thing was dismissed.

Delegates, prior to the General Service Conference, get a pile of background. However, if you serve on the board, it’s four times the pile of background. There is a lot of reading. But I take a break every now and then and read some of our history and input from others. A quote from Bernard Smith had a calming effect on me. You can find it in the back of *A.A. Comes of Age*. He wrote:

And I thought of the finger of God determining our course as individuals, as a Fellowship, and in our relation to the world about us.

Clearly, I thought, the Twelve Steps of A.A. must have been spiritually conceived to meet a serious and growing challenge to all of us, nonalcoholic as well as alcoholic. What is that challenge? It is the challenge to a generation that would deny the spiritual basis for human existence and accept in its place a currently socially accepted basis that is mechanistic and materialistic. It is a challenge to which A.A. will never yield, for the tenet of its faith and, indeed, its existence is founded on the certainty of a spiritual basis for life on earth.

My last in-person mini-conference was spent talking about how we had the IC 2020 coming up in Detroit. The trustee for the hosting region gets to be up on-stage Friday night for the Big Meeting. I had to vote twice to cancel Detroit — to *not* have the ego boost of being up there on Friday night. To *not* enjoy 50,000 or so of my closest friends. Believe me, it was a heartbreak. But everything around Covid was a heartbreak. I’m glad we did Zoom meetings — that was the only tool we had available. But one of the values of what we do is person-to-person, face-to-face meetings with people. The last two General Service Conferences I

attended, as trustee, were virtual. A.A. works face-to-face, person-to-person, eye-to-eye. I think we are paying some of the price for that.

However, we did learn some things. As a board, we found that we could have a lot of separate committee meetings with 8-10 people virtually. That works quite well. We survived and Lord knows we'll have other things down the road which we will have to survive. I was reluctant to join in on this portion of the Forum when I first made plans to come up here a year ago. Somewhere in my heart I wanted to sit back and not participate. And yet, I do believe we have taken some steps to repair some problems we have had. I love this Fellowship and I owe my life to it. You guys are the ones who have given me that life. Thank you.

Bill F., past East Central Regional Trustee, 2013-2017 - What an adventure service has been. In January 1980, I was taken to a meeting by a woman and her father. She was the driver, and her father was in the back seat. They put me with him in that great big backseat. She gave a talk that night, but I have no idea what was talked about. When they passed the basket, I thought, "What a wonderful thing — they are collecting money for me!" She dropped her father off that night, and I was still in the backseat. She pulled up to where I was living with my college girlfriend — where I wouldn't pay my part of the rent. This woman turned around and said, "Bill, what are you going to do tonight?" I thought she was trying to make a date with me. I told her that I was going to smoke a little of that hippie lettuce, what about you? She said, "Bill, we don't smoke that in A.A." I thought, "I'll stop doing that." My next thought was: "Someday I will be a very important executive with A.A. and I'll be out giving talks and drawing a big salary. I'll have it made!" I never had any idea I would amount to anything, though, and this was the greatest adventure of my life.

Today I honor and trust our trusted servants. I know that A.A. is in good hands. I read Bob's letter on the way here, and I thought about how it was a call to action that we need to share with our people when we go home.

What I do today in A.A. is exactly what I was doing as a trustee: I go into the county jail and share. Sometimes I run into people in the community, and they call me "the jail preacher." Sometimes I'm introduced that way to their families and sometimes people will knock on the door and want to talk to me. Sometimes, when we are having landscaping done, we go outside to give gratuities. Some of the men say, "No, you don't have to do that; you helped me in the county jail." What a rich life we have thanks to Alcoholics Anonymous and literature. Thanks, to all of you.

Bob M., past East Central Regional Trustee, 2005-2009 (*This message was read, as Bob was unable to attend*) - Bob sends his regrets at not being able to attend. He sends his regards and notes that Regional Forums were a highlight in his experience as an East Central regional trustee.

Donald W., past East Central Regional Trustee, 1993-1997 - I was on the Grapevine Board two years in the middle of my term as trustee. I had the pleasure (or the push) to make sure La Viña got to the General Service Conference floor. The treasurer, a Class A, was using his corporate mind and he saw that it was going to cost a lot of money to develop La Viña. We were in the process of putting it together when we went out for dinner on a Friday night. We spent two hours going back and forth, arguing pros and cons and financial concerns. I said

that in A.A. it's not the last thing we worry about. We worry about the person out there and how many people we would help with the project. We finally went that way. He said he wasn't going to approve the project unless he got a five-year moratorium. I said, "Hey, I've been around a long time, and if you give something to an alcoholic and it's working, they aren't going nowhere!" If it doesn't work, we don't lose anything either, because then we will at least be able to get a few Spanish-speaking people into the program. It finally got through and La Viña became the magazine for Spanish-speaking members. I'm proud of that; it's one of my highlights.

This weekend, the people translating are very important to me. Why? We had a forum in Ft. Wayne, and it was being translated from Spanish to English, so we were able to sit there and understand. It helped those of us who were there understand the value of translation. I wanted to be there because I wanted to know if my experience and service as a regional trustee had been useful. I found out it had. I wasn't sure when I went in '93, if a committee chairman, Grapevine board member, or a trustee was a useful thing. But now I know it is, because La Viña continues to be a part of A.A.

Years ago, I went to an Area 23 general service workshop that they have every October. In one weekend, they get their new GSRs and DCMs together to explain what their positions are all about. They've always invited the East Central regional trustees to be there, so I was there. Well, a young lady was sitting at the registration table. She looked like she was lost and didn't know quite what she was supposed to be doing and she wasn't sure if she was going to be doing it right — and she didn't want to make a mistake. I watched her grow. I watched her go through the committees. I had the pleasure of being there when they had an election for their delegate. I had the pleasure of pulling her name out of the hat. When she got elected, she looked at me as if to say, "What do I do now?" Well, trust God and do the work that your sponsor tells you to. That young lady is here, today, as a trustee.

My first trip to New York as a delegate in 1984 was a highlight of my service experience. Up to that point, I'd never been out of Michigan. I'd never even been close to an airplane — let alone fly on one. Scared to death of heights, I didn't know where I was going or why I was going. In 1960, at 9 o'clock in the morning, I walked up a sidewalk and into a mental institution. But in 1984, at 9 o'clock in the morning, I was sitting in the Roosevelt Hotel, representing Area 34.

My first year in this program was in 1970. I spent a year not drinking and going to meetings. That's what I was told when I walked through the door. I didn't hear what they were saying about all the other stuff. In 1997 I went back out for a lost weekend. I scared the heck out myself and I came back to this program. It took me only a weekend to figure out that everything they told me was true — I was not going to start at the beginning of my drinking, I'm going to start where I left off and worse. A power greater than myself kept me out of trouble that night — I only got a ticket for doing 100 mph. After the state trooper wrote me the ticket, he came back and told me he wanted to ask me some more questions. I said, "Sure, go ahead." He said, "I want to know why you stopped." I was driving my car down the highway in a blackout. I just happened to wake up and see his lights in my mirror. I didn't tell him I was in a blackout, I told him I just saw his lights in my rearview and thought I should pull over because he was after someone. He said, "I was, but at 120 mph, I couldn't catch you." What scared me was

what could have happened — driving 120 mph in a blackout. It was yet another time God was in charge.

Friday night, for some reason, I procrastinated getting here. I figured it would be like all other times, where they've got to ring a bell to get people to come in. Well...I came in at 6:55 and I almost couldn't find a seat! What an overwhelming feeling for someone who continues to want to carry the message to come in and see a whole room full of new people. Fantastic. I've never seen so many new timers come up to the mic and express their gratitude for what they have and where they're at. The ask-it basket was overflowing this morning. Usually, we are lucky if we've gotten any at these forums, and that's growth! Thank you.

CLOSING REMARKS

Cathi C., East Central Regional Trustee - We are sober today. Let's keep finding ways to get the message carried — whether it is at the group level, district, area or another part of the world. If it's not in this language, then what other language? If it's not by this method or pamphlet, then what? That's where we come in. What works? What doesn't work? I think the answers come from listening and talking with each other — and understanding; we are all trying to do what is best for A.A. as a whole. We are the “extremely cordial” region — and it shows.

At this Forum, folks brought people along with them, there were scholarships available, fliers posted, websites, word-of-mouth and many other methods were used to get people involved this weekend. The final Forum registration was 404 attendees.

Bob, General Manager, GSO - In thinking of the purpose of the Forum, this particular Forum certainly accomplished it: To come together, share information, share trust. I saw the trust build here. It also happens at our General Service Conference every year. It's also one of the purposes of the Conference — once a year, to give delegates time to come together, to inspect the books, and meet the people in the office and on the boards. Regional Forums also provide another forum for that to happen, and it makes a difference. Those who have been to Conferences see that if you've gotten there on a Saturday, you kind of feel like, “Who are you and who put you there?” But on Monday or Tuesday, while we are not yet singing Kumbaya, we'd probably hold hands if we did a circle afterwards. You feel the trust build and I felt that here, too. I hope you felt the same thing. That gives me hope for A.A. That hope lies collectively in the unity of Alcoholics Anonymous.

It's essential to do the work that we do. One of the things that always comes to mind here at Forums is the massive amount of clarification and information — of facts. Some folks here know I have my favorite quotes up on the wall in my office. They're there for a reason: To remind me — and I think perhaps others might read them sometimes, too. One of them is Herbert Spencer's quote about contempt prior to investigation. If there is anything that can leave us in everlasting ignorance, it's that. I do not want to fall into that. I hope I am always mindful of that quote when I hear something or get upset and want to form a quick opinion. When we talk to each other about the truth in what happens at Alcoholics Anonymous, and the next time we get crossed up to remember that — to take that pause, step back, and remember this Forum. To come back to the next Forum if you have anything that builds between now and then, to try to understand — to seek to understand — which is one of the best parts of servant leadership. We know where that comes from — our Eleventh Step prayer. Sometimes, it is not *what* we do in Alcoholics Anonymous, it's *how* we do it. Actually, it's not sometimes, it's always that way. I saw that here at this Forum — in the “cordial region” as Cathi named it. The way everyone carried themselves here — with that kindness — remember to carry that forward into your service.

I've been closing with this lately. It's not Conference-approved, but I'm at the mic and you're not (*laughter*). You can send me an email about it later if you want. This is from Tim McGraw, from a song called “Humble and Kind”: “Don't take for granted the love this life gives you.

When you get where you are going, don't forget, turn back around, help the next one in line, always stay humble and kind."

Mike L., Interim General Service Board Chair - I have had one of the most amazing weekends in my service as a trustee. Thank you for that experience. We've talked a lot about trust this weekend. We've had a wealth of reference material to discuss — a lot of the stuff that Bill wrote. The reason we have a wealth of information about trust is because we've had trust issues in the Fellowship since the start. Our service structure was founded out of a lack of trust about a board of nameless, faceless people, not connected to the Fellowship, making decisions for the Fellowship. So, what we are experiencing is nothing new.

In that book that has been referenced quite a bit — *Our Great Responsibility* — there is a passage where Bill describes the greatest barrier to trust as fear. He goes on to say that the path from fear to trust goes through prudence. In 1966, the definition Bill gave for prudence was "rational concern without worry." We had some examples of prudence this weekend. I was amazed at the level of vulnerability that people demonstrated as we were sharing our experiences and fears. So, our role in the service structure is to make sure Alcoholics Anonymous is here for the people who aren't ready for Alcoholics Anonymous, yet. I've got a whole slew of them in my family. I don't know when they are going to be ready for this; I need you all to help me make sure that this is here for them. This is vital.

The Blackfoot culture has a principle that's called the "breath of life." It's been adapted by some more modern-day psychologists to be described as "cultural perpetuity." The Blackfoot culture describes that as the understanding that our time here is temporary; we are going to pass on. But the principles and the traditions of our culture need to last for the people who are following us. That is what we are doing here.

Bill describes us as people who would not normally mix. We mixed pretty well this weekend. It's essential for us to mix because we have different ideas and different experiences — and they are all valid. If we all thought the same, we wouldn't need these big meeting halls for events like this. We wouldn't need to spend the money we do on the General Service Conference — we could take care of it with just a few people. But that's not how our experience is. We need to have all those voices at the table. This is all part of the process. Sometimes it is uncomfortable. But ultimately, what I find is that when we go through that, and we remove the fear and get to the trust, the end result is more than what I could have ever imagined. So, I appreciate the opportunity to be a part of that journey with every one of you. I understand the gravity of serving as the interim chair as a Class B trustee; it isn't lost on me. For a guy to come from where I came from, to be given the opportunity that I've been given, is something that I've never been able to figure out on my own — how that happened. What I did, when my sponsor asked me what I was willing to do to stay sober, I said, "I'll do anything." You all have provided that opportunity.

As we go out from here, please remember that there are people dying from untreated alcoholism outside of here. Some of them are even in the Fellowship. I was one of them at one time. Every action that we take should be geared toward carrying the message toward those still-suffering alcoholics. I look forward to traveling that journey with you. I love you and I'd like to ask your help in closing the Declaration of Unity.

“This we owe to A.A.’s future: To place our common welfare first; to keep our Fellowship united. For on A.A. unity depend on our lives and the lives of those to come.”