

NORTHEASTERN VIRTUAL FORUM

FINAL REPORT

June 4-6, 2021

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

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INTRODUCTION

The 2021 North Eastern Virtual Forum was held on June 4-6, 2021. Registration for the Forum was **1,044** This included **577** members attending their very first Forum.

Dear A.A. Friends,

Please mark your calendar for the upcoming 2021 *Virtual*
Regional Forums:

West Central September 10-12

Southwest October 8-10

East Central November 19-21

UNANSWERED ASK-IT BASKET QUESTIONS

Q. AA allows us to download AA literature in English as a pdf, once. We cannot download non-English literature as a pdf - we can only purchase in paper. With COVID-19, as we do PI work, we are finding institutions only want AA literature digitally. PI committees want to pay GSO to purchase AA literature as PDFs that we give away. The response to our inquiry from GSO staff is that purchasing pdfs is not available at present. Seems like AAWS needs to address this quickly to protect our copyrights and GSO revenue and to have the hand of AA there digitally. Thank you!

The Publishing Department at the General Service Office (G.S.O.) shares that this expressed need and suggestion from Northwest Regional Public Information committees is taken seriously. Making our items of literature accessible digitally is an ongoing focus at G.S.O.

The G.S.O. Literature Desk reports that since the onset of the pandemic G.S.O. has received some shared experience on the general topic of carrying the A.A. message in virtual settings. G.S.O.'s Publishing Department reviewed and supports the use of glideapps to access to A.A. literature in virtual meeting settings. From posts (<https://tiaa-forum.org/>) in the Technology in AA online community a description of glideapps is available:

English ... <http://area8aalinks2aalit.glideapp.io/>

Spanish ... <https://areas8aafolletos.glideapp.io/>

Some efforts groups have shared with G.S.O. related to carrying the A.A. message in virtual settings through literature:

- Announcements listing websites such as aa.org and local intergroup offices to access A.A. literature, including pdf files that are viewable and downloadable.
- Posting A.A. literature in the chat feature.
- Offer to newcomers the option of receiving A.A. literature by postal mail service.

Q. Kevin or Al: How can AAs attract professionals?

R. Beyond the CPC work that AA already does, I think it's important for people in the professional community who care about AA to know what opportunities there are to help and what role the non-alcoholic professional can play. As someone very familiar with the fellowship my whole life, until someone called me about serving on the General Service Board, my understanding was that help from outsiders was not only not needed, but not wanted (i.e., Seventh Tradition.) I think that narrative can be changed, but given AA's independent spirit you might get more than you asked for.

WORKSHOP REPORTS

Session A: 11AM-11:55 AM EST

What are we doing to radically reach out, increase participations?

Moderator: Tom B. Reporter: Tom B.

Help members to understand what service below the group is, and does. Ask chairs of meetings and service meetings to vary the format. Devote more meetings to reading books re the history of A.A.; As Bill Sees It; etc. Make sure 12 Step sponsors also explain the importance of being involved in service. Move forward with plain-language Big Book; not everyone has the opportunity to go through the Big Book with a sponsor. Take members along to service events, don't just tell them about it. Be a role model for why service is important, and fun.

Going into (e.g.) a linguistic district, make sure to explore service committee opportunities as well. SHOW EXCITEMENT ABOUT DOING SERVICE! Keep using different formats in meetings, include service. Keep it simple – don't overwhelm members with data.

Why are there only two shades at meetings? Add a Concepts shade, stimulate conversation. Strive for inclusion – ALL members should be given the opportunity to experience service below the group. Bring GSRs – AND other members – along to District [and Area] meetings. Don't just talk about service – show people what it's about, walk through it with them. Share about service, before, during, and after meetings about service – use every opportunity. Share at recovery meetings how service has enhanced our own sobriety. Live in the Steps – it may cause people to listen more closely when we talk about service. Use the secretary's report during meetings to invite members to participate in service below the group. Stress the importance of rotation – not only to involve new members, but also to keep members from making it "their" commitment over a long period of time. Share our service experiences with our service sponsor, so that they can be passed on further. Always be available to new GSRs (and other interested members) to take them through the Traditions.

What are we doing to radically reach out, increase participation?

Moderator: Tom B. Reporter: Melissa J. Speakers: Paola A., Nisaa A., Scott M.

Purpose: brainstorming session, think outside the box; questions for 2 audiences

1. If you are already involved in service below the group level: What approach have you already experienced that has been effective in getting people involved in service; or what new approach can you think of that you have not yet seen tried?
2. And if you are NOT involved in service below the group level: What is your biggest reservation, and what might change your mind?

Tom - presented back to the Intergroup in home county on the 71st General Service Conference.

Scott and Paola – Discussed progression in 2018 from Box 459 article about Hispanic women's groups in CA into series of safety workshops geared toward the Hispanic members throughout Area 49, culminating with more participation by women in the Area Linguistic district, and increased awareness of all involved re safety – and inclusion.

Nisaa – shakes up Area agendas for Committee Meetings and Assemblies; keeps these focused but fun; invites participation; shows enthusiasm

Attendees' feedback:

- Being told to get involved in service (instead of asked) was a deterrent. Showing her enthusiasm in her commitment helped to get others involved. Found that offering to share meeting formats was helpful for others looking to start new meetings.
- Started a new meeting where they read historical A.A. literature to teach people about A.A. and service. She asks other people their experience in how to get people more involved.
- 12 step service, sponsorship, should include an intro to service, like the traditions and the concepts. Does not think enough people take them through all principles. Talked about the plain language big book might make AA more accessible and might help members to be excited to get involved in service. Believes that a big book study edition will make our fellowship more accessible, thereby making service more accessible.
- Keep sharing ideas! Other people listen and it creates a ripple effect. She brings people to service with her. Guides sponsees to service. Lead by example.
- Invited Spanish speaking members to speak at jails and it has been helpful. Works with MCDs in Spanish district to help them expand their services. Reached out to the Nassau county commission of the blind. Were able to give literature to this commission that was in brail. Invited the president of the commission of the blind to a unity breakfast to build community. Talk about ideas because other people might have similar ideas.
- Keep things simple, sponsorship, mentorship. Asking questions. Remind people it is just one day at a time. Normalize the fear. Get fired up when you give your report, make people excited to do service with you. Find people who can demystify things. Share information with others. When we are passionate, other people will want it. Maybe outreach to community colleges and public airways.
- Keep it simple. Often there are only two shades on the wall, not the three legacies. Have your group add the third shade. Helps people to ask questions about service. Said he can invite members that are women, LGBT, Spanish speaking into H&I and corrections commitments. Women have a different experience. Always important to be diverse in speaker choices. Open to the experiences of different people. Lean into our own discomfort. We need to learn new things to grow. That is what our steps teach us!
- Bringing a friend to the district meeting. Talks about the service stuff she is doing in typical A.A. meetings. Share in the chat the upcoming service events that are upcoming. Make service look attractive.
- Talk about how service enriches his life when he shares. Take service commitments that force you to learn new things. Talk about how service helps him in his personal life. Show up when he says he is going to. Talks about three sides of the triangle. Ask others for suggestions, how we can do things better, what is good and what could be improved. Ask for help.

- Sharing before/during/after meeting in how service helps him take the steps. Was missing pieces in step one until he started doing service. Talks about it often. Invites people to go to events.
- Attending a lot of virtual gatherings. Brings that information to a google group. Brought that information to committees. Starts their area meetings with “why we have a conference” and discusses the importance of prayer before business.
- Sharing information with members after attending different events. Keep a document with upcoming events that she can copy and paste information into the chat. Sharing experience about service to others. Invite people.
- Offer to take people through the traditions after speaking at traditions meetings. Did a traditions workshop for new members in the county to help them understand their roles.
- Talks about events he is excited to attend. Have attractive sobriety and share experience.

The Third Tradition – Heat of A.A.

Moderator: Michael K. Reporter: Clay T.

After some research to prepare for this workshop two questions came to the moderator:

- 1) How can we keep the door to recovery open?
- 2) How can we widen the doorway?

The moderator quoted Bill Wilson “On Talking on 12 Traditions - Part 3” - filmed in 1969 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M8Rz7fufUJ8> . “So therefore we should keep this door wide open; we cannot put any strictures upon it, and we bind ourselves not to. We cannot compel the new man to believe anything, to pay anything, to do anything. We actually invite him to disagree with everything we say, and still, if he wishes to stay around, he is in A.A. if he says so. This is the charter of individual freedom that is portrayed in this most important Tradition Three, dealing with membership.”

The moderator closed by saying there is interplay among the 36 spiritual principles of AA – the Steps, Traditions and Concepts. Tradition Six says how we thought that if this program solved our alcohol problem, it must be capable of solving practically any other. Learned by experience to keep it simple. Concept Four says the right to participate is born of the alcoholic’s spiritual need to belong. And changing the Preamble wording from “men and women” to “people” is an example of increasing inclusiveness, and that the decision was the collective group conscience of the fellowship as expressed through our General Service Conference.

The workshop was opened to comments from participants. The following are a substantive sample of all comments.

Suggestions:

- Why is Barry E., author of “Living Sober” not brought up more in discussions about the Third Tradition?

- I think the Long Form of Tradition Three should be emphasized much more in our literature. Too often AAs are only aware of the short version.

Concerns/Fears:

- In AA we have a singleness of purpose. It scares me when people talk about their struggles with drugs during meetings. Today alcoholism and drug abuse go hand-in-hand so often.
- All this talk of inclusivity, and changing the preamble, is a guise to take over A.A. with outside issues.

Comfort/Resources:

- I take comfort that Tradition Three gives me the right to belong.
- Tradition Three calls us to practice Tolerance and Patience.
- [We] must make a stand when seeing bias. Reference materials helpful in examining these questions: 1957 Bill Wilson Speaks on Singleness of Purpose; 1958 Bill W.'s thoughts on Problems Other Than Alcohol appearing in the Grapevine; February 1948 Grapevine editorial, Bill W. on the 5th Tradition (see pg. 79 Language of the Heart).
- We should not be led by fear, doubt and insecurity. We should be open, honest about our fears, and have willingness to change.

Session B: 2:30 PM-3:25 PM EST

“Virtual Meetings: from an Accessibility Perspective”

Moderator: Paul H.

My name is Paul, and I am an alcoholic and I have the privilege of serving as the panel 70 Delegate from Area 31 Western Massachusetts, on the Treatment & Accessibility Committee.

I would like to welcome everyone to this workshop. I will start by talking about the many benefits of having so many more virtual accessible meetings during this exceedingly difficult time.

I am a member of the Friday night Wilbraham, MA. group and Virtual meetings have helped allow several past group members that have moved out of State, live in a nursing home, or are homebound to attend our virtual meeting. It is so good to see them. It was interesting to learn from my friend Tom that A.A. was making use of online/virtual meetings long before I ever thought about it, as demonstrated by the statement below from the fourth edition of the Big Book's forward in November 2001. "Taking advantage of technological advances, for example, A.A. members with computers can participate in meetings online, sharing with fellow alcoholics across the country or around the world. In any meeting, anywhere, A.A.'s share experience, strength, and hope with each other, in order to stay sober and help other alcoholics. Modem-to-modem or face-to-face, A.A.'s speak the language of the heart in all its power and simplicity."

I think it is important to look at how the forced changes that we have undergone have brought about new ways to reach newcomers, and those needing

accessibility accommodations, that we simply could not make before. The single parent can now attend a meeting without needing to find or pay for childcare, and they have a mute button when they need it. The visually impaired have an easier means to join a meeting, voice assisted or by conference call. The deaf can take advantage of closed captioning that is now built into all major video conferencing apps. Immuno-compromised individuals can safely attend a meeting online. Things may not ever be exactly like they were before, but there is not any reason that the new normal cannot be better than the old normal. Those that now find A.A. more accessible will share that sentiment. I have talked about the wonderful benefits of virtual meetings and now will talk a bit about them as an accessibility challenge for some and ways of overcoming those challenges. A longtime member of A.A. from my home group recently moved out of State to an assisted living facility. He has been sober well over 30 years and always attended several meetings a week when he was able. Shortly after moving the pandemic hit and he has not been able to attend A.A. meetings for the past year. Early on the staff at the facility were able to help him get access to virtual meetings in his room, but it took a month or two to really understand that he became more agitated and upset while attending virtual meetings and could not fully explain why. He said he did not want to attend any more virtual meetings. After doing some research on this topic and having further discussions with him he said it bothers him to attend a virtual meeting and he gets more agitated when he attends them.

At this same time, there were many National newspapers and magazines that were publishing stories about people that have an aversion to virtual meetings. This appeared to be what was happening with him. I discussed this with a fellow North East Regional Panel 70 Delegate who had recently been assigned to the Treatment Accessibility committee. I told him I was thinking that maybe he would like hearing CDs of A.A. speakers. It was amazing to me that my friend said he had a lot of A.A. speakers on CDs from various conventions over the years and he send me 25 CDs.

I purchased a small CD player and sent the CD player and CDs to the person in the assisted living facility. This has worked very well, and he can now listen to a speaker whenever he wants. We may need to get him some new CDs in the future, but this has helped him immensely.

I did some further research on this issue, and some of what I found focused on reports that science can explain some of this aversion to virtual meetings. For example, following two statements helped me to better understand why virtual meetings do not work for everyone. Kate Murphy, the author of [You're Not Listening: What Your Missing and Why It Matters](#) states in her book, "The problem is that the way the video images are digitally encoded and decoded, altered, and adjusted, patched, and synthesized introduces all kinds of artifacts: blocking, freezing, blurring, jerkiness, and out-of-sync audio. These disruptions, some below our conscious awareness, confound perception and scramble subtle social cues. Our brains strain to fill in the gaps and make sense of the disorder, which makes us feel vaguely disturbed, uneasy, and tired without quite knowing why." Owen Hughes stated in CXO on April 27th, 2020 "In a nut shell, video meetings make it harder to pick up on social cues we would get when speaking face-to-face, making it trickier to judge when it is our turn to speak, or when someone wants to chime in. At the same time, the lack of eye contact and physical distance between participants often gives the video meetings an

impersonal, robotic quality that can stall conversations” I am very thankful for the opportunity to share this information here today and am really looking forward to the discussion that will begin now.

“Accessibility to A.A. in a Virtual World”

Moderator: Paul H. Reporter: Mike B.

A member with a disability has found virtual as an avenue for her to participate in the service structure. A DCM has heard from a few groups that are reluctant to continue a hybrid presence. The DCM speculates fear and the want for things to go back to the way things were pre pandemic. Many members are citing our anonymity traditions as a reason why they do not want to participate in virtual. Awareness has been boosted from our isolation regarding the internet and virtual meetings, and that is the silver lining from the pandemic. Anonymity issues can be dealt with by turning off your video or a group doing hybrid can place the camera pointing to a fixed object instead of pointing at the crowd in the room. A concern about losing members once groups go back to in person and stop using a virtual presence. Some are concerned with the cost of doing hybrid after the pandemic and that it could be cost prohibited. A way of helping the newer member who has only known virtual. Reach people through the home group. The aversion to virtual may be the science behind it for some of the members and groups not wanting to participate.

“Who ‘s Missing from our Rooms?”

Moderator: Jon C. Reporter: Dani M.

Our presenter, Jon C., opened the “Who is Missing in Our Rooms?” workshop with statistics of the proportional disparities of alcoholics of different races, religions, sexes, cultures, ages, etc. in the rooms. More importantly, he posed the question, “What are we doing about it?” Members shared who they see missing in their areas, and they shared solutions or suggestions they have tried or are willing to try to create a welcoming fellowship for all. Outreaching, advertising, using technology and virtual platforms, and providing safe environments were among some of the actions suggested we can take to help these “world-weary souls like us” join in. Other ideas for attraction included having a less defined higher power, more diversity and inclusion pamphlets, and specialty groups. However, it was mentioned that some specialty groups have merged with mainstream meetings because of the acceptance and openness of the group members; the reward was found in the effort. Whether by ourselves or in a group, when we use the spiritual principles and our literature, when we take responsibility to be of service, and when we begin to listen to individuals with open arms and minds, we create the environment we need to carry the message that A.A. is all-inclusive because we have a singleness of purpose. For that...We are responsible.

Session C: 6:45 PM-7:40 PM EST

“Singleness of Purpose in Corrections Service” (Moderator: Todd D., Reporter: Cindy D.)

We got through 19 sets of questions and shares. Here are some of the items that were brought up:

- Remember we are a visitor at the facility, and we are supposed to follow the rules
- There are meetings inside that are open and closed but in some “local Jails” we need to focus on our primary purpose
- Make sure we let all persons inside know that we have principles and most importantly what they are
- Clip on ties help in jail LOL
- How many Big Book studies are inside and it was noted that in the solid groups use the Big Book and read from it
- Identify! Just be you
- Make sure no matter where you go share why we are alcoholics and how we got to the point of knowing we are alcoholics
- For any situation that occurs just size up what to do next and let God run the show
- Teach what Singleness Of Purpose really is
- Get involved in Corrections and remember if you don’t what to go inside you can do correspondence
- When members complain that Corrections is just too hard or it is tough to get in to explain why it is that way
- Just be yourself
- Zoom in corrections is awesome
- Remind the members inside that the only difference between us is you are here
- Be safe inside
- When there is big turnover in the prison remember we are there to just carry the message

“Singleness of Purpose in CFC Work”

Moderator: Todd D.

I’m humbled and honored to be presenting this most interesting topic on Singleness of Purpose in Correctional Service. I also feel very lucky to have such an open-ended topic, as it gave me a great deal of material to work with. What I mean by that is, I had the ability to put my spin on this and be entertaining while being informative (remember we are not a glum lot; it says so in the book) or I could be serious and focus on how to deal with questions based on my experience.

I am going to act like a good trusted servant and give the facts as they relate to my experience and of course sneak in a few of my own opinions. Mostly though I will apply the traditions to the task because any time I’m doing anything A.A. that is geared towards service I look to the traditions, the concepts and the warranties to guide me.

The 12 steps, 12 traditions and 12 concepts will be very important because you see today, we are going to talk about what can really happen when you are carrying the message into correctional facilities and how our Primary Purpose ensures we do one thing and do it well. It is not my goal to tell you how to carry the message and stay focused on our primary purpose, it is not my goal to get you involved in Corrections but what I would like to do is look at various situations that occur when you're carrying the message behind the walls in hopes it will spark discussion. I have decided that my service today is to be informative so that you, the servants of AA can make informed decisions based on your own questions and answers.

Let's start this out with a bit of background. I've been taking meetings into New York State prisons since 1992. Yes, I have taken a couple of short breaks, when my son was born and when my wife had cancer, but other than that I have consistently gone into the facilities. As we all know consistency is the key to having a good meeting inside the facilities plus it allows the "Persons In Custody" to count on having a meeting. I personally know how important it is to be consistent in going into the facilities I can remember only too well being sober in a maximum-security penitentiary and not having a meeting to go to. Fortunately, I did have the Grapevine and a Big Book.

Maybe I should come up with a controversial statement to get us going. That is always fun but wait, oh, yea I am not here to be controversial but maybe I can stir your passion.

How about we look at some examples of things that I have experienced in correctional facilities and what happened. Then if that does not spark questions and discussion you can all tell me what I did wrong (LOL) or right.

The first thing I am going to address is how we deal with the folks who say they are not an alcoholic but need to be there for parole. When this happens, I first check if the meeting is an open or closed meeting and if it is an open meeting then there is no issue but what if it is closed what then? Do we ask them to leave or do we try to educate? Remember our goal here is to carry the message to the still suffering alcoholic, so what do you think? What is the best thing to do? Or what about the addicts that say they are only an addict? Again, this provides the opportunity to get to know people and to share our experience, strength and hope. Me personally, I ask others and myself to share how they decided they were alcoholics. Most of all we let everyone know we can help you with your alcohol problem. Now the question still remains do we just let it go or not? What do you think?

What about when you have issues or arguments and even threats between "Persons In Custody"? There is a culture in prison that must be put aside during the meetings but how do we do that? Here is an actual thing that happened at a meeting where there were about 30 men in the room. Once it was just us alcoholics in the room. The guards had left. One of the newer members was being berated and threatened by another member because he did not care for the nature of his crime and took offense in being in the same room with this person. As the situation quickly escalated the only thing that I could do was to calmly yet firmly get between the two of them and say remember this is an A.A. meeting and we cannot have fights in the rooms. I let them know if we have a problem here that requires the guards then we may not have a meeting next week and that hurts us all. I further went on to say in the rooms of AA we never look down at an Alcoholic unless we are picking them up and we never ever demean or make someone feel persecuted. Hey

isn't that one of the Warranties? It was a tense meeting, but as the hour went by most everyone focused on the topic and on our primary purpose.

I know it is not important to this discussion, but I can tell you that the two men that were arguing ended up in the hall after the meeting and a scuffle did occur as they left. Later the inmate that started it apologized to me and the group for bringing an outside issue into a meeting. The newer member with the unsavory conviction ended up being transferred to a different facility.

So in closing, I know I have not fully addressed the answers to the questions but then I am just one voice in A.A. that knows as a group we determine what is and what is not done in A.A. As my sponsor was so fond of saying "What do you think..."

La Vina Workshop

Moderator: Karina C.

Karina C., Associate La Viña Editor, gave a report on the latest updates at La Viña. An introductory video was played giving an overview of the new daily quote SMS service, recently released book, "Mujeres en AA", as well as the online and digital products now available to members and the 25th anniversary of the magazine. Karina then gave an overview of the website, to help members familiarize themselves with where to find information with the new layout, and invited members to try out the page as part of Grapevine and La Viña's temporary free access to all online content during that week. While members did not have questions or feedback, they messaged their gratitude for the information. The workshop closed a few minutes early.

PRESENTATIONS

Presentation Reports

8:20-8:45 PM EST Session A Presentations

Fun in Service Work--- Nikki O., Delegate Panel 70, Area 28 Maine

My name is Nikki, I am an alcoholic. I am grateful for the invitation to participate in the first ever virtual, Northeast Regional Forum.

Fun in Service work, it seems like an antipodal statement. I thought that as I was feeling uncomfortable in my recovery, and was edged to Service by my sponsor. I arrived at my first Area Assembly, unknowing of what took place. There were cafeteria tables set up with handmade signs indicating which District was sitting where, and as I looked to find a place I could fit in, I noticed mounds of candy, kazooos, pinwheels and people laughing and talking with one another. I thought about what I had heard from others; how people were arguing and politicking, consuming the room at these events. I nestled in next to a few people I recognized from another district and they welcomed me. They did a great job of helping me to get acquainted, and even provided me a copy of the Service Manual. I figured I'd throw that in some box when I got home never to be seen again, but I found myself a bit interested in what was going on in this room full of strangers.

I attended the next Assembly, this time I brought a few people along. I made a super cool District ID for the table and made sure to have candy, some stress balls and homemade cookies- I figured if my travel compatriots got antsy- they could join me in eating sugar and acting foolish. I was having fun getting ready for the event, at the event, and on the way home talking about what had transpired. My musketeers were not impressed. They talked about not understanding why we would argue about one word in our Guidelines, when they were guidelines not rules. I thought about how much fun I had, and asked how we could make this fun for them next time. One of them said, there is nothing fun about Service- I immediately had my mission. I wanted to be involved in making Service work at the Area level fun. I hoped it would sprout up to the districts and groups. Over the years I have recognized- this isn't for everyone, Service happens at all levels, not everyone has to want to spend their weekends "arguing" over a pamphlet, or talking about finances. Some people want to make coffee and thank God for the coffee makers. As Delegate to the 70th and 71st General Service Conference, I thought bringing the fun along into my position was especially important. During a pandemic, which was keeping us from meeting in person, what could we do? Service work still needed to be done, the treatment centers and correctional facilities needed us more than ever. We had the virtual platform in place and a few of my panel members stepped up to the plate. We had workshops (we called them funshops), we had "visitors" from other Areas, share and speak about Service topics, we had the cream of the crop sharing (if you didn't get a chance and you are cream of the crop- there is still time). We had virtual dance parties, karaoke, Halloween parties, Holiday alcahthons that lasted 24 hours. All the time planning, coordinating and organizing, I recognized that Service work is a ton of fun for me- but most importantly it brings me joy. Nothing feels like watching someone have that proverbial light click on, when they get it- they understand the connection to our recovery and the work we do. I've heard in A.A. that once you are a pickle, you can never be a cucumber again. Service work is like that too. Once you have that feeling of Service joy, we chase it. We long for the exhilaration that comes from that third legacy procedure that puts our sponsees into positions that we have been prepping them for. We've prepped them through working out of the Service Manual, sharing transportation to Service events and being available for questions that arise. One of my most joyful moments was when my sponsorship family came to a "surprise" Zoom anniversary party and my Service sponsor and a huge group of A.A. friends from around North America were all present. My sponsee was getting ready to celebrate one year and was shocked that A.A. stretched beyond our immediate area. She experienced the feeling of being a grain of sand among many. Now, that is fun. She left to attend her homegroup that evening and landed an AA job. She since has brought the Service Manual into the business meetings and refers to pages that we have highlighted. We talk about the importance of Recovery, Unity, and Service.

I am looking forward to continuing the Concepts Workshop that 4 of us Panel 70 delegates got together to offer. In September, Area 28 is having a Fall Festival (really an AA job Fair) with Area Committee Chairs sharing their experience, strength and hope, Area Officers providing a barbequed meal and a guest speaker who will focus on the importance of Service at all levels.

The times I have had fun in Service are easy to share with others. Trying to convince others that they will have fun too is a bit more difficult. But the joy, that I have from doing a 12-Step

call, answering questions or helping to find the answers, and other versions of serving the fellowship, are what attract others to Service.

I believe that sharing my joy is the attraction. If I am not attracting people to Service through joy, that is on me. Dr. Bob said it best on pages 180 & 181 in the Big Book "I spend a great deal of time passing on what I learned to others who want and need it badly. I do it for four reasons: 1. Sense of duty 2. It is a pleasure 3. Because in so doing I am paying my debt to the man who took time to pass it on to me 4. Because every time I do, I take out a little more insurance for myself against a possible slip." Thank you.

Service Sponsorship --- Matt K., Delegate Panel 71, Area 11 Connecticut

So many of my meaningful A.A. experiences stem back to service sponsorship. When I asked someone to be my service sponsor, I had no idea what I was in for. I then entered a world of road trips to service assemblies, countless growth opportunities, trips to international conventions, more friendships than I could ever imagine, and a steady course of staying neck-deep in Alcoholics Anonymous.

Because of service sponsorship, I learned many spiritual lessons. I was shown the importance of having integrity and keeping my word. I was taught that A.A. service is an important place to demonstrate excellent customer service because we might be the only example of general service someone meets. This means striving to treat every service-related phone call and email with enough care that it catches the other person by surprise. My service sponsor enlightened me that when I stop wasting time trying to arrange life to suit myself, suddenly many more hours become available to be useful. Above all else, my service sponsor instilled in me that the most important things I do in A.A. are those things I do when nobody is watching.

Service sponsorship pushes me to my outermost limits. My mind will always have me believe that certain things are unattainable. Luckily, my service sponsor reminds me that I cannot trust my alcoholic thinking. I am prompted to be wary of settling for "good enough" rather than considering how "good is the enemy of the best." Today I know it IS possible to find a replacement American Sign Language interpreter at the last moment. It IS possible to be a young person involved in Area service. It IS possible to rearrange one's entire schedule on a moment's notice to drive two hours and give a presentation. It IS possible to redistrict during a pandemic. It IS possible to say "yes" whenever someone asks for help. It IS possible to have an Area service position while also juggling demanding professional commitments. Without service sponsorship, I would convince myself that none of that is possible.

In addition to the countless spiritual lessons, service sponsorship has also taught me many informational points. I learned that the first essays written on the Twelve Traditions by co-founder Bill W. appeared in the A.A. Grapevine several years before the book *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* was written. I learned that there is a difference between A.A. Conference-Approved literature and A.A. literature in general. I learned that service material from the General Service Office does not require Conference-approval. I learned that when we make contributions to support the General Service Office, we are technically making the

contribution to the General Service Board before it makes its way to funding the office. I learned that Article 8 of the General Service Conference Charter indicates that Area Delegates, District Committee Members, and General Service Representatives should all serve terms concurrently. All this information is readily available in our literature, but it was through service sponsorship that it came alive for me.

While service sponsorship might take many forms, my experience with it is strenuous. We met together, one on one, going over the Traditions and Concepts. We read line-by-line, highlighting the text, and writing in the margins. We studied the A.A. Service Manual cover to cover—including the appendices. I was given homework assignments and was urged to incorporate service-related matters into my 11th step practice. Most importantly, we spent time—lots of time. This was not some form of second-class sponsorship, nor was it simply a matter of being told: “give me a call when you have questions.” We had an *experience* together and we continue to *enlarge* upon that experience to this day.

Having the ability to service sponsor others has been an absolute joy. I try my best to pass on what was given to me, leaning on two important ingredients: (1) using A.A. literature as the guide; and (2) spending adequate time. If a service sponsee justifies their beliefs by simply stating “my service sponsor told me so,” that means I have done a terrible job. Using A.A. *literature* as the basis for service sponsorship allows the A.A. message to guide the discussion, rather than my message. I remember how insecure I felt the first time someone asked me to service sponsor them. My service sponsor said: “Listen, if you simply read A.A. literature with another alcoholic, magic will always happen.” That has been my experience. My service sponsor also reminded me about the other important ingredient: spending adequate time. Effective service sponsorship requires time. This is not always convenient. As a reminder, Chapter 5 of the Big Book (“How it Works”) contains a few powerful phrases: “rigorous honesty,” “strenuous effort,” and “vigorous action.” When I find myself fighting the idea of giving service sponsorship ample time, I need to be reminded that I almost died from alcoholism, that I am on borrowed time, and that I would be nothing without Alcoholics Anonymous.

Young People in A.A. --- Caroline N., Delegate Panel 71, Area 59 Eastern Pennsylvania

Hello, everyone! My name is Caroline and I’m an alcoholic. My sobriety date is April 8, 2004. I am grateful to say I have never had a legal drink; I got sober two months before my 21st birthday. I currently serve Area 59, Eastern Pennsylvania, as the Panel 71 Delegate to the General Service Conference. Thank you for the opportunity to give this presentation on the topic of “Young People in A.A.” I have heard that “young” means anyone who is young at heart or with room to grow, although the Big Book with its footnote on page 34 in the chapter “More About Alcoholism” and the “Young People and A.A.” pamphlet (P-4) refer to young people as “under the age of 30.” Previous membership surveys show that approximately 10- to 20-percent of A.A. members are under the age of 30.

I became active in young people’s groups in early sobriety and found others who, like me, had never had a legal drink. Others who had had access to alcohol thanks to older siblings or lenient parents, fake IDs, shoulder-tapping, and fraternity parties. Others who would go out to the diner after midnight meetings. I found a strong culture of fellowship and of service.

Doing the steps, reading the literature, sponsoring others, and taking service commitments was just what we did.

Young People's groups in Alcoholics Anonymous began appearing around 1945 in Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and Cleveland, including the first one here in the Northeast Region which was in Philadelphia and called the "35 and Under Group" which met Mondays at 8:15 p.m. at the 4021 Clubhouse at 4021 Walnut Street.

In 1958, a meeting of young A.A.s from across the U.S. and Canada started what is now the International Conference of Young People in Alcoholics Anonymous (ICYPAA). Two years later, in 1960, Bill W. noted that the age of new members was much lower than when he and Dr. Bob founded A.A. 25 years earlier. In a letter to ICYPAA in Philadelphia dated June 15, 1969, Bill wrote "In recent years I have found nothing for greater inspiration than the knowledge that A.A. of tomorrow will be safe, and certainly magnificent, in the keeping of you who are the younger generation of A.A. today."

A total of three ICYPAA's have been held here in Eastern Pennsylvania. All hosted in Philadelphia, these took place in 1960, 1969, and 1976. First, in 1960, the 3rd annual ICYPAA was held at the Benjamin Franklin Hotel at 9th and Chestnut Streets, with a theme of Unity/Action/Growth. The newsletter announcing the conference said, "It will also be just plain fun and feature everything that goes with a weekend of pleasure except the hangovers." Nine years later, in 1969, the 12th ICYPAA was held again at the Benjamin Franklin Hotel, with the theme of A.A. World Wide. The conference program featured staff from the General Service Office, as well as panels by members of Al-Anon, Alateen, the medical profession, and the clergy. The last time the conference was here in Eastern Pennsylvania was the 19th ICYPAA in 1976, coinciding with the nation's Bicentennial. This time, it was held at the University of Pennsylvania, and the theme was The Spirit of 76. After the conference, the Vice President of the United States at the time, Norman Rockefeller, wrote a letter to the committee congratulating them on a job well done. He said, "All can find strength in your success, for you are shining examples of what we can accomplish with a confidence in ourselves and a faith in one another. Yours is truly a proud record of dedication and achievement, and one that is in the best spirit of our nation." Some of the workshops were "God As I Don't Understand Her," "KISS, Keep it Simple Stupid," and "The Right Way to Take Someone Else's Inventory." *The New York Times* published an article about that ICYPAA, which was reportedly attended by over 1,000 members, and mentioned that "Frisbees were passed out at the registration desk and Slick Willie and his band played at the dance."

When I moved back to Philadelphia to finish college in 2006, having dropped out to go to rehab in the fall of 2003, I made Center City Young People my home group. When Philadelphia was awarded PENNSCYPAA a few years later, I was elected secretary and registration chair. I was inspired to stand for GSR of my home group, which coincided with my being elected to the PENNSCYPAA Advisory Council. After being GSR for two years, I continued to serve District 27, first as Visitation Chair to encourage unrepresented groups to send a GSR to the district meetings, then as ADCM during Panel 63 and DCM for Panel 65. I was Area Officer-at-Large and Registrar for Panel 67, and Alternate Delegate for Panel 69.

In the A.A. Archives, there's not only a copy of the letter from Bill W. to ICYPAA that I mentioned earlier, but many other materials related to Young People in A.A.:

In a May 1960 address, Bill W. wrote, "For us old timers, the coming of so many younger members into A.A. is one of the deeper satisfactions that we can ever have. To think that so many are to be spared that extra ten years of unmitigated hell that so many of us pass through, it is something for the greatest of gratitude."

There is a March 1991 letter from the Chair of the General Service Board that states "The General Service Board and the General Service Office recognize young people's groups and ICYPAA as part of Alcoholics Anonymous."

But what does this mean, "part of Alcoholics Anonymous?" We know from reading the Service Manual that YPAA is not included in the General Service Structure, in the sense that there is no Conference Committee or Trustees Committee specifically for this area of service. Despite that, young people's groups, conventions, and conferences are vital activities in A.A. and many young people are GSRs, DCMs, and so forth down the inverted triangle.

Most recently, YPAA was a topic at the General Service Conference in 2017. (Not including Literature agenda items like pamphlet revisions, delegates' area service highlights, and presentations.) Agenda Item J. for that year's Conference Committee on Policy/Admissions was "Consider a request to add a YPAA subcommittee to the service structure." The background material included a letter from the Delegate from Area 08 (San Diego-Imperial) with the request, expressing the hope to establish the legitimacy of YPAA as a part of A.A., integrate YPAA into the structure by creating mutual understanding and cooperation, and coordinate young GSRs to gather actions and/or feedback for the Conference to consider.

But this request prompted more questions than answers, such as, Which Conference Committee would this subcommittee fall under? What work would the subcommittee do? Would it affect both Conference and Trustee Committees? What would be the implications for area or district committees? Why not simply encourage young people to become GSRs, DCMs, area delegates, and integrate into the existing structure? Ultimately, the 2017 Conference Committee on Policy/Admissions took no action.

In closing, I will read from an October 1998 letter from George D., then the General Manager of the General Service Office. He wrote, "I can assure you that young people's groups, conventions, and conferences are vital activities in Alcoholics Anonymous." Then he followed by offering some sound suggestions are just as helpful for us today: "We encourage you to continue to communicate with the area, get young people involved in service work, i.e. GSR, DCM, corrections, treatment, CPC, PI, etc. Invite the area officers to young people's activities and make sure that the young people's groups attend area assemblies and service weekends." Thank you for the opportunity to present on this topic today. It's always a pleasure to serve Alcoholics Anonymous.

Presentation Reports
9:00-9:15 AM EST Session B Presentations

From the Home Group to the World Service Meeting: Using Virtual Technology to Build A.A. Unity and Service --- Hank K., Delegate Panel 70, Area 50 Western New York

In March 2020, faced with the pandemic, our General Service Board cancelled the 70th General Service Conference. Only weeks later, the Board re-scheduled the Conference as a virtual event – the first in A.A.’s history. This year’s Conference was the second.

In the past, Delegates often had less than two weeks each year to meet and work with each other. In the new virtual world, the Northeast Regional Delegates and Alternates meet monthly with our Regional Trustee. We also have virtual recovery meetings every week, where our bonds grow even deeper.

I served as Alternate Chair to my Conference Committee. The Chair lives in Washington State. We worked and talked together virtually, regularly and intensively. As a result, we were better prepared as servant leaders. Our Committee held virtual monthly recovery meetings. When new members from Panel 71 were appointed, they joined these meetings right away – months before we would have met them in the past.

Virtual technology also deepened our connections with the Trustees. Our monthly meetings with Francis made our bonds with him especially close. He brought other Trustees to our meetings, and they talked with us at length. Others came virtually to District, Area or other service events, where we got to know them better.

Through this virtual communication, I came to experience the Trustees as people – as A.A. members. I began to appreciate more the enormous responsibilities they bear and the sacrifices they make. That experience began to take away my sense of the Trustees as “they” - to build my sense of how much we share in our hopes for our Fellowship.

Bill told us that “the unity of Alcoholics Anonymous is the most cherished quality our Society has.” His vision was that A.A. had come of age, and that acting through the Conference, the Fellowship as a whole could take responsibility for our future. When he had that vision, the only way the Conference could meet was through physical travel to New York. For practical reasons, our Conference could gather only about one week per year. What would Bill think about the potential for this new “Colossus of Communication” - for us to work together more closely? Would he smile? Have we glimpsed a path that can lead us to greater unity, transparency and effectiveness? I believe deeply that this increased sense of unity and fellowship among the Conference members has served A.A. well, and that it can continue to grow.

So far, I have talked only about my experience as a Delegate. But over the past year, we have glimpsed the promise of virtual technology to A.A. as a whole. Virtual service events like this one reach AAs who have never have been exposed to general service. Last year’s virtual US/CAN Eastern Regional Forum hosted literally hundreds of attendees who had never attended a Forum before!

Home groups have gone from brick and mortar to virtual all over the world, helping preserve and strengthen A.A. during the pandemic. Virtual technology helped these groups carry their message far beyond their geographic homes. In recent weeks, I have attended home groups in Virginia, Florida and Shonan, Japan - and a general service meeting in Russia!

New meetings have arisen that are online only, with attendees from across the country and around the world. I go most days to a spiritual meeting with attendees from New York State, Pennsylvania and Texas. I attend an online meeting based in Sweden, with AAs from Russia, Japan, Iran, Kenya, Mongolia, England, South Africa, China, India and the US!

To experience the unity of A.A. worldwide like this is simply an overwhelming spiritual experience, for which I am truly grateful. The time for this talk has only allowed me to scratch the surface of this topic. I have not even addressed, for example, using virtual technology to carry the message directly to the sick and suffering alcoholic. But I'll bet most of us have heard heartwarming stories of newcomers who have gotten sober on Zoom` – I know I have! For now, the pandemic is abating in our part of the world, and in-person meetings are roaring back. Virtual meeting technology has been lifesaving, but what is its future? I think I see Bill wink. What's that? Oh right – "more will be revealed!"

**Diversity – Becoming a Welcoming Tent! --- Jody K., Delegate Panel 71, Area 60
Western Pennsylvania**

Diversity—becoming a welcoming tent. Our tent is expansive, giving shelter to all alcoholics who want it. It is our Sangha, in Buddhist terms.

As I prepared for this topic, I found references to diversity in our literature going back to our program's birth. So much good stuff! And then I realized I had five minutes to present it all. So, I set the bulk of it aside to speak to you in the Language of the Heart.

I will, however, point out examples of our Third Tradition in action. There's the passage in the 12 & 12 which discusses the impromptu group conscience meeting to decide if a man who also had "another addiction even worse stigmatized than alcoholism" should be admitted. Soon after in the same essay, a trouble-making atheist comes along. In Pass It On, there's a story of a man who was "...an ex-convict. He had all his earthly belongings on his back. His hair was bleached blond; he had on makeup; and he told us he was a dope fiend." These examples illustrate the Third Tradition at work in a time and culture where differences were much less visible than they are today. We have grown, and there is seldom a need for a group conscience meeting to discuss what to do about a particular member's presence in our rooms. Any problem other than alcohol is an outside issue. This is at the very heart of our principle of spiritual anonymity—that inside our rooms, we are alcoholics, period.

Here are my outside issues: I am a white, cisgender, heterosexual woman living in rural Pennsylvania whose culture could be described as "hillbilly hippie." The discrimination I experience as a woman is nothing like that of my mother's generation, even living out in the sticks, but I still tasted bile when reading about the alcoholic almost exclusively from the masculine perspective. I have disabilities, too, and when I got sober, they were a lot more

visible. Many meetings did not have accessibility for my wheelchair. Additionally, I identified as “an alcoholic and an addict.” I felt like pity played a part in the acceptance of my chair and the accommodation I needed (sometimes, my chair with me in it was carried into church basements), but when I opened my mouth and identified as dually addicted, I did hear disparaging remarks. Thankfully, I had a loving sponsor whose history included heroin. She helped me understand the principle of anonymity, and I soon dropped the “anda” identifier.

So I had *some* things to overcome. I was a low-bottom drunk, unlikely at 34 to make it much past 35. I swallowed what I found objectionable because I was desperate. In the past 18 ½ years, I have witnessed cultural conditions for the alcoholic, especially for the young alcoholic, change to the point that 34 may be viewed as old age to them.

The essay on the First Step in the 12 & 12 says that, “It was obviously necessary to raise the bottom the rest of us had to hit to the point where it would hit them.” This says to me that the door must be open, that every member of our fellowship and every piece of our literature should welcome anyone who suffers from alcoholism. Younger people are seldom “alco-saurs” and often have other outside issues that may prevent their re-entry after “more research.” They aren’t living long enough to come back, willing to set aside what they hear as exclusive language in order to find recovery.

The great range of items addressing issues of access submitted to the Conference beg for this more welcoming tent. The danger in not heeding those cries is that people who might find a home with us, who cannot overcome what they deem impassable obstacles, will turn for the door.

I have heard, “Nobody changed things for me,” and “If they don’t like it, they don’t have to stay.” This is *not* the hand of A.A., extended to anyone, anywhere. It should *not* be so difficult to come through the door and stay. Where in this attitude is loving the alcoholics until the alcoholics can love themselves?

I do not believe we need to fear that any change, small or large, to our literature will obscure out life-saving message. Having just experienced my first Conference, I can assure you that the primary objective, the only objective, of the Conference is to protect A.A. as a whole for generations to come. I assure you, the clarity of our message is in good hands, the hands of the Higher Power expressed in our group conscience. And I truly believe that if Bill, Bob, and the other 98 were here today, our message would be the same, but it would be delivered in a much more inclusive way. As Bill said in a letter referencing a new edition of the Big Book, “Since the audience for our book is likely to be newcomers, anything from the point of view of content or style that might offend or alienate those who are not familiar with our program should be carefully eliminated.” There you go, folks. Bill said it’s okay to change things if we need to.

And, when you hear someone ask for inclusivity in matters of gender, gender identity, sexuality, race, literacy, or spiritual proclivity, please remember that they aren’t asking that A.A. be changed just for them. They are asking for tens of millions of people like them—hundreds of millions world-wide. Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of people—all people who need and want it.

This tent of ours, our very own three-ring circus—Recovery, Unity, and Service—must be open to everyone. Our numbers have been stagnant since the mid-1990s. Those coming to the circus aren't sticking around to become part of the high-wire act, aren't seeing the freedom that is theirs, if they want it, if they're willing to do the work that enables them to feel sometimes like they're flying on the trapeze or riding that beautiful rocket right into the 4th Dimension. Thank you for allowing me to share.

Membership and Belonging --- Jan W., Delegate Panel 71, Area 30 Eastern Massachusetts.

The long form of Tradition Three states: "Our membership ought to include all who suffer from alcoholism. Hence we may refuse none who wish to recover. Nor ought A.A. membership ever depend upon money or conformity. Any two or three alcoholics gathered together for sobriety may call themselves an A.A. group, provided that, as a group, they have no other affiliation." The familiar short form of Tradition Three states: "The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking."

It is in Tradition Three that Bill W. shares his shining ideal: the simple principle that everyone should have an equal opportunity to recover from alcoholism. In writing about the Third Tradition Bill says: "This is a sweeping statement indeed; it takes in a lot of territory. Some people might think it too idealistic to be practical. It tells every alcoholic in the world that he may become, and remain, a member of Alcoholics Anonymous *so long as he says so*. In short, Alcoholics Anonymous has no membership rule. Why is this so? Our answer is simple and practical. Even in self protection, we do not wish to erect the slightest barrier between ourselves and the ... alcoholic who still suffers. ... If we raise obstacles, he might stay away and perish. He might be denied his priceless opportunity".

The idea of "membership" is somewhat clinical. It can be viewed as a status or an affiliation. In A.A., it only requires one person's participation. If I say I'm a member of Alcoholics Anonymous, then I'm a member. My membership requires nothing of anyone else.

The idea of "belonging", however, feels more participatory and intimate. Belonging implies inclusion, kinship, mutual emotional attachment.

A.A. members frequently share that prior to finding Alcoholics Anonymous they struggled with the feelings of not belonging anywhere, and now, as a member of A.A., they share a sense of belonging, of no longer being an outsider looking in.

But what of the individual who finds their way into the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous, identifies as an alcoholic, declares themselves a member of A.A. and of a group, follows suggestions to get and stay sober, and yet, does not have a sense of belonging?

In a Grapevine story from October 1977 titled "*I Want to Belong*", the author writes about a speaker at the podium getting easy laughs while telling stories about "fags" and "queers" from his past. The author, who identifies as "queer", is shocked that people are laughing. He writes, "I again remember what I had forgotten: that I do not belong as much as I would like to think. I am afraid to look to see who laughed. It might be somebody I love with the love that AA taught me".

Why do I share a story from October 1977 with you today? I share this story because the General Service Conferences between 1986 and 1996 believed the stories in the 3rd edition of the Big Book were up to date. It was not until 1997, nearly 20 years after this Grapevine story was printed, that the Conference recommended a 4th edition of the Big Book which, when published in 2001, would include the first story from a gay member.

I share this story because I believe that in 2021, members of A.A. who are transgender or non-binary currently experience A.A. in the same way many gay members did decades ago: they are members because they say they are, but all too often, they feel like outsiders looking in without a sense of belonging.

This story from 1977 remains relevant because in April of this year, the 71st General Service Conference struggled to take a small, incremental step toward greater inclusion. We spent quite a lot of time and energy to change the words of the A.A. Preamble from a “Fellowship of men and women” to a “Fellowship of people”. The struggle with the Preamble at this year’s Conference reflects the Fellowship’s ongoing resistance to integrating societal and cultural shifts into the microcosm that is Alcoholics Anonymous.

When A.A. members who are different from the majority ask for greater inclusion, they often have the short form of Tradition Three recited to them. An individual’s membership in A.A. is based on action the individual takes; there is no action required by the Fellowship. Cultivating inclusion and belonging for every A.A. member **does** require action by the Fellowship. Failing to take action, threatens the priceless opportunity to recover from alcoholism that Bill W. promised in Tradition Three to every alcoholic. Thank you for the opportunity to serve.

PAST TRUSTEES SHARING

John K., General Service Trustee 2001-2005

I am now reading Nell Wing, A.A.’s first archivist’s, book. The book is entitled, Grateful To Have Been There: My 42 Years With Bill And Lois. Having been myself on the General Service Board, I am indeed grateful to have been there. As David mentioned, I was on the Big Book committee, which was a great thrill. I chaired many a revision of a pamphlet, and was on the committee for the creation of a new pamphlet.

As our Class A Trustee said, “Sometimes it isn’t what’s in the pamphlet. What’s important is that the pamphlet makes sure that certain groups know they are welcomed in A.A. As long as the title of that pamphlet appears on our literature in the rack, we have accomplished that purpose.”

I was also on the A.A.W.S. board when we started to put the Big Book fourth edition up on the website. That was a very controversial issue at the time. One of the things that I’m always concerned about, and dearly devoted to, is the 9th tradition, that A.A. as such ought never to be organized. AA is a spiritual movement, and it’s so important we remember that. For example, the G.S.O. has no power to authorize groups, it simply registers group and gives them a number for identification purposes. If it had the power to authorize groups, it

would have the power to fail to authorize groups. But it doesn't have that power; it wasn't intended to have that power. I hope that we don't get to the day where a super organized, central office is issuing directives on every little detail of how A.A. ought to function. A.A. enjoyed its greatest periods of growth when this spiritual fellowship grew organically, and leveraged the volunteer power of all of its members. We don't need orders of worship issued by some central synod, or presbytery, or Vatican.

I highly favored the change in the preamble, I've lived in an era where here in eastern Long Island, and in New York City, the change has been made on an ad-hoc basis for years. Why couldn't we just say that you're authorized to make this change without the Grapevine getting upset about a copyright? You can do that by the 4th tradition, on a group basis. Lead more and more things to the groups, so that the upside-down triangle stays upside down.

It's very important that people who have been given responsibility for the custody of A.A.'s fellowship exercise restraint and humility in going about our business. Otherwise, we'd give in our own personal pension to control and dominate. The idea of the General Service conference being in session year-round scares the hell out of me. The General Service conference is supposed to be a watch dog that asks hard and difficult questions, that says to the boards, "what have you been doing with our fellowship?", and. The legislative, or the investigative, purpose there shouldn't become part of the executive purpose: of meddling in A.A.'s localized business all the time.

William James once said, "when spiritual movements get strong enough, they organize themselves. They become ecclesiastical institutions with corporate ambitions of their own. The spirit politics and the lust of dogmatic rule are then apt to enter and to contaminate the originally innocent thing." It's written in a variety of religious literature, and the book of our history. Spiritual movements are nurtured, they're preserved, they're loved, and they're cherished because spiritual movements are about love and service. I hope I don't sound like a bleeding deacon, I don't intend to.

We also have to make sure that were not camouflaging ourself in the language of the most current business school stuff, at every level, including the general service office. I'm old enough that I've recognized management principles move in and move out. The fact that we strategize... I don't know how a spiritual movement strategizes. An office strategizes, a spiritual movement doesn't strategize. They're nurtured and they're loved.

The advice that I always give to newcomers and new trustees is, Number One: Choose your Battles. You don't have to get involved in every damn detail. Number Two: if you're going to be a warrior in A.A., and we have people who love being warriors, try and be a happy warrior. If you lead from anger, resentment, contempt, and condescension you're going to look around some day, and the followers you thought were behind you probably aren't still there. The last piece of advice is, try to stay focused on the relative position of your ass and your elbow, and if you do that you'll probably be ok. So, as Nell Wing said, "I'm grateful to have been there". Thank you.

David E., Northeast Trustee, 2001-2005

It's really been a privilege and a pleasure to have been given the role of Trustee, and now be a past Trustee. A.A.'s 7th tradition has paid for my education, so I feel a real sense of

obligation, duty, and pleasure to be part of this. I welcome everybody who is attending, especially those for whom this is their first forum. I have found service in A.A. to be a wonderful experience, and I have made so many friends around the world as a result. Lifelong friends are promised, and this is one of the promises that has come true for me.

I was thinking about the 5th edition of the Big Book. John and I served on the 4th Edition subcommittee. At that time, there were differences of opinion about how deeply we should get involved in changing the edition. The fellowship felt very strongly about not changing the first 64 pages, and I've seen that kind of language repeated this time around. We started the process in 1997, which was 24 years ago. Society has changed a lot. If we go forward with a 5th edition, it won't be published until A.A. is 90 years old, at the soonest. It seems clear to me that we should go ahead and keep this one as an archival historical document, if we want, but publish an updated language edition. I'm not talking about plain language; I'm talking about the same message that we've got in the Big Book today, but written it in a way that's more inclusive and open to the rest of the world. Society has changed significantly since the Big Book was written. If Bill was alive today, would he want us to update our language and be more relevant to the current population? Would he want us to look ahead and see if we could stay relevant into the future? John is right. We could become rigid as a movement, and fail in the long term. That's a risk we face by not accommodating ourselves to changes in society. As John mentioned, people and groups have already updated the preamble without having to ask anyone's permission: because that's what we wanted to do. Are we going to risk having groups or individuals make their own revisions to the Big Book, and use those in A.A. groups? Without the group conscious process of the General Service conference? If we're not willing to change with the times, we're going to lose our relevance in society. We're going to end up in the dust bins of movements that have existed in the past, movements that have come and gone. Maybe that is our destiny, because God is going to use us perhaps as long as he needs us.

I would like to ask the delegates, the board members, and the trustees who are listening here today to think seriously about changing the language in the Big Book. Maybe, taking out "To Wives" and "To Employers". Are those really accurate in terms of today's business and corporate practice? If someone followed those today, would they get into legal trouble? I know this would be a really bold action, a really difficult task, but I think that we need to be willing to move forward and have vision. Bill, and his article on Leadership, challenge us to have vision of the future. If we don't have vision for the future, we're going to be stuck in the memories of the past. I hope that we'll always be looking forward instead of looking back.

George D., Northeast Region Trustee 1978-1982, past G.S.O General Manager

In 1976, Dr. Jack came up with the idea of Regional Forums after speaking with a lot of other people. He appointed a committee of delegates to advise the office with about these, experimental at the time, Regional Forums.

I was on that committee. The second Regional Forum was in Vancouver, British Columbia. Cora Louise, who was a legendary staff member, was in charge of the forum. She and I showed up Thursday night, and we drafted the program for the following weekend. We did it all Thursday. We organized sessions and we figured out who we'd ask to participate. Then, we got to Sunday morning, and couldn't think of anything else that wouldn't be too heavy

and boring. We then realized there were three past Trustees that were great speakers. So, we thought, “why don’t we have a meeting with these great speakers?” It ended up with everyone all charged up and happy, and the past Trustees liked it. The current Trustees liked it as well, probably because they thought that they would get to do the same thing one day. That wasn’t very good strategic planning, because little did we realize that this would become so popular amongst the trustees that we’d never get rid of the program. If Cora Louise been better strategic thinkers, we’d never be talking to each other this morning.

I spent the first twelve years of my sobriety, and five years before that (when I wasn’t always continuously sober), doing a lot of boots-on-the-ground service. There were no treatment facilities for a little detox. We were flooded with calls. We were starting groups. We were very, very busy with boots-on-the-ground work: carrying the message to the alcoholic who still suffers. In 1973, I stumbled into general service, which is not boots-on-the-ground. We’re serving the people who are in boots-on-the-ground work. We in general service are not, strictly speaking, carrying the message at all. We are trying to support and carry the people who do have the message, the people who are boots-on-the-ground. That’s my opinion, and I haven’t changed it.

I had great mentors. Dr. Jack, Norris, and Bob H. Bob was the General Manager for several years before Bill died, at the time of Bill’s death, and for several years afterwards. That was a tough time, because everyone was afraid A.A. wouldn’t survive without Bill. Milton Maxwell, a non-alcoholic trustee who wrote the first academic paper on A.A., used to say that “in A.A., the means are more important than the ends”. I really believe this. It’s implicit in the steps and the charter. If we do things in an A.A. way, we can make mistakes and be able to fix them. If we don’t do things in an A.A. way, we might go a long time without making any good mistakes, and when we make big mistakes, we won’t know how to fix them.

The last thing I’ve been thinking about is, what good are we doing the movement that were serving? We can talk about all the services we’ve done, but other people can do that, and the movement will figure out how to do that. So, what are we doing that’s really important? I’ve been involved in general service longer than practically anyone still on their feet, and my conclusion is that the General Manger hasn’t changed in the years since. The General Manger said the most important we can do for the movement of Alcoholics Anonymous is to set a good example of how to do things in an A.A. way. I think the movement still needs that example. Otherwise, the charismatic leaders and people with particular spiritual approaches are going to just fragment. We in general service should set a good example of how to do things for the groups, the members, and every activity for which A.A. comes together to carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers. I’m very happy that we have Linda and Bob as our primary leadership team, and I’m very confident that we will set a good example.

Rich P., Northeast regional trustee, 2014-2018

I have a very positive view about things. I think we’re the size were supposed to be. I also think that at the end of concert six, we’re supposed to follow a corporate business model. A.A. has become a good, sizable, nonprofit business. I believe, as George says, that we’re supposed to support the groups that do all the work. The work is most important. I’m enjoying life now, doing my work in the groups, and doing what I’ve been doing all my life.

That's what we're here to support. I hope we never forget that. And every cent that we get from our 7th tradition goes to support the groups, to help the drunks that are still suffering. We'll be the size we were supposed to be.

To think that adding a button for contributions on our website would cause a spiritual upheaval was not accurate. In six years, our online contributions went from zero to twenty percent. What would've happened if we didn't have this during COVID? During COVID, we were only a month behind on our prudent reserve. We were ready for COVID, and we did a good job. Our boards did a great job, and they are ready to take off and support our groups again. We always have to remember where the money goes: it goes to support the drunks that still suffer, and is a spiritual thing that connects us.

When I go online, and I put down "I have a drinking problem", A.A. shouldn't be number sixteen, A.A. should be number one. A few weeks ago, I was reading about Tradition 3, and discussing it with my friend and my sponsor. On page 79, the language of the heart says the about Tradition 3 that we have ownership of A.A.'s name, and we need to protect it. Why is there a group out there called alcoholicsanonymous.com making money off the A.A., name and saying they're the unofficial website of A.A.? We need to look at that and take care of it. We need to protect A.A.'s name, and support our groups, which I think we're doing.

We were ready for the pandemic, and we didn't even know we were getting ready for it. Our groups contributed right through the pandemic. We did some right things, and I see the boards today continuing to do right things. It's an exciting time for you, Linda and Bob. We haven't lost focus on what we do, which is to help the drunk that's still suffering.

And I'll say one last thing: A.A. actually started in Wooster, Massachusetts. Also in Wooster, William James met Sigmund Freud in a hallway in Wooster, Massachusetts, and they talked about the spiritual solution. Think about it. Lest we keep to our principles, and we follow that 164 pages, and we have a good G.S.O, good A.A.W.S., and a good Grapevine to support our groups, we'll do just fine. I believe our higher power put us here for a reason. We just keep doing what we're doing. I have a positive outlook, maybe too positive, but I know there's a good board, and I wish you all the best.

Billy N., Northeast Region Trustee 2013-2017

I'd like to use my time to talk about other people and not me. I recently had a talk with a young Trusted Servant. They had who reached the officer level in their area in their young 30s, which is very unusual. This person was calling me to resign, and I had a long talk with them. They were resigning because of the pressure they were feeling from retired trusted servants, who didn't think they were devoting enough time to their position. I'm a person whose been in favor of inclusiveness my entire time in service.

The only way we can be inclusive is by actions. Not by quotas, not by selection, but by our actions matching our words. While I hear diversity and inclusion talked about all the time, I do not usually hear any mention of young people. This is one of the reasons we're so far behind technology in Alcoholics Anonymous. In my professional life, I'm regularly surrounded by 22-28 year olds. People right out of university or college who know the latest

technology. What I want to point out is: we don't need to ask why people aren't involved in service, we need to ask ourselves what we're doing wrong or what we could do better. How could we make it easier for more people to participate.

How come the corrections workbook, the CPC workbook, and other workbooks didn't mention this technology? Even before the pandemic, we didn't talk about taking advantage of this technology. How come we weren't talking about reaching probation officers and judges during their lunch hour, on their workday, to have a workshop? I hope, as the world comes back to normal, that we don't forget about this technology. I love in person service events, but does every district meeting need to be in person? Maybe every other one could be on zoom so that more people could participate? Maybe we should stop asking people to make a choice between their education, or their family, or their personal recovery.

There's a book in the professional world called Death By Meeting. No one has carried that out worse than the service structure of Alcoholics Anonymous. Why have we made it so hard for people to serve? My strong belief is that the corporate work is not evil. Business is not a bad word; businesses should be accountable, ethical, transparent, and responsible. Certain businesses are bad, and people equate those two, but let's not forget that the average business is 20-25 years ahead of us regarding technology, diversity, and inclusion. So, to the people who are saying that we're becoming too business like: if that means were going to catch up on diversity, inclusion, and technology- well then I'm happy to hear that we're going to embrace some simple business concepts.

We have a bad habit of forgetting our past. Why do we use terms like Dark District? The great Francis B. (a class A Trustee) and I made a motion at the General Service Board level five years ago, and other trustees came down pretty hard on us. But we don't need to use terms like Dark District. We don't need to use terms like "the Coffee Girl", we don't say "the Coffee Boy". There's a lot of things we can do in our actions to get people who want to participate in service. That's where I'm going to focus my time.

The last thing I'll say is this: in 2008 and 2009, the conference went late after midnight. In 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, and 2014 the board spent a lot of time on, "how do we not keep people up late at night? How do we not have sessions going after midnight?"

If you embrace the way to reach an informed group conscious the way A.A. pamphlets say we ought to, should our delegates be making decisions on important A.A. policy at 1:30AM? After being up for 12 or 13 hours? I personally think were better than that. Thank you and thank you for your service.

Bob W., Current General Manager

For those of you that don't know, John K. was a Northeast Regional Trustee. Many of you that knew him, knew he was one of the best examples of a trusted servant. He served with humility, dignity, and grace through all of his service to Alcoholics Anonymous. His wit, humor, and humility was something to be modeled. It reminded me of something John had mentioned in his talk, about how we carry ourselves when we serve with kindness and humility, and John did that. I like to think that John is looking upon us now, with his spirit. So

many alcoholics within Alcoholics Anonymous owe him a debt of gratitude. I know I do, he was very encouraging to me, and a wonderful man. Thank you.

CLOSING REMARKS

Linda Chezem, General Service Board Chair

I opened this weekend by sharing the May 29th quote from the daily Grapevine. It's a quote by Bill W., "truly transforming spiritual experiences are nearly always founded on calamity and collapse." This weekend, we've acknowledged that while COVID has been truly transformational, and somewhat of a calamity for A.A., we are going to come out of COVID in a new way, with new ideas. So, I will close with today's Grapevine quote, which I think is a perfect bookend for the weekend. The quote is, "the place to start in achieving an informed group conscious is with thyself."

Today is D-Day. I mention this because I want to always ask the question: How we are serving our veterans of the armed forces of Canada and the US?

I learned a lot this weekend, and I want to share a little bit about that. I love the idea of "alcoholic math" as described by Ken T. I've never done traditional math well, so I think that might be a better way to approach math. Thank you, Ken T., for the idea. Francis made a great suggestion that we need to give Hank K. a virtual passport with virtual country stamps for his around the world meetings. Maybe someone will start a virtual international club. I heard the question, "How are we going to serve someone who lives in an area where no meetings exist, and therefore is not part of a group? How can they still be of service in A.A.?" I'm looking forward to the Forum on December 11 to learn more about what A.A. can do for remote communities. Thank you, Trishelle, for showing us the A.A. Bridge. That forum will bring us some answers. There were many questions, and I know we're going to find some answers as we serve.

I'm going to quote Bill W. again, from Chapter 6 in The Big Book. "Yes, there is a long period of reconstruction ahead, we must take the lead. Service is leading, and leading is service." Let's approach this future where we are serving and leading, remembering something else Bill W. said, "A vast communication net now covers the earth, even to its remotest reaches. Nothing matters more to A.A.'s future welfare than the manner in which we use the colossus of modern information. Use them selfishly and well, it can produce results surpassing our modern imagination." We heard that from our past trustees that the A.A. way is not just what we do, it's how we do things. I love what Naysa said, "I don't want to have people be spectators. I want them to be participants. You don't have to have 1,000 years of service. The radical can be in the simple". I love the idea that simple me can become rad.

And now for the most important words I can say today, thank you. This weekend is the result of the work and care of so many people that I cannot list them all. I will make you a deal: if you will each take one more look at the agenda of this forum, and send a thank you to at

least one person who is listed, I will not read every name there. I'll trust you to say thank you. And say thank you to yourself for being here. We needed you here, whether as a presenter or as listener. We especially needed the folks for whom this is their first time attending a forum. We want to make sure that this forum isn't your last forum. And to the past trustees, you are truly balcony people. Thank you for being here and sharing your thoughts.

To my current fellow General Service Board members, thank you for welcoming me. Francis, you are super. Thanks for your chairing and sharing and caring, you are a great role model. I want to give a special thank you to James H., M.E.T.S., G.S.O. and the rest of the G.S.O staff for your work to make this weekend wonder-filled. I loved the G.S.O. staff when I served on the board back in the dark ages, and today I'm so grateful to know that G.S.O. still serves for all of us with joy. A special thank you to the tech team and Mike W. They're the ones who keep our wheels from falling off as we trudge the virtual road of happy destiny. "We shall be with you in the fellowship of the spirit, and you will surely meet some of us as we trudge the road of happy destiny." Let's start the rest of our journey by joining hands and taking a moment of silence. Then, we'll recite the declaration of unity. The declaration of unity is part of our recognizing of the value of the minority voice. We can have unity with multiple voices, if we can reach out. "This we owe to AA's future, to place our common welfare first, to keep our common fellowship united. For on A.A. depends our lives, and the lives of those to come". Thank you!