

# WEST CENTRAL REGIONAL FORUM

## FINAL REPORT

August 16~18, 2019

Grand Forks, ND

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

Dear A.A. Friends,

Please mark your calendar for the next West Central Regional Forum, which will take place in Missoula, MT on the weekend of September 10-12, 2021 at the Hilton Garden Inn.

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# INTRODUCTION

The 2019 West Central Regional Forum was held in Grand Forks, North Dakota. Registration for the Forum was **357**. This included **198** members attending their very first Forum—many were welcomed at the Forum Orientation on Friday evening. In addition, the West Central Regional Forum marked the **213<sup>th</sup>** Regional Forum since their inception in 1975.

# DELEGATE PRESENTATIONS

## **All Inclusive**

Dan G., Delegate Panel 69, Area 24 Iowa

When I was praying over what topic to discuss with you all today I kept going back to the phrase “All Inclusive.” Now keep in mind I have no idea why I chose this topic or even why I kept referring back to this particular topic when there were plenty of others to choose from. Let me give it a go, and, as I speak, I want to make it very clear these are my opinions and only my opinions. They are not those of my home group’s, not Area 24’s, not the West Central Region’s and not the General Service Office. In fact, some of you — if not many of you — might totally disagree with me on many points that I will make today. I am okay with that. If that is the case, then I will have done my job and opened up this conversation which I feel is important to discuss.

I have so many more questions than answers today, which again allows everyone in attendance to hopefully initiate dialogue that I believe needs to be started. What does “inclusive” mean? We are all familiar with the popular chapter “We Agnostics” in the Big Book, especially where it states that, “We found that God does not make too hard terms with those who seek Him. To us, the Realm of the Spirit is broad, roomy, all inclusive; never exclusive or forbidding to those who earnestly seek. It is open, we believe, to all men.” This of course speaks about and refers to those who are seeking a Higher Power that they understand.

I am going to take this conversation in a whole different direction and talk about the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous, the districts, the areas, the region and, yes, even the General Service Office. Let me explain my experience. In 1990, I struggled to find a Higher Power that I could be happy with and understand. I was raised in an organized religion where God was portrayed as something damning and judgmental. When I started to actually listen to discussions around this topic in the rooms of A.A., I started to hear many different accounts and descriptions of other people’s Higher Power, and 90 percent of them were vastly different than mine. As I began hanging out before and after meetings, I started to become more and more comfortable with voicing what I thought and believed. As I continued to struggle, I was approached by an oldtimer who simply said, “I think you will have a hard time staying sober if you continue to

use a Higher Power like you are describing. If you are interested, why not come to such and such address on Saturday morning, and we can talk about it more.” I was instantly intrigued by that comment, and I decided to go. I figured I might as well, since I couldn’t get any more miserable than I already was. Why not give them a chance?

*Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary* defines “inclusive” as “comprehending stated limits or extremes.” I believe that that particular day I was given an option to go from one extreme or belief to a whole different extreme or belief. I ask myself this question periodically: If that oldtimer didn’t make the conversation he was having with that group’s other members feel *inclusive*, where would I be in my recovery today? Let’s frame that briefly. There was a group of people who were having a discussion regarding recovery from alcoholism after a meeting that had several newcomers in attendance, many who had no clue what a Higher Power even was, and those newcomers were inclusive in their conversation. They didn’t stand in the circle sipping their coffee; they were standing there, having a conversation together in a manner that was welcoming to anyone who wanted to join in the discussion.

I then ask myself after each meeting I attend: Was I being inclusive to the newcomer tonight? Unfortunately, there are nights I have to say, no, I was not. I placed myself in a manner where I was not approachable, and I was not a good example of how to be inclusive. I was self-centered and selfish in my conversation and with whom I was talking to. I need to be better than that. I *must* be better than that. I need to remember where I was in early sobriety when I entered the rooms of A.A. and had no idea why I was there, because I sure didn’t want to be. In fact, there were times when I even had a plan to go out to the bar afterward, because my spiritual program was in shambles; I wasn’t working with my sponsor and I for sure wasn’t working the Twelve Steps of A.A. It was because of people like Ron that I stuck around. It was people like him who walked the walk and talked the talk and lived by the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous. Had it not been for men like that, you would have a different presenter today and Area 24 would have a different delegate. I am standing here because I experienced the same feeling again when I was 12 years sober, but that story will have to wait for another day.

I had the privilege of hearing a fantastic presentation on remote communities while I attended the General Service Conference. It brought many questions about inclusiveness to mind. For example, how inclusive are we to those who don't have an opportunity to attend numerous A.A. meetings a week? Do we offer to bring one to them? Do we offer to have meetings available via Skype or other forms of technology? I know that where I am from those options are not available or, frankly, even considered. I then think about those who might be of a different socioeconomic status than some of us here today are. Do we make it possible for someone who is unemployed or struggling financially to be a part of A.A.'s service structure? Are we inclusive to the senior citizen in the local nursing home who has a lot of years of sobriety by bringing them a meeting? How about the person who is hard of hearing or visually impaired? These are all questions that I need to be asking myself, and I try to be as accommodating as I can be, whatever that may mean.

Now let's talk about our districts, areas, region and the General Service Office. It is often said that "those" people are only out to serve themselves — the whole "us versus them" argument. Let me expand on my thought. After a few years of working with a sponsor and going through the Twelve Steps, I was nominated and voted to be the G.S.R. for my home group. I was asked to be at the district meeting, bring back information to the group and serve as the voice for the group. I didn't think I was knowledgeable enough about the "business" of A.A. to fit in with members of the district. I had heard stories about district, and that sort of thing didn't sound appealing to me. Nonetheless, I accepted the position and went to my first district meeting. Now, what I had heard and what I had initially experienced were pretty similar. I didn't feel welcomed, I felt like an outsider, I didn't feel like I had adequate background on the business that was being talked about and I had no idea about the service structure of A.A. I felt like I was on an island all by myself. I really felt that the position wasn't all that it was cracked up to be. However, as I became more interested and more willing to learn about what was being discussed, I felt more comfortable. As I recall, I didn't feel that district meetings were very inclusive at all. In fact, I felt they were *exclusive* more than anything. Then the time came when the members asked me what I thought. I was like, *Huh? Wait a minute, did they just ask me for my opinion?* "They" being the D.C.M., the district chairs and the other G.S.R.s. They seemed genuinely interested in what my home group had to offer. They included me in the conversation. I no longer felt that the people at the district were exclusive.

Being single when I was in early sobriety offered me the flexibility to attend area functions when they were scheduled. I again went into these events with the whole “those people in area . . .” belief, and I thought they were above me. And again, I was somewhat correct in my assessment, but only because I went in with that belief. I was not able to see it any other way. By nature, I am an introvert and I like to keep to myself. Of course, I would feel excluded from everyone if I believed that that was what was happening. I had to start with myself and become open to meeting new people and asking questions. If I wanted to feel that feeling of inclusiveness then I needed to be inclusive, as well. I needed to be sure I made others feel welcomed, especially after I attended several events and noticed someone new enter the door. I still like to believe that I try to make new G.S.R.s, D.C.M.s, and area chairs and officers feel welcome. I try to show up early to welcome the G.S.R.s, D.C.M.s, and area officers and chairs to the event. Why? Because that is what I would want to happen to me if I was in that position again. Which brings me to the region and to G.S.O.

A little less than eight years ago I was nominated to serve Area 24 as its secretary. I was nominated six months after the beginning of the rotation, simply because I chose to attend an assembly after a resentment. I describe this moment because it was when I was first exposed to the West Central Regional Forum. I went to my first one in Dubuque, Iowa, by myself, once again with the us-versus-them and lack-of-inclusiveness beliefs. I had fallen into that trap once more. I showed up, and I knew only a handful of people from Iowa and zero people from other states. Frankly, I didn't even really know what I was attending or what the West Central Region was. I remember hearing reports about it while I was a D.C.M. but never really taking the time to learn what it was all about. I quickly discovered that there really wasn't an us-versus-them issue to begin with, that the people from G.S.O. were drunks like me and that all they did was the same thing we were doing in our areas and districts: serve the recovering alcoholic. I was blown away by the concept.

Lastly, it became very apparent that I had held G.S.O. and many previous delegates and trustees on a pedestal for a very long time, until I had the privilege of attending the 69th General Service Conference this past May. I was able to see the people that I had spoken to via email and over the phone in person on numerous occasions, only to realize once again



that they are just drunks like me and all they want to do is what's best for A.A as a whole. I realized that they are all inclusive and never exclusive.

In closing, I would like to thank everyone, especially those who are here for their first forum, for listening. I am not sure I covered what it means to be all inclusive, or us versus them, or both. But what I do know is that I am a proud member of Alcoholics Anonymous. I hope that I can be inclusive with my service work and be a part of the "us" category, not the "them" category.

### **Communicating Up and Down the A.A. Service Triangle**

Paul L., Delegate Panel 69, Area 40 Montana

I would like to thank the forum organizers for the loving invitation to present at the 2019 West Central Regional Forum. When I came up with this idea for "Communicating Up and Down the A.A. Service Triangle," I thought it would be a really great topic for a workshop. The organizers for the forum had other ideas and thought this would be a really great idea for a presentation. After kicking it around for a while, procrastinating for some time, balking and generally wondering what I was going to do, I finally started to do the work. I researched the topic, taking the action necessary to get things done rather than just talking about it. I figured this couldn't be the first time someone came up with this idea for a topic. As I researched prior Conference reports, the Conference inventory and *The A.A. Service Manual* and talked to others, I began to see a common thread about communication within the A.A. service structure.

I read about the great effectiveness that members of Alcoholics Anonymous have in talking to a new member. We all know about communicating face-to-face with the still-suffering alcoholic when we are doing Twelfth Step calls. We can share our experience, strength and hope with another alcoholic and tell them what it was like, what happened and what it's like now. We have learned how to honestly communicate with our sponsors, how to show up when we say we are going to and how to call ahead when we cannot. The communication that supports the Legacy of Recovery, though, is not what I'm going to talk about.

When we are in our group business meetings we learn to become communicators. We discuss a topic, continue to discuss it, discuss it some more and then finally vote on it. After the vote we ask for a minority opinion to give one last chance for more discussion, possibly identifying an aspect we had previously not thought about. If the minority opinion is persuasive enough we then have the opportunity to reconsider our vote, to correct our potential mistake and to go ahead and continue to discuss the idea so that all who want have input. It is in this way that we develop a group conscience. The group conscience is usually our first experience in making decisions together while being guided by a loving God, a spiritual entity. But that is not what I came here to talk about.

The General Service Office has a website to serve the Fellowship as a resource for the A.A. member, to aid those seeking help from A.A. and for professionals working with alcoholics to help the media when they have questions and the public at large. The website provides accurate and consistent information about A.A., providing details about services coordinated by the General Service Office. It encourages participation by A.A. members, groups and committees in A.A. services and activities. There is a staff member who serves as a liaison and monitors the information about A.A.'s website from comments by visitors in order to continually update and improve the website. There is a new movement going on to expand the role of technology as we reach out to young people and professionals: two audiences on whom the broader use of technology to carry the message would have the greatest impact. There are also different strategies going on regarding both the use of social media, such as Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn, and ways to improve search-engine optimization for reaching out to the still-suffering alcoholic — something that we do well, but again, that is not what I came here to talk about today.

What I did come here to talk about today is to ask, what can we do to improve communication up and down the service triangle? I wish there were a magic wand that I could wave over all of you that would fix this problem. But deep down I know — we know — that that would not work. It wouldn't have worked for my recovery, and there are no magic wands to fix this. What is needed is action.

There was a recent study done by an outside consultant (contracted by the General Service Board) that reported on the internal and external communication in A.A. One of their conclusions was “the overarching determination that information is not traveling up or down the Conference Structure effectively or efficiently.” We may wonder why this is; because we are told about the G.S.R. on page S26 of *The A.A. Service Manual* that “communication is a two-way street,” and we are further told about the D.C.M. on page S32 that “the D.C.M.’s job is primarily that of two-way communication.” When *The A.A. Service Manual* talks about the delegate, we are informed that they are to “communicate the actions of the Conference to area committee members and encourage them to pass on this information.” For all the information about *what* to do, we are not told how to do it.

We are reminded in the 2014 General Service Conference inventory that “regarding the flow of information throughout the Fellowship, from the board of trustees to the delegate, from the delegate to the area, from the area to districts and groups and then back, there is concern that key information is sometimes missing. Communication is one of the key elements of the Conference process and is one of the facets upon which trust is built. In general, communication between trustees and Conference chairs would be beneficial to keep the Fellowship current of board meeting topics and discussions.” To that end, we have seen some mechanisms put in place for improving communication between the trustees and the Conference committee chairs, such as the pre-agenda phone calls. We are still learning how to do this well; but it does provide an important conduit for information to flow between the board, the Conference committee chairs and the Conference committees. It will hopefully become the new norm as it becomes more established in developing Conference agendas with input to the board from further up the service triangle. This then has become some of the “how” to improve communication between levels of the service triangle.

We are further reminded in the 2014 inventory that “the flow of information from regional trustees helps to provide a bridge between the board and the Fellowship. When these channels are not well utilized or become clogged, misunderstanding can grow, the perception of ‘us versus them’ takes root and we lose spiritual focus and effectiveness.” I have seen the improvement happen with the detailed report made by the West Central Regional trustee right after board meetings. This is also another tool used to improve the communication between

service levels. One of the important parts of receiving this report is for the delegate to then pass on this information to the members of the area committee, further distributing the information between different levels of service. This information can be shared through an area newsletter, an email, a conference call or a regularly scheduled area meeting.

Another mechanism we have to transmit information among the different levels in the service triangle is for the delegates to give reports about what they saw, what they heard and how they felt about the Conference. These reports can be offered to area committees and chairs, to district committees and at area assemblies. They can be given as a formal presentation with a PowerPoint, at a talk before a business meeting, at a campout or as an informal sit-down discussion with a smaller group of service-minded individuals.

Barriers to communication can be broken down through the use of G.S.R. "service schools." By gathering some of the district and area officers and committee chairs, you can put on a program describing the tasks and duties for the G.S.R. as outlined in *The A.A. Service Manual* and the pamphlet "G.S.R.: Your group's link to A.A. as a whole."

These barriers to communication and the development of an us-versus-them mentality among the different service levels of the Fellowship is not new. "The greatest hurdle the Fellowship will face in the next ten years will not concern copyrights, nor whether litigation is public controversy, nor the proliferation of self-help psychobabble. ... The greatest hurdle we face in the foreseeable future is the spill over into our Fellowship of the cynicism and distrust that are exhibited in our North America society at large in regards to its public servants. It has been noticed with growing concern that letters from members of the Fellowship are more and more suspicious of the motives of the leaders we have chosen to serve us." This is a portion of a presentation given by Gerry F., the West Central Canada trustee at the 44th General Service Conference, twenty-five years ago. You can see that this question has come up before.

We need to take action; there is no magic wand. The necessary action is like the inventory that we first took and the early amends that we made: initially not easy, but as we saw the results we become more comfortable at doing it. Finally, regularly taking our inventory and making amends has become second nature for us. So, too, will communicating among the

different levels of service in the inverted triangle. Having calls between trustees and Conference committee chairs and committee members, sharing Conference results through delegate reports, having regional trustees share about board meetings and holding service schools will all become familiar to us, and we will wonder how we ever did without them.

### **Tolerance: A Two-Way Street**

Anthony F., Delegate Panel 68, Area 63 South Dakota

I have always loved the story of the good Samaritan. For those who don't know, it is the story of a traveling man who gets robbed and is left for dead. Two other men see him, beaten up and broken, yet decide to cross to the other side of the street and pass him by. These respectable men, men of honor, were so caught up in the dogma of their religion that they convinced themselves that the best action to take was no action at all. Intolerant, really, of this stranger.

On the other hand, we have the good Samaritan. Moved by compassion, one might say, he nurses the beaten man back to health. Just like Clara Barton, the "angel of the battlefield" during the Civil War and founder of the Red Cross, and Mother Theresa, who simply comforted the "unwanted, the unloved, the uncared for," the good Samaritan realized that our neighbor is not always the man or woman who believes as we do, practices the same customs as we do or lives in the same country as we do.

Today we define a "Samaritan" as a charitable or helpful person, but 2,000 years ago they would have been considered the used car salesman of their time. Or better yet, just below an alcoholic of my type. The intolerance of the Samaritan people eventually led to a massacre in 35 AD. Intolerance always seems to lead to hatred, then to violence and then many times to death. In the words of Martin Luther King Jr., "Hate begets hate; violence begets violence." The only cure? Again, King says, "We must meet the forces of hate with the power of love."

In the story found in Tradition Three of the "Twelve and Twelve," we encounter a salesman named Ed. A member of Alcoholics Anonymous who claimed that we could do without all this "God nonsense." As Bill writes, A.A. was more pious back then, so there was a call to kick Ed out of the group. Cooler heads did prevail after Ed asked if they meant what they wrote by

stating that the only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. But what they didn't do was change how they did Alcoholics Anonymous to fit Ed's ideas or beliefs. They stuck to what worked while being tolerant of Ed's continued bantering.

You see, tolerance is not agreeing with the other party. Instead, it means to allow the existence, occurrence or practice of something that one does not necessarily like or agree with, without interference.

Just as I would be concerned with a group wanting to throw out the modern-day Ed, I get a bit uncomfortable when people talk about being offended by the Lord's Prayer. Certainly, it's not required to like it or say it, and many groups have even removed it from their meetings. But offended? That sounds an awful lot like intolerance. Could someone who is offended by this prayer possibly be the good Samaritan and sponsor a Christian? Or do they refuse? Is it okay because there are "enough" other people out there to be that person's sponsor?

Would it be okay for someone like me who lost a family member in the attacks of 9/11 to not help a fellow drunk because they are Muslim? Or is that when our code of love and tolerance really comes alive?

I belonged to a men's group that met every Monday evening a few years back. I brought a newcomer to the meeting once. He was verbally attacked when he made a connection between the reading and a Bible verse. He was two days sober, still shaking, and more than one person with quite a bit of time in the program felt it necessary to not only dismiss but put down his understanding of a spiritual principle. I still kick myself for remaining silent during the meeting. I tried to explain on the way home our idea of our own conception of God. But that wasn't the problem; the problem was a complete lack of tolerance by members of our Fellowship. I realize there will always be those who are intolerant, but he asked me why I was busy making excuses for them. He had me cold, just like Ed had the group when he grabbed the book from the shelf and asked about the only requirement for membership.

My friend, however, never did join A.A. I invited him to other meetings, but at some point he found a different way. Remember, we don't have a monopoly on the cure for alcoholism.

However, I often wonder how many people he might've helped had he sobered up and carried the message of Alcoholics Anonymous.

When I was about seven years old my mom remarried. I met, for the first time, my step-grandparents who lived far away and had some preconceived ideas about race and ethnicity. Bottom line: as a Mexican, I was not well received. For years, I was quite intolerant of any racial injustice I saw or heard, to the point where I was using language I certainly would not use from this podium. I was angry. I thought it best to fight hate with hate. The Big Book tells us we need to drop all our prejudice, and I believe that to mean even the righteous kind.

Because I loved my stepdad, however, I stayed in contact with those grandparents. In fact, I was there when Grandpa died of lung cancer, and I helped comfort him in his final days on earth. I don't think it had any effect on how he viewed me, or any other minority for that matter. But I loved my stepdad, and I tolerated those grandparents for him.

Yet, that wasn't the case with my grandma; she and I did develop a relationship. She told me, years later, how much it meant to her that I was there in those final days and hours with her husband. My stepdad appreciated it, as well. We had a couple occasions to sit and talk. Sometimes for hours. In the end, I think her heart and mind did change. And those talks changed me, as well. I went from being a man who tolerated his grandma to a man who loved her.

I have seen a growing trend in A.A. to be all about diversity of everything except thought. My grandparents' ideas and beliefs were wrong, no question. Sometimes it's easier to be tolerant of those we know are flat-out bigots. Tolerance of the intolerant is sort of our modus operandi. But when it comes to strongly held beliefs that are not as easily identified in the right/wrong categories, we might be headed for trouble.

Dr. Bob writes, "During nine years in A.A., I have observed that those who follow the Alcoholics Anonymous program with the greatest earnestness and zeal not only maintain sobriety but often acquire finer characteristics and attitudes as well. One of these is tolerance."

I couldn't agree more. However, I don't believe we have 36 different principles in A.A. Instead, contained in our Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions and Twelve Concepts are probably seven or eight solid principles on which we should never compromise — principles like integrity, freedom, responsibility and service leadership. I would also venture to say that the virtue of respect covers our code of tolerance.

We should never forget that alcohol beat us up and left us for dead like the man in the story about the good Samaritan. Our singleness of purpose tells us it is best to do one thing supremely well, and that means picking up the pieces of a still-suffering alcoholic and guiding him or her through our Twelve Steps. Our code of love and tolerance lets us do that with joy and without judgment. That does not mean we give up our strongly held beliefs, religious or not. However, it is vital that we don't cross to the other side of the street and walk past the man who may be suffering only one or two blocks away.

Finally, I leave you with what I found to be the most powerful moment from the 2019 General Service Conference. Vera, the delegate from Oregon, said, "It is entirely more important how we treat each other rather than what we get done."

### **Today's World—Demonstrating Integrity, Anonymity and Service**

Kathi C., Delegate Panel 68, Area 76 Wyoming

*Merriam-Webster's Dictionary* defines "integrity" as "the quality or state of being of sound moral principle; uprightness, honesty, and sincerity." "Principle" is defined as "a rule of conduct or code of conduct." "Anonymity" is defined as "with no name known or acknowledged." "Service" is defined as "the act of giving assistance or advantage to another; giving aid or assistance." Let's see how demonstrating a code of conduct while being nameless and giving assistance to another works for Alcoholics Anonymous in today's world.

Many aspects of living in today's world are contrary to being anonymous. To have my name be known and to be acknowledged are ego-feeding propositions. Twelve years ago my business's name contained my first name. I had arrived. My education had paid off while I was establishing a foothold in a second career. I wanted to be known. As life magically unfolded for me to learn lessons, I ended up having to file a police report on a stalker,



completely move my business location and eventually change the business name so that it wouldn't include my name at all. What a freedom that turned out to be.

Not limited to the business world, social media has an ego-feeding aspect, as well. There has been a reduction in the number of people posting pictures of their sobriety medallions compared to the volume from just a few years ago. During shares at a meeting, I have heard members talk about how they used to post their medallion picture but then stopped doing so as a result of inventory work and realizing that it was the feeding the ego and promoting a lack of anonymity. They live the spiritual principles of the Steps by continuing to apply them on a daily basis. As with many things, there are two sides to the coin. Social media has the potential to be a great tool for information, if handled correctly. Alcoholics Anonymous cannot be attractive if it is invisible. The challenge is how to finesse the beast of social media to be a useful tool for the Fellowship while maintaining the individual member's anonymity. Sharing experience, strength and hope about anonymity can help A.A. members learn more about anonymity and the Eleventh Tradition. This can easily be achieved through sponsorship, via a meeting topic or via a workshop topic. It can be done!

Service, as this body knows, has many facets. Step Twelve is all about service. By carrying the message of recovery, one person to another, face-to-face with the honest, open sharing of how I came from being a toilet-hugging, puking-through-the-nose, disgusting woman of poor moral fiber to a successful multiple-career, at-ease, in-peace-and-comfort woman can give hope that they, too, can recover from the hopeless state of mind and body. Sponsorship is part of service, and sponsorship does not mean ownership. Sponsorship does not mean I am anybody's higher power. Sponsorship does not mean that I keep my sponsees in a state of spiritual bondage by being self-righteously rigid and browbeating them until they agree with my view of how the program should be learned, understood and applied in order to live a productive life. There is always Step work to be done. We also have group service, committee work, general service — the list goes on. My favorite service position is greeter, followed by coffee maker. As a G.S.R., I was told by the first delegate I served with that "if it's convenient, it's not service." I have always remembered that. Generally, I arrive early at A.A. meetings and functions to see how I can be of assistance — service. A picture is worth a thousand words. I have had many new members mention that they notice I am always doing something.

Guide by example and invite them to join in the work while being joyful and enthusiastic about it. How can I help? Be a Tigger, not an Eeyore!

I saved “integrity” for last, but it’s not the least. Integrity is rich in its depth and beauty, as it assists with the work of building character: Applying Steps One, Two and Three daily. Taking personal inventory on Steps Four and Ten, sharing with another alcoholic on Step Five, surrendering the character defects or shortcomings to God and making a different decision as a course of action on Steps Six and Seven. Identifying who I have wronged and making amends with Steps Eight and Nine.

Four things my spirit needs are prayer, meditation, fellowship and a purpose. Step Twelve is my purpose. A code of conduct — how am I fulfilling my purpose? Am I sowing seeds of critical negativity to push my own agenda? I’ve watched members do this. In fact, once at the end of a conference call as I was preparing for my first Conference, I was asked by a past delegate what agenda I was bringing to the Conference. Right then and there I replied that I was going to be open-minded and do the best I could for Alcoholics Anonymous as a whole. I was not bringing a personal agenda. Over these past two years especially I have witnessed integrity by the members of the Conference. It has been an honor and a privilege to serve with you. During the same time period I have also witnessed a great lack of integrity by people who profess to uphold the principles of the program, yet their individual code of conduct would point directly at character defects in full bloom. Their actions are neither attractive nor desirable. Each member of Alcoholics Anonymous is a teacher. The elder statesmen teach us how to behave. The bleeding deacons teach us how not to behave.

In today’s world, demonstrating integrity, anonymity and service would seem to go against many of the forces of society at large. Living all 36 spiritual principles of the program of Alcoholics Anonymous shines a bright spiritual light of hope for a better life free from the alcohol bondage that can and does cut through the hopeless despair that traps the practicing alcoholic.

## **Unity: Us and Them ... Or Just Us?**

Erika H., Delegate Panel 68, Area 41 Nebraska

There's gonna be a lot of quotes in the next five to seven minutes; if it sounds good, then somebody has probably already said it. Plus, it's always fun to get lost in the Grapevine Digital Archives.

When I first read "Us and Them ... Or Just Us?" as a suggested topic submission from the last West Central Region Forum, it sounded pretty interesting. But then I started overthinking it ... as I do. Why that suggestion? Having been in A.A. for a little bit now, I've had more than one occasion to observe and/or participate in an "us versus them" kerfuffle. We alcoholics, to quote the "Twelve and Twelve," "are problem people," and to quote me, "we don't people well." This is why we must rely on spiritual principles. But I am an alcoholic, so I don't seem to have a long-term memory about what is good for me.

*Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age* says that, "The Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous symbolize the sacrificial character of our life together and they are the greatest force for unity that we know." We hear much mention of sacrifice, but what does it mean? According to the dictionary, sacrifice is "the surrender or destruction of something prized or desirable for the sake of something considered as having a higher or more pressing claim." Sure, I'm okay "sacrificing" a few dollars at a meeting, right? But is that still a sacrifice if it now comes more easily to me? What about sacrificing my opinions or my personal agendas (especially the ones that I'm not always aware of)? Ugh, there it can get a bit icky.

*Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age* lays out some of our growing pains: "Gradually we saw that the unity, the effectiveness, and even the survival of A.A. always would depend upon our continued willingness to give up our personal ambitions and desires for the common safety and welfare. Just as sacrifice meant survival for the individual, so did sacrifice mean unity and survival for the group and for A.A.'s entire fellowship. ... A.A.'s Twelve Traditions are little else than a list of sacrifices ... that we must make, individually and collectively, if A.A. itself is to stay alive and healthy."

Sometimes we forget and we start thinking that we're different! We say things like, that group isn't very good; my group is the best group; those types of groups don't belong here; those people at the group, district, area or General Service Conference did something I don't like; those people in New York did something I don't agree with; or, I don't like those particular A.A. activities or events. According to a September 2013 Grapevine article, that is "the voice that seeks to set the record straight, to triumph, to have the last word. Often that voice arises in me when I feel another member has shared something untrue, objectionable, threatening to my belief system or to AA, or our Traditions."

When I start voicing ... that voice, I need to be mindful that I not feed my ego. I'm a sick person, and my alcoholic brain wants to tell me that I'm better than somebody for some reason, or that I know best, or that my being right supersedes our principles. Gosh darn, when my ego and my fears get together, it can be a hot mess. I have the right to opinions — and I have plenty — but our A.A. principles tell me I don't always have to share them. Tradition One in the "Twelve and Twelve" tells us that "desires and ambitions ... must be silenced whenever these could damage the group. It becomes plain that the group must survive or the individual will not." The Tradition One Checklist asks, "Do I make competitive A.A. remarks, such as comparing one group with another or contrasting A.A. in one place with A.A. in another?" It also asks, "Do I put down some A.A. activities as if I were superior for not participating in this or that aspect of A.A.?" and "Do I spout platitudes about love while indulging in and secretly justifying behavior that bristles with hostility?"

A 1954 article in the Grapevine refers to us as "the most scrappy bunch of people in society" who "fortunately found AA but we just don't get well overnight." This 65-year-old Grapevine article also says, "We find fault with the manner in which our group Secretary and Chairmen conduct the meetings; we engage in factional disputes regarding inter-group affairs, and complain about AA business in general." The article goes on to say that, "Perhaps since we are all so enthusiastic about our wonderful program, and being a super-critical lot to start with, we are unconsciously only trying to protect and guard it against anything that we think might prove injurious. In the final analysis, don't we all want to do only what is good for AA? Then we have no major differences but differ only in our opinion as to how best to do good, which is, after all, only a matter of detail." It sounds as if that article could be written about us today.

In our newest book, *Our Great Responsibility*, Bill says, “This is the way of the group conscience; this is the way of trusted servants. This means debate. This means the exercise of such gifts as each has. This sort of exercise of personality within the framework of the principles is the very essence of our life and of our growth. This we know from thirty years of experience. So let us trust our servants, and let us trust each other.”

Good advice from Bill W.

Ultimately, we have to be mindful whenever we are talking about any member of our Fellowship in an us-versus-them capacity, because that destroys our unity. Those people and those groups, may they be atheist, unlisted, young people, New Yorkers, general service folk, non-general service folk, lenient or strict interpreters of the Traditions, etc., etc., they are all alcoholics. We are all alcoholics ... except the Class A trustees, but they're pretty cool, too.

Love and tolerance is our code. In truth, this is the basis of real unity. A Grapevine quote from 1969 spells out our sense of unity: “Almost always, when the chips are down, we forget our differences and observe our First Tradition. ... Each AA realizes, deep down, that if it were not for the ‘we’ of AA, there would be no ‘I.’ We must ‘hang together or die separately.’”

# FULL FORUM PRESENTATION

## **What Defines an Editorial Change and a Content Change?**

Christine G., Delegate Panel 68, Area 35 Northern Minnesota

The purpose of this presentation is to take a closer look at and foster some thinking on how we should be updating our current literature that is considered “Conference approved” and getting feedback from the fellowship as part of that process. Does our literature need updating to reach the still-suffering alcoholic who has not made it into the rooms? Do we need to provide our literature in different formats? Do we need to update our literature to reach professionals? Do we need a new policy to allow these things to take place?

These are a few questions that came to my mind as I spoke with A.A. members about our current A.A. World Services, Inc., Policy on Publication of Literature. I don’t have the answers to these questions, and I know you may have a lot more. I am hoping that this presentation will bring out more discussion about updating our literature so that, as a fellowship, we may find a common ground that does not take Conference involvement out of updating “Conference-approved” literature.

The 2012 policy was only acknowledged by the 2012 Literature Committee, and it has never been approved by the General Service Conference. This policy defines an editorial change as “(1) correction of typographical errors and errors of grammar or syntax, (2) correction of erroneous statements of fact, (3) updating of historical and statistical information and (4) correction of cross-references to other material necessitated by changes in such other materials.”

Let’s look at what the policy says about a format change: “It is the manner in which *content* of the literature is arranged and presented to the reader. Examples include hard cover, soft cover, large print, standard size, pocket size, Braille, audio, video (including video with ASL interpreter), digital and electronic (suitable for reading on electronic devices such as smart phones, tablets, and computers).”

The policy goes on to say that any new piece of literature and any changes to existing literature other than editorial and new or changed formats will not be published without prior approval from the General Service Conference.

We had a situation that came to light at the 68th General Service Conference with *Daily Reflections*. This is our “Conference-approved” meditation book, and the Publishing Department created a YouTube video version of this piece and presented it to the Conference. There were some concerns that changing the format, the content and the intended audience, also changed what was initially approved by the General Service Conference. This is a good example of how the process should unfold.

The A.A.W.S. Publishing Department submitted a new policy to the fellowship for approval, which is taking great steps to include the Conference on matters of setting policy. I would like to hear your thoughts on the criteria section, which reads:

“When reviewing, revising and updating the content of A.A. literature, the following criteria will guide the editorial process: The Publishing Department will undertake routine correction of typographical errors, errors of grammar or syntax, inaccurate cross-reference to other A.A. materials, and erroneous and/or outdated statistical information.

“In addition, text and titles will be updated, as needed, according to:

- a) audience to whom the text is directed;
- b) use of outdated language, jargon and references;
- c) availability of current science;
- d) focus on diversity and inclusivity; and
- e) ongoing contextual relevance of A.A. historical data.”

What triggered this creation, you may ask? The *Daily Reflections* project that took place last year, the suggestion from the A.A.W.S. managing editor that our literature needs a review, and feedback from the Communications Audit.

Ames S., the managing editor, wrote a letter that was included in the 69th G.S.C. background material, which states that current policy “may constrict the ability of A.A.W.S. to present timely and effective materials.”

Ames also mentions in his proposal that the Communications Audit states, “There are significant challenges in communications that are negatively impacting A.A.’s relevance and impeding its effectiveness in reaching the still-suffering alcoholic.” Is a revised policy allowing for these five points of criteria being based on an outside audit?

The proposed policy seems to be taking all Conference input out of any updates to current “Conference-approved” literature that is not less than a year old, and it is implied that the updates are “Conference approved.” Do you agree with A.A.W.S.’s intended policy changes?

If there is a concern about the amount of literature that needs updating, there are other avenues that can be taken to include the Conference and still get the work done in a timely fashion. I have heard from many great mentors in A.A. that, in A.A., speed kills.

How about we look at different processes that would involve delegates throughout the year versus getting input only during Conference week? We have been very focused on how effective our communication is, and we may want to look at extending this communication over the course of the year. By providing avenues that will get more involvement from the Fellowship we would avoid cutting out the fellowship from having input and approving the work that is being done. I feel that by approving this policy it would be taking out the most important link to our “Conference-approved” literature.

In closing, do you feel our literature is out of date and/or needs to be converted into different formats in such urgency that would require skipping Conference approval? Some examples that come to mind are translations of existing “Conference-approved” materials to French or Spanish, updating pamphlets to better communicate with professionals, or converting written material into video format for view on the Internet?



# FULL FORUM WORKSHOP

## **What Defines an Editorial Change and a Content Change?**

**Presenter:** Christine G. **Moderator:** Tom A. **Reporter:** Melissa A.

During this full forum workshop, workshop members not only considered questions about what constitutes an editorial change and what constitutes a content change, but also shared input on such questions as: “Do you agree with A.A.W.S. intended policy changes?” and “Do you feel our literature is out of date or needs to be in different formats in such urgency that it should skip conference approval?”

Members shared their thoughts and experiences. Regarding editorial changes, members shared comments such as, “A problem that I see with editorial changes is [that] when we were doing the Big Book, in the stories that were transferred from the Third to Fourth Edition, there were sentences and paragraphs removed. When we were in the background material, a way to do the literature was to separate it by committee and have the delegates see if anything needed to be changed. I think that is a better thing — then it really is Conference-approved.” Another member shared, “A general feeling that I have been getting out of the area [is that] we don’t want to make a whole lot of changes in the Big Book, etc. . . . Content change is something that we should really be very careful of.”

Another workshop attendee said, “The Second Edition of the Big Book had bolding of “program of recovery.” During the 6th and 7th printing of the Big Book the capital letters of “program of recovery” were taken out and were changed to lowercase letters. I think that we need to be careful of editorial changes. When we get into diversity and updating those could lead to major content changes.” Another member opined that: “[Regarding] establishing good policies [with] editors, etc., we should let go and allow our trusted servants to do the work — our staff and our committees [should] go do the work and trust that they will come back and do things the right way. We can’t have it both ways.”

Others questioned decisions made, such as where did the “express need from the Fellowship for the creation of the video” come from? There were also questions about decisions to print (or not print) books that were (or were not) “moneymakers,” citing that a

large print “A.A. Comes of Age” was not done because it was “not a moneymaker” and commented that “These changes changes need to come through the delegates to us.”

While some questions from workshop attendees asked for more information, such as “Can you talk a little bit about the literature matrix that is being used?” Other questions and comments indicated concern with “hurrying” to approve something outside of a yearly Conference. One member said, “30 years ago they got in a hurry in Czech [in translating the Big Book] and it did not go over really well.” Another commented, “The Conference is set up because we want to hear the voices of the Fellowship — sometimes we like to take that voice away. I’m more concerned with content. I think we are getting pretty close [to] letting people decide for us.” Another voiced concern over what their area wanted and how the Conference operates: “My group was not in favor of [the] agenda item to have any effect on the content. I was thinking, at our last area assembly in Area 36, that everyone wanted to have a say in “grammar.” It was really clear to me that the Fellowship wants a say — there is a reason we have a group conscience.”

Finally, some members voiced additional concerns: “I want to caution the group. I’m concerned about the content being less and less connected to the thoughts of the Fellowship. What is the value in accelerating this process? What are we actually accomplishing from that? There is potential harm that can come from that. Why is it that we need to accelerate the process? Once a year should be perfectly fine.”

# WORKSHOP REPORTS

7-7:55 p.m.

## **Supporting Grapevine: From your Story to Service**

**Moderator:** Albin Z., AA Grapevine, Inc. Publisher **Reporter:** Wendell O. La Viña Editorial Assistant

The workshop began with a commentary about Grapevine and La Viña. The moderator shared suggested steps on how to put on a workshop and informed members that the Grapevine had a calendar with different sections topics for each month (the same as with La Viña, but every two months). After member introductions, many expressed a desire to learn how to put on a Grapevine workshop in their areas.

Some people shared their method for putting on Grapevine/La Viña workshops and shared recommended steps to a great workshop. For instance, bringing attention to magazine subscriptions and their usefulness to groups and sobriety. Among other processes, the moderator shared how magazine covers were selected.

## **Fostering Participation in A.A.: Who's Not in the Room?**

**Moderator:** MaryAnn G. **Reporter:** Julie S.

The workshop attendees responded to questions: "Are we reaching out to all who want it? What more can we do? Do we exclude those who have alcoholism and drug abuse?" In response, members pointed out that some young people feel censored or minimized. Primary purpose is discussed with addicts privately and after the meeting. Another member noted that "there may not be N.A. [available], so "we should be open to all who need it." Others noted that the Third Tradition states that the "only requirement is a desire to stop drinking."

When responding to "what more can we do?" members said, "there is always more we can do." For example, "sign language." As an impediment to fostering participation in the room, it was pointed out that "lack of sponsorship and involvement in service is a problem." Another said, "Sponsorship is needed to understand [the importance of] service and Traditions."

In response to “are we reaching out to all who want it?” a member noted that “we aren’t reaching everyone because we are all not reaching out.” Another said that “we have to have a message, a program, in order to reach out.” Others posed questions about their own actions: “Am I greeting people warmly? How do my actions carry the message?” It was acknowledged that new people were needed, so “What am I doing?”

Another discussion topic was “What is a conversation we are not having in A.A.?” Many shared thoughts and experiences on this topic. For instance, “Is YPAA part of A.A.?” “Are we a group or a meeting? Then, if we are a group, are we willing to be of service?” A mention was made that “young people identify as alcoholics/addicts” and there is a difference between A.A. today and “what A.A. looked like 50 years ago.” “The newcomer has changed. How can we change with them?” Finally, members asked, “Why are we so afraid to talk about Traditions?” and “Why did we quit making Twelfth Step calls? Let’s bring them in.”

### **Circles of Love and Service**

**Moderator:** Patricia L., Trustee-at-Large, Canada **Reporter:** Diane B.

This workshop was conducted in a roundtable format. The moderator presented the story of Alkali Lake — how a native community recovered from alcoholism. In the early 70s, Alkali Lake was known as Alcohol Lake. The chief made a decision to make the town dry. They incorporated the 12 Steps and the Medicine Wheel. The discussion centered on the connection between remote areas and international work and the room opened up to share stories of reaching out to remote communities — opening up hearts. Stories included special forums in Canada, being mentors, and bringing people to meetings who felt excluded by a dual diagnosis of alcoholism and mental health. It was noted that a remote community doesn’t have to be geographically remote.

The group discussed the strain between First Nation people and Canadians and being aware of barriers. The work done on relationship-building was mentioned.

Finally, the workshop noted that A.A. can work in spite of us — it works with something bigger than us. Let's cooperate with that power and develop compassion and understanding for indigenous people — it is our collective responsibility.

### **Young People in A.A.**

**Moderator:** Curt W. **Reporter:** Rachel M.

In this workshop, members discussed and shared experience on two questions involving young people in A.A. The first question, "How do we engage young people in A.A. without breaking the A.A. Traditions?" garnered many responses, such as "Be an example of the Traditions, be a sponsor"; "each group is autonomous"; register YPAA events or meetings with G.S.O."; "if you are a member of A.A., keep it in the service structure and do not divide A.A. and the YPAA"; and "breaking the Tradition should be discussed when the Tradition is broken."

The second question, "How are the areas handling YPAA events?" received responses such as: "A.A. doesn't discriminate"; "A few years ago, YPPA wanted to be a part of the service structure"; "One city in the Area has an annual event geared towards those who are young in sobriety — it encourages them to participate"; and in MN, there was a surge in young people seeking sobriety — what can we do better?" In addition, it was noted, in workshop members' YPAA convention experience, that no Traditions were broken. Those within the workshop considered "What can I do, as an A.A. member, to help welcome individuals who come into A.A. at a younger age?"

### **Safety in A.A.**

**Moderator:** Chris P. **Reporter:** Mike S.

Two questions were posed during this workshop and, in response, members shared their thoughts, experiences and practices. The first question, "How does your group address safety?" elicited the response of participants who shared, "making the group aware by discussing safety within the group, group conscience or group inventory." Members also shared that it was also helpful having "specific group members who are contacts for other members to report inappropriate behavior to. Announcing those specific group members at the beginning of each meeting" is another way to address safety. Members also shared that

their groups “develop a plan of action to address safety issues before they happen.” Other ways members addressed safety were to “never go alone on a 12-Step call.” Some areas in the country allow the carrying of firearms, and if this is not desirable, then post a “No Firearms allowed in Meeting” sign in the meeting.

The second question posed to workshop members was: “Why talk about safety in A.A.? Is A.A. unsafe?” In response, workshop attendees shared that there were “lots of negative information regarding A.A. out there.” Another commented that “professionals are not recommending drunks go to A.A. because of safety issues.” Also, members suggested that “early on, addressing A.A. [safety issues] with sponsees” and making sure they do not “falsely assume A.A. is a safe place — the world can be a crazy place” is helpful. Finally, remember our “primary purpose — we are here to get sober and carry the A.A. message. [If we] call people out [we can do it] in a private, principled way.”

**8:05-9pm**

### **Joining the Digital Age at the Speed of A.A.**

**Moderators:** Racy J. G.S.O Staff, Public Information Assignment & Julie Gonzalez, G.S.O Staff Assistant, Communication Services Assignment **Reporter:** Wanda P.

Within this workshop, members discussed the message of A.A. and carrying that message in the “digital age” to those who still suffer, i.e. the “target audience.” Many topics were presented and discussed. Among them, anonymity in the digital age, Traditions, the Meeting Guide App (Licensed by A.A.W.S.), aspects of the website completed in 2014, and the Alcoholics Anonymous’ YouTube Channel (4k subscribers) implemented in 2017. SEO (Search Engine Optimization) and relevant keywords and search engines were discussed. It was acknowledged that A.A. is slow to incorporate and adapt to technology. Also, there is no current discussion about a G.S.O. Facebook Page — however, staff members can provide feedback.

The moderators shared information about how the office ( in response to a Conference Advisory Action) is currently evaluating Google Ad Grants — they will report back to the 2020 Conference. Moderators explained how they are bringing in experts to provide information about the platforms being used so we can be better informed about “digital A.A.”

Speakers outlined how the Google Ad Grants are set up, such as the utilization of \$10,000 USD in in-kind Google Ads advertising every month. Google Ad Grants would be utilized to provide accurate information. In regular Google Ads, it is “pay to play” but Google Ad Grants offers \$10k per month to eligible nonprofits to utilize the program.

Workshop members asked many questions, and many voiced concern over the relationship with Google and utilizing the 10,000 dollars offered per month in ad spend. Some concerns were that using the grant “violates our 7th Tradition.” It was mentioned that in “Google Ad Grants no money is being exchanged. [It is] space — same as a PSA.” Another said that a “\$120,000 yearly donated by Google is a donation . . . Tradition 6 [talks about] non-affiliation” and pointed out that with a PSA, “They run it or they don’t. Google claims the right to keep what we were doing, even if we choose to end the relationship.”

Another concern was that A.A. was utilizing the grant to “elevate our stuff to the top of the list when people type in keywords related to A.A.” And, since our 11th Tradition is “attraction not promotion, [then] we are entering into competition with other agencies in a search engine.” The member felt that “we are selling our Tradition for a low price.” Others pointed out that there is a “business side to A.A.org. We get discounts in a lot of areas from discounts at churches for our meeting room, PI/CPC for a booth, etc. Exploring potential avenues is a necessity.” Members wanted to know “what to do if this doesn’t work.” It was suggested that members should talk to their areas about their concerns. Moderators pointed out that the “Fellowship will provide feedback to the Conference to decide if we want to proceed forward with this.”

### **Fostering Participation in A.A.: Who’s Not in the Room?**

**Moderator:** Erik C. **Reporter:** Jenny S.

**Note:** This workshop was moderated in ASL and voice interpreted for the hearing attendees. Within this workshop, members discussed ways to foster participation in A.A. by discussing who was not in the room — and why. Members shared that increasing interpretive services in metro areas would help make those who cannot hear feel more welcome. A member shared, “Currently we have 7-8 interpreted meetings in the metro area and that is far from being sufficient to meet the needs of A.A members who are deaf.” Also, “For interpretive

services. . . [we] need to plan the funds for the cost, not be resistive to providing service.” Also, physical accommodations should be assessed.

Workshop members also discussed community issues. For instance, regarding people in the military, a group member reported that at least 22 vets kill themselves every week. Is this “poor reaching out?” Members shared that we don’t “sit back and they come to us. We need to go out and reach out to them. Not drag them, but invite them.” There are many ways to do this:

- a. Host meetings in hospitals, treatment programs, shelters...
- b. Spread via public information

Members spoke about taking personal responsibility for behaviors and making changes. It is necessary to be open and have an open communication within the group without being judged. “A.A. is for everyone!” and “I’m responsible to welcome newcomers” — be welcoming and warm. All of us have a responsibility to ensure a safe environment in meetings.

## **Primary Purpose**

**Moderator:** Ramona B. **Reporter:** Diane P.

The moderator presented two questions to this workshop:

1. How do I share my program in such a way that it meets the primary purpose of Alcoholics Anonymous?
2. Is my primary purpose fellowship or recovery?

In response to the first question, members gave input on how they shared their program so that it meets the primary purpose of Alcoholics Anonymous: Work with sponsor, follow the directions from a sponsor that has knowledge of the Big Book, attend literature meetings because of structure, sharing experience, strength and hope in carrying the message. Members also shared that there is no right or wrong, just be open and willing to be the vessel to the alcoholic who still suffers. Be of maximum service to God and the fellow alcoholic.

Members shared their experience and thoughts about whether their primary purpose was fellowship or recovery. Some said, “fellowship can be the same as fellowship in the bar.



Recovery is needed to change our personalities.” Also, “being honest and inspired by the God of my understanding.” Others mentioned that they relied upon a sponsor/sponsee relationship to ensure that their primary purpose was recovery. It was stated that “read[ing] the first 164 pages with a sponsor who has experience with the Big Book and a combination of both fellowship and recovery is beneficial to growth in sobriety.”

### **Archives and the A.A. Foundation**

**Moderator:** CJ M. **Reporter:** Megan K.

In this workshop addressing the work and importance of archives, the moderator asked those present a question: “How many (in attendance) are involved in their area, district or group archives?” Three hands were raised. The moderator shared that G.S.O. archives office was instituted in 1975.

Why keep archives? To get a sense of what we, as A.A. members, belong to. Archives also answers the “whys” of why we do what we do — individually, and as groups, districts, areas, and the General Conference.

Also, in A.A. as a whole, archives history illustrates the importance of our actions and how we keep carrying the message as time evolves. The workshop members were asked, “How do you keep archives?” In response, it was shared that to help those in archives or just beginning, G.S.O. has a workbook on the do(s) and don’t(s)s of archiving. In addition, the “Annual Archives Workshop” can answer questions and is a great resource for those interested in archiving. In addition, helpful pointers were shared, such as “Don’t throw anything away, but only keep one of each document,” as well as “store in cardboard boxes, digitize, develop organization system,” and finally, for those in or beginning to archive, “have patience.”

## **District Inventories**

**Moderator:** Don M. **Reporter:** Sheila J.

The workshop began with a question: “If you had one question to ask everyone at a District Inventory, what would it be?” Participants wrote their one question down and it was subsequently narrowed to two questions:

1. How are we uniting our district groups?
2. Does our district attract newcomers into the service structure?

We do a district inventory to be better at the things we do — to get down to causes and effects of what we’re doing or not doing. The group agreed that a district questionnaire, followed by feedback, was the best tool for an inventory. Different types of inventory were discussed, as well as whether or not to use a moderator and who participates (just district, G.S.R.s, taking questions to groups, etc.) A sample questionnaire containing 18 questions was passed out and discussed. A discussion was held on the value of the questions on the questionnaire, especially the monetary question on group contributions. A lengthy discussion was also held on group contributions, splits and district responsibilities. District structure and its basic purpose was discussed. It was noted that questions regarding personal conduct, acting out, principles, leadership, etc. seemed to be missing on the questionnaire. A brief discussion was held on how we turn feedback into action.

# PAST TRUSTEES SHARING

**Jo-Ann L.**, Trustee-at-Large/Canada, 2007-2011

When I woke up this morning, I was thinking about this weekend. The words I was thinking of were “mutual love and respect,” one member for another, and that is what I witnessed this weekend. When I sobered up, I didn’t get involved in service right away. But when I began to put up my hand, people started encouraging me. Getting involved in service changed my life. As a woman, it felt like I didn’t have a voice. But going to an assembly and a district meeting for the first time I thought, I might have something to offer here. I learned so much about myself as a woman. I also learned so much about Alcoholics Anonymous.

We were talking this morning about money and I recalled a time, as trustee, that I was invited to go to an area. At the time, I was serving Eastern Canada as their trustee. When I got to the area, I wasn’t expecting the barrage of financial questions they had for me. I had to do my homework at night because I knew they were going to ask more questions. When I got up the next morning, I realized that when they invited me, they said, “We can’t really pay for you to come here — but we want you to come.” I said, “We always talk about how, in Alcoholics Anonymous, a regional forum is free.” My coming to their area was free — to them. And yet, as I said to them that morning, “I’m wondering who actually paid for me to come to this assembly? I thank you for inviting me, and I didn’t say no — because we want to be helpful and we want to be there when you need us — but you have to realize that when we hold up a piece of paper and we say, “Order a lot of this literature. It’s free.” It’s actually not free. My coming here this weekend wasn’t free. I didn’t talk to the airline and say, “I’m working on behalf of Alcoholics Anonymous, so please accept my free seat on this plane. Please feed me and put me to bed at night. For free.”

And so, it was a lesson for all of them and it was a lesson for me that I could be honest about Alcoholics Anonymous. When I come here, I am not special. I am a member of Alcoholics Anonymous.

I feel grateful for the members that I’ve served with, and I’m so grateful that Alcoholics Anonymous is alive and well, and thank you to everyone for your participation this weekend.

Thank you for listening to that particular voice inside of you that said, "I don't know if I really want to go. What's going to happen there?" I'm so glad you came. Some of you are going to be sitting up here someday. You don't know what God has in store for you. He sees way further ahead than all of us. So, thank you.

**Larry N., Trustee-at-Large/U.S., 1993-1997**

I'm an alcoholic. Even if wanted to, I couldn't do anything about it. Actually, it was the best thing that ever happened to me. I found A.A. for the first time in Yankton, South Dakota and I have not had a drink since 1971, for which I thank God and every member of A.A. It was a long and exciting trail that led from G.S.R. to area treasurer, alternate delegate, area chair to area delegate and then, three years later, I was elected trustee-at-large/U.S.

Powerless against the obsession to drink and the bondage of self, I am in constant need of God's healing love transmitted through A.A. hands and hearts. Probably the greatest gift of all my service is the international focus of the role of trustee-at-large. Trustees-at-large attend World Service Meetings (WSM). I was a delegate to the 1994 meeting in Colombia. At this WSM, the Japanese delegate announced joint plans with New Zealand to host the first Asia-Oceania interim service meeting. I also saw the 20th anniversary of A.A. in Japan. During this anniversary in Tokyo, the Japanese delegates decided to move forward with adding nonalcoholic trustees to their general service board. This was preceded by a most interesting discussion and strong opinions. Just like here. Another time, in Slovakia, a Class A trustee and I traveled together to share at a meeting of psychiatrists. I brought with me payment to give to a nonalcoholic secretary of one of the psychiatrists in Slovakia. She had translated the Twelve and Twelve into the Slovak language. She expressed, in tears, how moved she was by the content of that book. As she shared her gratitude for the privilege to do this service, she wept. I had never seen anything like that. Nor did I ever expect it.

In this short time, I cannot describe the tremendous and overpowering love and unity I felt at the World Service Meetings and all other meetings I was privileged to attend. Our G.S.O. carries the message in the most effective ways throughout the world. Our contributions are gratitude that mixes money with spirituality to carry the A.A. message forward and around the world. Our responsibilities are the same that they always have been. If God sustains us and

we work together in the spirit of anonymity, we will not fail. We are a society of equals, with the life and death needed for the message that we have so freely been given. In A.A.'s new book, "Our Great Responsibility," Bill refers to the G.S.R.s and those serving on committees during one of his Conference talks. He implies that without these people at the grass-roots level, the Conference could not be effective. Each of us is a link in the chain. I thank God for the wonderful privilege to serve A.A. and I thank him for every one of you, and I thank you for my life.

**Andrew W.**, West Central Regional Trustee, 2013-2016

I want to tell a story. A little over twelve years ago, in August 2007, I was out in Eastern Montana, in the badlands. I'm out there to give a delegate's report during my first year of being a delegate. I'm in an A-frame, we are in the badlands, and it is really hot. We are at the lower Yellowstone "soberfest" and I had a suit on ('cause that's how we roll in Montana), and it's hot, there are rattlesnakes outside, and I'm thinking I'm going to give a small thing — and there are three past delegates in the audience. I'm happy to see how well the boards are getting along now, but this was during a time when there was a little more controversy going on. So, I give my report, and there is a controversial item. Tom, one of the past delegates, has questions. But one of the things I love about Tom is that he and I agree on lots of stuff, and some things we see differently. We both share a passion for willing to talk about topics in A.A. So, we had a really great conversation about it. I don't know if we changed each other's minds, but it's always nice to see that somebody else who loves A.A. can have a different opinion on something. Even if we don't change each other's minds, it's always good for me to see that someone else could have a different viewpoint from mine and still have a love for A.A.

We are now in the process of electing a new trustee — each area will elect a new candidate for the next West Central regional trustee. I wanted to encourage you, if you are thinking about it, to talk to your sponsor, your spouse (if you have one), and I encourage you to stand. If you make yourself available, the time will be there.

And it goes by fast. It's only four years, so it may seem like a long time, but it's not. It's not always easy. As a trustee, in my first West Central Regional forum, one of the past trustees

told me I was going to have hell to pay for the next four years. It was a controversial time, and I didn't have that, but what I did have was experience and growth unlike any other time I can imagine. Thank you.

**Ken B.**, General Service Trustee, 2008-2012

Sometimes we have controversy in A.A., and it's easy to overreact to what we hear. My first regional forum was in Omaha in 1991 and a discussion in the room — the scuttlebutt — was that they had just fired the general manager. I left there going, "Hmmm." I thought we were a spiritual entity, I didn't understand that we have some business principles underlying all that. Back then, my takeaway was a little more sour than it should have been. If you've heard anything this weekend that troubled you in any way, talk to someone — it's not as bad as it may sound. In fact, I know someone who has a sponsor who was sponsored by that general manager and he assures me that everything is okay. We're solid.

The takeaway I have from this one is something that Leslie [current General Service Board Treasurer] said. It had nothing to do with financials, other than how she said she's not allowed to contribute financially to this operation. But she's a Class A, so we make her work. I thought, What a wonderful thought to carry out of this one — it's not what I put in the hat, financially, it's what I actually *do* to contribute to our ongoing success and mission. That's really why we are here and it's the recharge we talk about — keeping our energies up and keeping them going.

I want to tell you about a conversation I had while driving up here. I was on the phone with a woman, Deborah, who lives in Laramie, Wyoming. Some good friends put me in contact with her. I was talking to her because she knew a woman and she had taken this woman to meetings. This woman, in Bill's writings, was referenced as the "Countess" who'd come into his office. Here's the backstory: This "Countess" (her name was Felicia), was going to a psychiatrist to get "fixed," and her psychiatrist had actually gone to a session where she heard Bill W. speak. The psychiatrist realized that Bill had offered something that she, as a psychiatrist, didn't have. So, she sent Felicia to Bill W. They sat in his office, and Bill said to Felicia, the Countess, "Do you think you are one of us?" She acknowledged that she was, so Bill got on the phone, called Marty M., got the woman a sponsor, and 55 years later, she died

in Laramie, WY. Felicia's story is in the 2nd and 3rd Edition of the Big Book "Stars Don't Fall." In her community, I guess she was the woman that all the other women gravitated to — she had many years of sobriety and she was in the Big Book. So, I was probing Deborah's memory for her knowledge and picking her brain for tidbits that would humanize Felicia. Deborah said that they'd go out to eat and the Countess always insisted on paying. However, when talking about life in A.A., back in the day when she was one of the very first women to ever be in Alcoholics Anonymous, she said, "We all just make it too complicated now. They all just went out and found drunks to work with." So, once again, it's really what we do to invest in the future of A.A. from our own energies and our mission-driven A.A., than anything else we can do. And with that I'd like to thank you all.

**Ted S.**, West Central Regional Trustee, 2000-2004

My talk today is about us, as members of Alcoholics Anonymous, and it's about you, as members in attendance at this forum, and your activity and action in service. When I was new and I came to my first service function, I had a sponsor. His sponsor was the current West Central Regional trustee and I remember him getting up and saying, "The most important person in this meeting this morning is the newest person in the meeting this morning. And for that we work our way up to nothing. That's what we do." If you are new here, I want you to know that. There is no hierarchy in Alcoholics Anonymous. The highest point we get to is sober and we carry that message.

I appreciated the comments from first time attendees. One of the fellows got up this morning and talked about leadership in Alcoholics Anonymous — the people you sponsor are the future leaders of Alcoholics Anonymous and that's why it's so important to sponsor them into service. That's exactly what happened to me — and it wasn't just general service, it was service in my group as well. Our mission is to carry that message to the still suffering alcoholic. A lot of it comes down to extending your hand and making contact. We do it through various other ways, as well, but that is what it comes down to.

This morning, we had an A.A. meeting here and it was based on a short reading from the Big Book. It was about how we all arrive in a position where we can't live with alcohol and we can't live without it. It's the lonely road that Bill wrote about. It's one of the loneliest spots and we

all know it in various degrees. Immediately, it hit home to me how important it is for one alcoholic to share with another. We carry our message to the still suffering alcoholic like no other entity can, and it's our responsibility to do that.

One person talked about leadership in Alcoholics Anonymous. He talked about having a workbook of some type that would be dedicated to leadership. I thought about that for a second, and then I thought, I learned everything I needed to know about leadership from the material we have in Alcoholics Anonymous, from the Big Book to the Twelve Traditions and Twelve Concepts. In the Concepts, Bill wrote about how we lead by example — we do not drive by mandate. That statement alone will move mountains. If you look at the best leaders, not just in A.A., but in business or whatever section of humanity you want, that's how they lead — by example. They do not drive by mandate.

Bill also stated that the good is the enemy of the best and I've never forgotten that. Some years later, a guy wrote a book about "good to great." I think he took it from Bill. He wrote about how good is the enemy of the best, and if we are the best and we can be better, then we need to be better, and we need to carry that message in the most effective manner we can. In today's society, things are changing, but our message will not change. However, sometimes the initial delivery, or other vehicles we may use, may change. We need to work through those things and be observant, because, as someone mentioned yesterday, we have a lot of gray-haired people here in the audience and we've got some very dedicated members. I have to remember that, too, and work with newcomers the best I can. There is no generation gap in Alcoholics Anonymous — you don't have to convince me of that, but sometimes we have to convince newcomers of that. It's just one drunk sharing with another. We need to continue to try to carry this message in the most effective manner.

The last thing I want to talk about is right here on our brochure, because it leads to leadership. It says that our next function is "to grow in understanding and effectiveness." That is exactly what Bill has written, that is exactly what this weekend is about, and that is what the G.S.O. is continually taking a look at — how can we grow in our effectiveness and understanding? And that's what your sharing helps us to do. Thank you.



**Carl B.**, West Central Regional Trustee, 1996-2000

I've sorted out in my own mind the two groups of people that attend regional forums: The whiz bangs and the diehards. The diehards are always there on Sunday when the crowd has thinned out and everybody else has gotten smart and gone home. I've always kind of secretly hoped that maybe the next trustee or the next delegate picked as one of our leaders is one of those diehards who stuck around for the Sunday morning meeting.

For me, these regional forums are like a substitute for those 3 and 4 day drunks I used to get on, back in my drinking days. I drank all the time, but I'd have to get on a tear once every 30, 60, or 90 days and spend about three or four days drinking. These things here have been kind of like a substitute for that. I can come on Friday night, stay up most of the night, start again on Saturday morning and get my high back as soon as I hear the laughter and noise in the meeting. On Sunday I taper down, get over it, and go home.

So, I got a letter from them saying they'd like for me to come and share at this meeting. It kind of perked my ego up a little bit. They said that we ex-trustees were the highlight of the regional forums. But then they said, "We only want you to talk for five minutes." I thought, Boy, I'm going to drive seven hundred miles to talk for five minutes and inspire those people in five minutes. My work is cut out for me. I'm not sure if I'm up to it. Then I thought, Well, I'll be competing with all those other people and one of them drove further than I did to talk 5 minutes, so he'll be the winner in that case. Then I got to thinking, Maybe that's not true. Maybe the reason they invited me to come and talk for only five minutes was because they needed lower companionship. So, you are going to have to make up your own mind whether it's lower companionship or an ego feeding proposition to drive 700 miles at your own expense to talk for 5 minutes.

Anyway, I've got to get serious, and I always hate to do that because it taxes my brain to get too serious, but these regional forums have been one of my favorite things to do in Alcoholics Anonymous. I was fortunate enough to attend the second regional forum that was ever put on. The first one was in Atlanta, Georgia, in the fall of 1975. The second one was in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, in March of 1976. I had a job clear across the state of Wyoming, and I wasn't invited, but I heard about it. I had not done a lot of service work and Wyoming really

had a poor service structure at that period in time. We were lagging way behind. The delegates then were picked by six or seven old timers who got together in a motel room and decided who the next guy was that they could trust to go to New York and represent the area. It was always someone who did not have a chance to be there yet. They didn't have any kind of system to pass it on or anything. I'd served as a D.C.M. for a while and I'd been elected to be the next area chair, and this was around March. I was supposed to have my first meeting in April and I was pretty worried that I wouldn't know what to do, so I thought, Maybe I'll learn it through the regional forum. It is something about service work, so I'll be able to do a better job. So I drove over there. When I got there, I didn't see another person from Wyoming. There were about 600 people there, but no one else was from Wyoming and nobody paid much attention to me. I stumbled around for the Friday night meeting and listened to what they had to say.

That forum was really something, because the people who dreamed up the forum system were all there. Dr. John N. — who we call “Dr. Jack.” was the chairman of the board at that time. With him was Bob P. who was the office manager at that time. He was a personal friend of Bill W.'s. Milton Maxwell and Gordon Patrick (both Class A) were there. Nell Wing was there, too. I got to meet all those people and had a chance to visit with them and talk to them. They were just so cordial. I'll never forget the first night, there had been (maybe it even exists somewhat today) the idea that there had been a difference between “them” (“them” were those New Yorkers) and “us” who were the backbone of A.A. No one had ever really had a chance to meet the people of the West Central Region, and very few of them had ever been to New York or to the General Service Office or had even seen one of those birds from New York. The Friday night meeting was pretty contentious because the A.A.s at that forum had a lot of criticism and questions about things they didn't think were going right and all that stuff. They had got to the microphone, and started picking things apart pretty well. I never will forget the lady they had brought with them from the G.S.O, it was Cora Louise B. That lady was really something. She had memorized *The A.A. Service Manual/Twelve Concepts for World Service* like the Bible. She could quote that A.A. Service Manual, chapter and verse. Someone from the audience asked a question from the microphone about the right thing to do. She would quietly get up, go to the microphone and say, “Well, the A.A. Service Manual suggests this . . .” and it would be a really nice, good answer to the question. Or somebody else would say

something, and she'd go to the microphone and say, "Well, the Traditions suggest that we do . . ." And after about an hour, she had disarmed that whole group. She just made them look and feel so foolish that they quit asking questions. I'll never forget how she did that, it was really something.

So, that was my experience 43 years ago. I'd been sober about seven years when I went to that forum. It got me started in a way that made me understand that if I was going to be involved in service work or do service work I had a responsibility to try and do the best that I could and find out how to do it — and do it like it should be done. You had to put something into it so you could get something out of it. I don't do service work because I'm a good guy. I hate good guys. I don't want to be a good guy. I don't want to be known as a good guy. I do it because I'm a bad alcoholic. That's the reason I do service work, because if I don't do this, I'll probably go back to doing the other thing, and I don't want to go back to doing the other thing because I am too old. So, for whatever reason we do service work for, if we are going to do it, we ought to do it, and do it right.

Doing it right, to me, is using the Traditions to get back the unity that we have lost over the years by not using the Traditions. I go to very few meetings where I hear a Tradition mentioned. [Not using] the Traditions are the backbone of the problem that we have today with the loss of unity. And we will never get unity back unless we start studying the Traditions and learning how to use them. A universal problem, I think, is it's too easy for people to teach us what to think. I went to school, and several of my teachers taught me what to think. When I learned what to think, I didn't think I needed to think anymore.

I think that's what we've done with the Traditions. If I had a problem, and I went to my sponsor and I said, "Oh, I'm having a real problem and it's eating my lunch, what should I do about it?" I then expected him to give me an answer, but he wouldn't give me any advice. He told me the worst vice in A.A. is *advice*. I said, "Well, you can tell me all these answers and make my life so much easier because you've had the experience. Just help me out and tell me how to solve this problem." He'd say, "Carl, I'm not going to do that." And I'd say, "Why?" He'd say, "Because you don't have any confidence in the decisions you make right now. If I told you, as

a sponsor, how to solve your problems, how would you ever get any confidence in making your own decisions?”

Well, thank God, he told me that — because he was right. I had no confidence at all in making my own decisions. I wanted him to tell me, I begged him to tell me, but he was smarter than that. Or he would tell me, “Carl, if you want an answer to that problem, what Step are you working? I’m not going to tell you the answer, but I suggest that you go back, look at the Twelve Steps, figure out what Step you’ve missed, what you are not doing right and what’s causing you to have these problems.” Well, that caused me to study the Twelve Steps and it taught me how to use them and it taught me *how* to look at the Twelve Steps instead of *what* to think about the Twelve Steps. I think we quit that — we are not doing that with the Twelve Traditions. We need to get back to understanding the Traditions ourselves, like we use the Twelve Steps to stay sober. If you read everything that Bill wrote about the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, he suggests that you have to give them equal opportunity if you’re going to have a healthy sobriety. And, if you are going to be in a healthy group you have to be in a group that understands how to use the Traditions in a group conscience meeting, or and how to develop the answers to the problems you’re arguing about by using the Twelve Steps to solve the problem.

I suggest that we start getting serious about learning about the Traditions, studying them, and using them to solve the problems we’ve got, instead of using our opinions, because we’ve all got opinions, and, like other parts of our anatomy, they all stink. Thank you!

# CLOSING REMARKS

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

I am Michele Grinberg and I am a very grateful class A (nonalcoholic) trustee. I love A.A. and I do the best that I can to practice these principles in all of my affairs. I have many “thank yous,” but in the interest of time, I’m going to collectively thank each of you for your contributions that made this West Central Regional Forum such an outstanding event.

I see my job, at regional forums, to be a good listener. I’ve taken lots of notes about your concerns, as well as your ideas, and I will forward them to the boards for discussion, as appropriate. I will also read my notes as I am flying home; it helps me to put the whole weekend together and to gain some perspective on what I’ve learned.

At every regional forum, I hear an unofficial theme emerge. At this forum, it was this quote: “The realm of the spirit is roomy.” For me, that means we are tolerant when we are in the realm of A.A. I saw warmth and tolerance around a variety of passionate opinions and passionate people. A.A. is special — I expect that there will be passion on all sides of an issue. There always is. It’s healthy — people are warm and caring despite having very strong differences of opinion. Why? Because the realm of the A.A. spirit is roomy. The challenge that I see — and that I will be thinking about — is identifying the barriers that keep people separated from the help, the warmth, and the love that can be found here. And how do we try to break through the barriers so that people will find A.A. attractive, will find service attractive, will get involved and experience the joy and continuing growth that we’ve been a part of this weekend? If you wish, I invite you to think about it as well.

There were many things that I heard this weekend that resonated with me. Here are just a few: There was lots of enthusiasm and questions around our digital communications and public information efforts. There were inclusion concerns — who would join us if they knew they were welcome? More of those who are deaf, blind, or have other accessibility issues might want to be here — if they knew they were welcome. What more can we do? Also — young people in A.A., or YPAAs. Each of us, I believe, strives to find a safe place to be who we are and to grow in our programs of recovery. A.A. happens when people identify and begin

to feel hope. Young people are making their space within A.A. I've seen it. But are we welcoming them enough into the greater A.A. community? Even if we don't agree with how they've defined their grouping, what more can we do to make a home for young people in A.A.? To state the obvious, they are the next generation of leaders.

In addition, the elderly, the Hispanic community, and other minorities are not in the rooms. Can we go to where they are? Should we? Is that Twelfth Step work? Sometimes folks just want to be invited to the party. Have we extended the invitation? I also heard fabulous, great sharing from your trusted servants — the delegates. I heard, among many things, "If I want to feel included, I need to be inclusive." And, stated by another delegate: "Tolerance is a two-way street." I heard: "Negative thoughts and suspicious motives can be erased, or at least lessened with the realization that it's "we" — not "us" and "them." I heard a wonderful comment about virtues (I don't know if it was said exactly, but this is how I heard it): "The virtue of respect includes tolerance." It reminded me of a comment by a delegate at the Conference that knocked my socks off: "It's entirely more important how we treat each other than what we get done."

From the workshops and the questions and comments from the floor, I heard that we must rely on our spiritual principles and, specifically, our Steps, Traditions and Concepts. Every individual in a meeting is responsible for providing a safe environment. Again, these are things that I heard. We need to learn to listen better and to understand people who aren't like us. We need to set aside our notions and listen. The irony isn't lost on me that it was the deaf members here who brought home to me the idea about being a better listener. When I am truly listening, it's with my brain and my heart.

From the floor I heard somebody say that they were grateful because we "talk and talk — and we talk some more." Through that, we learn to listen. So, in processing everything I heard this weekend, including the wonderful talks today from your trusted servant past trustees, I came away with some questions to consider. I hope that you will too, and that you'll "talk and talk — and talk some more." What more can each of us do to assure that A.A. is welcoming to all? How can we communicate better with each other and spread a genuine enthusiasm for

service? And how can we encourage more folks of all ages and backgrounds into our wonderful service structure?

As Bill wrote, “Honesty with ourselves and others gets us sober, but it is tolerance that keeps us that way.” Let’s continue to communicate with each other about our issues with love and tolerance in this roomy, spiritual home we call A.A