



FINAL REPORT
SOUTHEAST REGIONAL FORUM
SEPTEMBER 26-28, 2014
ISLA VERDE, PUERTO RICO

Dear A.A. Friends,

Please mark your calendar for the next Southeast Regional Forum, which will take place in Orlando, Florida, December 2-4, 2016 at the Orlando Marriott Lake Mary Hotel.

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

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INTRODUCTION

The 2014 Southeast Regional Forum was held in Isla Verde, Puerto Rico. Registration for the Forum was 342. This included 172 members attending their very first Forum—many were welcomed at the Forum Orientation on Friday evening. In addition, simultaneous translation from English to Spanish and Spanish to English was available throughout the weekend. This allowed everyone equal participation regardless of which language they spoke. Sunday morning included a session for sharing from first-time forum attendees, followed by sharing from one Southeast past trustee and five past delegates from the Host Area which included a Panel 24 delegate!

Everyone openly expressed gratitude and affection to Southeast Regional trustee Chet P. for being with us and chairing the Forum as Regional Trustee with his characteristic enthusiasm and great love for A.A.

Ask-It Basket Questions (Not answered onsite)

- Q. What is ICYPAA?
- R. ICYPAA has a long history as an established A.A. conference. It regularly contributes to the A.A. General Service Office, as well as to the area service structure in the local areas where it is held. ICYPAA and its attendees are also committed to reaching out to the newcomer, and to involvement in every other facet of A.A. service. ICYPAA participants can often be found serving at the national, state, area, and group levels — some have been delegates to the General Service Conference from their areas and have served on trustee's committees of A.A.'s General Service Board.

In the pamphlet, “The Twelve Traditions Illustrated” which is Conference-approved literature, there is reference to International Doctors in A.A. and Young People in A.A. it says, “These ‘special interest’ groups offer only one instance of the diverse and inclusive membership within our Fellowship. Our Traditions allow unparalleled freedom, not only to every A.A. member, but to every A.A. group.”

- Q. Can a delegate area lose its active status?
- R. There is nothing in our literature that suggest that a delegate area can be deactivated. While it is true that areas are defined geographically, they are spiritual entities that focus on participation in A.A. service worldwide.

The A.A. Service Manual, 2014-2015 Edition, defines an area as:

“An area may be part of a state or province, or all of it, or may include parts of more than one state or province, depending on the size and needs of the A.A. population. In any case, the area holds an important middle position in the Conference structure—through the elected delegate, it participates in A.A. worldwide, while through the D.C.M.s and G.S.R.s, it is close to the local scene.”

- Q. What message are we, as members, asked to disseminate?
 R. A.A. members carry a message of hope and recovery from alcoholism through the A.A. Twelve Step Program.
- Q. If alcohol is a symptom, as stated in the Big Book, then what's alcoholism really?
 R. In our experience, it is difficult to find a better definition of alcoholism than the first 164 pages and the stories of A.A. members that follow in the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*. Additionally, you might consider "The Doctor's Opinion" from that same book which says:

We believe, and so suggested a few years ago, that the action of alcohol on these chronic alcoholics is a manifestation of an allergy; that the phenomenon of craving is limited to this class and never occurs in the average temperate drinker. These allergic types can never safely use alcohol in any form at all; and once having formed the habit and found they cannot break it, once having lost their self-confidence, their reliance upon things human, their problems pile up on them and become astonishingly difficult to solve. (*Alcoholics Anonymous* page xxviii)

When the *Big Book* refers to alcohol being a symptom, it is seen as a symptom of the character defects that we will address in Step Four. "Our liquor was but a symptom. So we had to get down to causes and conditions." (*Alcoholics Anonymous* p 64)

SPANISH WORKSHOP REPORTS

La Viña: The La Viña Rep and More—Bringing Our Message of Hope to Alcoholics (*Moderator: Irene D., / Reporter: JM*) The workshop moderator invited participants to ask questions (a total of 6 were written down):

- 1) ***What is La Viña and how does it help us, A.A. members?***
- 2) ***What is the best way of getting fellow A.A. members to subscribe to La Viña?***
- 3) ***What about La Viña's self-support?***
- 4) ***How do we motivate trusted servants to become part of La Viña?***
- 5) ***How can we help La Viña Representatives?***
- 6) ***Can we make contributions to La Viña?***

These six draft questions were then reelaborated and discussed in detail, as follows:

- 1) ***What is La Viña and how does it help us, A.A. members?***

La Viña is A.A.'s Spanish Language Meeting in Print. The editor added that La Viña is the international journal of A.A. in Spanish, which can be carried into prisons and can be used around the world. It also has a website with information that can be used for service. One participant suggested that LV should translate the GV's daily quote, but the editor explained that only 300 members have subscribed to the weekly reflection. Other members questioned whether it could be because of a lack of information or access to computers, but the editor replied that the weekly reflection has been around for a year already and that for those AAs without a computer, they are trying to get approval for an SMS version.

Another participant said there were some problems accessing LV from the GV website. The editor explained that there are still some limitations with regard to LV's website; for instance, having a digital archive of La Viña is still not possible.

Another participant said that in terms of content, some stories are repetitive, but another member stressed that people need to start sending the kinds of articles they want to see.

2) ***How do we motivate trusted servants to become La Viña Representatives and how can we help them?***

A participant said that RLVs tend to lose their motivation and so do subscribers, but someone else at the workshop pointed out our responsibility for motivating others and that he subscribes to both the GV and LV.

3) ***Self-support, contributions, subscriptions and motivation:***

A participant said he was impressed with the 700 subscriptions achieved at LV's anniversary. The editor explained that guidelines given to the Anniversary host committee were helpful. She reminded participants that the magazine cannot receive contributions, only subscriptions.

Corrections Correspondence Service (C.C.S.) (Moderator: Luis Raúl H., Reporter: Carlos C.) The workshop secretary gave a brief introduction on the mechanics and purpose of the workshop and an explanation of what CCS service is. The moderator then gave a summary of the service that has been provided in correctional facilities in Puerto Rico, and a description of positive and negative experiences that have taken place. A.A. in Puerto Rico has recently met with corrections administrators and agreements have been reached allowing A.A. access to carry the message into correctional facilities. Trusted servants working with CF have been meeting to discuss how to organize visits and other ways of carrying the message. The moderator explained that the correspondence service is another important way of carrying the message into correctional facilities.

Participants shared about how this was an innovative alternative in Puerto Rico and how important it was to meet and plan how to implement this service. It is also important to bring literature—including La Viña—into institutions as a way of carrying the message. The goal is to establish good relations with corrections administrators—which requires persistence—and to improve communications. Getting the correspondence service going will require gaining entry into correctional facilities. In the meantime, it is important to prepare through workshops and learning how to carry out this service.

Self-Support: What Does It Mean? (Moderator: Oscar R., / Reporter: Narimar R.) The Workshop discussed the following questions:

- 1) How do I apply the Seventh Tradition in order to make sure my group functions properly?
- 2) How do we carry the message that one dollar is no longer enough?
- 3) What will happen to small groups that cannot support themselves and cannot make contributions to support services?

Participants reached similar conclusions regarding these three questions: everything begins with me and with the group.

- 1) In order to keep its doors open and continue carrying the message to the alcoholic who still suffers, each member should do his/her part. A newcomer does what he/she sees. If the example given is that of giving no money, the newcomer will give nothing.

- 2) One dollar is not enough, but even two dollars does not suffice to keep the group open and support other A.A. services. How can we afford coffee, literature, etc. other than contributing? As A.A. members, we are responsible for the Fellowship. If I am able, I can give for myself and for the person who is unable to give. What each A.A. member gives, is what keeps our service structure going... the district, area, GSO. It is not just about the money I give, it's everything that pours out of my heart. It's my adherence to sponsorship, the Traditions. It's a measure of how important Alcoholics Anonymous is for me.
- 3) It is important to be honest about a group's real situation. Going to other groups to ask for support and inviting them to come to our group. We should let the Fellowship know how we are doing. If we are not known about, newcomers cannot find us. If a situation is no longer sustainable, we should be mature and accept that the group must close.

A.A. and Social Media (*Moderator: Sherry Ann H., Reporter: JM*) The workshop moderator invited participants to ask questions (a total of 5 were written down):

- 1) ***Are there any recent materials about anonymity and social media in our literature?***
- 2) ***How are A.A. members affected when social media are used?***
- 3) ***How can the principle of attraction vs. promotion be affected when social media are used?***
- 4) ***Should we pay for ads in newspapers or social media?***
- 5) ***Are there A.A. web pages in other countries?***

The discussion was as follows: The moderator said that there is a web page with information that is readily accessible. One participant said anonymity is one of our Traditions, and that she has seen fellow A.A.s who do not respect anonymity in social media (such as Facebook). The solution, said the member, is to block A.A. members who make such comments. Another member told a story about a woman in A.A. who lost her job because of comments other A.A. members had made in social media. Another participant said comments could affect other people and interfere with identification. The problem, as summarized by another member, is that information could be seen by third parties linked to the original receivers.

One male participant talked about the risks associated with sending text messages using cellular phones. Another said that "the line between attraction and promotion" is a very fine one: an example is the production of movies having to do with recovery.

A recommendation was made that any comments should be posted in A.A. web pages. One member pointed out that there are public service sections that contain information about A.A. groups, meetings, etc. The secretary remarked that there are in fact other countries that have A.A. web pages.

The Importance of Archives (*Moderator: Manuel C. / Reporter: Steve B.*) The discussion was as follows: A lot of information was lost when the area office moved. Many A.A. members look for information, but few develop a real interest. The budget for Archives has been eliminated. A suggestion was made to have an Archive committee appointed, as A.A.'s history is part of our gratitude to the program and merits any costs. A participant suggested there should be a call to A.A. members to gather those archives materials that were lost, and that a dedicated person should be hired.

The book *La Historia de A.A. en Puerto Rico* (The History of A.A. in Puerto Rico) will need to be revised in the near future, as it will soon be ten years since its last edition.

Getting Involved in Service (*Moderator: Alberto L. (Tito) / Reporter: Gilberto V.*) The discussion was as follows: One participant said that service is the cornerstone of sobriety. If there are no trusted servants, groups die and alcohol returns. Without recovery there is no unity and therefore no service. Another member shared that losing the fear of serving took him twenty years. Another participant described his process as stopping drinking, getting a sponsor, getting his sanity back and then discovering service, which led him to love the program and his fellow A.A. members.

Regarding motivating others to serve, one member talked about the importance of developing a sense of belonging. A female participant said she was led into service by her sponsor. After working the steps, she developed some mental clarity and attended some workshops. Now she sponsors others. Another participant said it was important to get help and to get a service sponsor. Another member said we should strive to keep our fellow members informed, introduce the literature to them and discuss what we learn. Lastly, a participant said that after alcoholics stop drinking, being a power of example and making sure there are opportunities to serve were both important.

ENGLISH WORKSHOP REPORTS

“Corrections Correspondence Service (C.C.S.)” (*Moderator: Holly P. / Reporter: Terry E.*) Workshop attendees were asked, “Is the C.C.S. program safe?” No attendees at the workshop were aware of any reported safety problems. To correspond, some people use a P.O. Box or Clubhouse address. However, others feel comfortable using their home address. Those using their home address report feeling safe because the assignments are two regions or two areas away.

Another question asked was: What should be included in a letter? In response, members reported that it was very important that you first follow instructions and include your full name, address, inmate name and number. Also, check with the correctional facility’s website for the exact way to address the letter to inmate. Volunteers in the C.C.S. program do not need to have prison experience—we have the same problem, and we share the same solution. Others noted that this work is like Twelfth Step work with a newcomer. You have to keep trying. One workshop member said that participating in C.C.S. is a numbers game—similar to working with newcomers because you often have to write to a few before you will get someone who will correspond. It’s important to keep the correction desk informed if your assignment does not write back so you can be assigned to someone else. Remember, it’s similar to talking with an A.A. newcomer after the meeting. It was also mentioned that there is a great need for correspondence with men. Also, update the corrections desk—let them know if you do not get a response. C.C.S. is something that everyone can participate in, even newcomers and people who cannot do corrections work because of background check issues.

“Self-Support: What Does it Mean?” (*Moderator: Marilyn B. / Reporter: Joyce C.*) Workshop attendees were informed about the request from G.S.O. regarding Seventh Tradition stories. Participants shared numerous ideas to help stimulate self-support:

- Expand on Birthday donations: As an A.A. receives medallion, give \$1 for each year.
- Use Birthday envelopes—share your birthday with A.A.

- The group discussed the maximum donation allowed per person: \$3k per year or \$5k last gift.
- When giving out medallion to celebrants, also give a Birthday envelope pre-filled out with group name and number.
- Increase donations from just \$1 in the basket. Ask, “What does a drink cost today?”
- Tell group members that the Big Book, when first published, was \$3.50. If it were published today it would be \$58.00!
- On sobriety birthdays, instead of the group buying a cake, the recipient can supply the cake and his or her sponsor can buy the medallion. Therefore, the Seventh Tradition money is not used!
- The average A.A. member does not know what G.S.O. is. Educate members about who and what G.S.O. is and how they help alcoholics.
- Go online! Online contributions and setting up re-occurring donations is easy.
- There has been a recent rise in literature prices—make this an opportunity to inform members of financial need and importance of self-support.
- Tailor message to appeal to group: One good phrase offered by workshop recipients was: “Make it a double!”
- Put out two boxes at area assembly: one for donations to area and one for donations to G.S.O.

“Young People in A.A.” (*Moderator: Marshall C. / Reporter: Elise W.*) The following two questions were discussed:

1. What would attract young people to A.A. and keep them in A.A.?
2. How can young people be involved in general service?

It was the sense of the group that attracting young people to A.A. and keeping them in A.A. is no different than attracting and keeping any alcoholic: Do outreach (and keep up with technology); be welcoming, encouraging, letting them feel important and needed; offer identification as an alcoholic; offer effective sponsorship; have a good time; keep meetings safe.

The sense of the group on the question of involving young people in general service was as follows: Invite them to do service at the group level—be a greeter, chair a meeting, etc; invite them to group conscience meetings, district meetings, area assemblies; lead by example; offer effective sponsorship.

On both questions, the consensus of the group was that young people should not be treated any differently than any other potential A.A. member.

“Grapevine: The Grapevine Rep and More—Bringing our Message of Hope to Alcoholics” (*Moderator: Ami B., / Reporter: Chris W.*) Workshop members discussed questions about the Grapevine magazine, as well as ideas regarding improving the magazine and increasing subscribers:

- What does a GV rep do? He or she orders the Grapevine for the group and encourages the reading of it, as well as subscriptions. Also, the Grapevine rep registers with the Grapevine office to receive the latest news.
- E-newsletter: Grapevine news and Grapevine in Your Group. You can register to receive these on the site. Grapevine in Your Group is sent to all GV reps and they are encouraged to share them with their group.
- There was concern about the message that is being given about the Grapevine. Is the message too negative? Print subscriptions are down. Digital subscriptions are flat. Should we be encouraging digital subscriptions? It was noted that the financial picture is much better than it was. People think of Grapevine as a magazine, not a multimedia company. Books comprise 30% of revenue – improved with refreshed covers.
- The 70th anniversary created opportunities for more travel to events for Grapevine staff, where they noted excitement. ICCYPAA and Founders Day were mentioned.
- A new Grapevine rep was inspired by the forum and will register soon
- The bottom line is that there are two ways you can help the Grapevine: to subscribe and to submit your work.

“Safety in the Rooms” (*Moderator: Don F. / Reporter: Jaret E.*) The group moderator led and shared that elder statesmen indicate meeting etiquette. Two questions were posed to the group: 1. Have there been safety issues in your group? 2. What can we do to prevent/solve them?

Members shared some group safety issues, including: Newcomer couples in abusive relationships; members being stalked (in many different forms); active drunks disturbing the meeting, meeting location, or group attendees before/after the meeting; members taking advantage of newcomers or group phone lists (sexually or otherwise), including ‘consensually’, i.e. quid pro quo; attendees with particular mental disorders leading to a propensity for violence or otherwise distressing behaviors; bringing/using weapons (safety issues themselves), causing chaos at group service meetings; group attendees with a past history and/or current desire (real or implied) to sexually or physically harm others or their families.

Some solutions included:

- Getting the authorities involved (if necessary)—A.A.’s Traditions do not place us above the law;
- Depending on the severity, warning the offenders;
- Simply not allowing improper behavior;
- Anticipate/handle probable problem situations preemptively;
- Inventory ourselves: For instance, do we avoid “undesirable” attendees rather than redirecting their misbehavior and Twelve-stepping them?
- Members’ take on the responsibility to protect/warn others of safety issues;
- Sponsors instilling a healthy fear in their sponsees’ suitors;
- Sponsors showing us how to stay safe;
- Men with men, women with women;
- Having a group conscience to decide on the handling of the many types of (hypothetical) safety issues that could arise, prior to situations arising.

“A.A. and Social Media” (Moderator: Jim S. / Reporter: Linda W.) The workshop attendees discussed the role of social media in A.A.—in particular, educating people regarding anonymity and social media and how we can best use various social media outlets to carry A.A.’s message while still adhering to A.A.’s Traditions. The consensus of the group, in regard to educating people in order to inform them about anonymity and A.A., was to educate A.A.s by sponsorship, workshops (area/district level), literature and pamphlets.

The group also discussed how to carry the message of Alcoholics Anonymous using social media—while staying within the guidelines of A.A.’s Traditions. The group consensus was that young people are educated within this area, and other group members can learn from them how to protect A.A.’s Traditions within social media. In addition, more experienced members can make sure newer members understand issues regarding picture taking of A.A.s at gatherings (and posting photos) and how it may compromise member anonymity.

PRESENTATIONS

“Communication Key to A.A. Growth and Participation” Rebecca T., Panel 64 Delegate, Area 16 Georgia

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this forum. I was excited and curious when I found out the Southeast Regional Forum was going to be in Puerto Rico. One thought that immediately came to mind was *how will the translation work? How will we be able to disseminate information back and forth across the language barrier?* Experience has shown me that when I step out of the way, my Higher Power will always provide the message that I need to hear.

In today’s world, technology is always changing our mode of communication; however, may we never lose sight of our primary purpose to help the suffering alcoholic. The question I need to ask myself is, how am I using the most effective method of communication within and outside of A.A.?

Our society was started with communication of one drunk talking with another drunk. Next was our Big Book in 1939, and then the A.A. Grapevine came along in 1944 to provide a broad form of communication.

Below is an excerpt from the July 1960 Grapevine article “The Conference Report”:

“Better communication—both inside and outside of A.A.—was the dominant theme of the Tenth Annual General Service Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous, which met for four days late in April at the Hotel Roosevelt in New York City.

“Bill W. sounded the keynote of the Conference when he spoke at the opening session on Wednesday evening. Describing A.A. as ‘a unique means of communication,’ A.A.’s co-founder said:

“Our lives have depended upon communication. Our unity depends on communication. Our functioning depends on communication. This Conference is a great network of communication . . .

“Our Twelve Steps probably won't change. Our Twelve Traditions? Not at all likely. But our manner of communication, our manner of organizing ourselves for service—let us hope that this goes on changing for the better, forever . . .”

This article inspired a review of how I communicate. Service work has given me the opportunity to improve on both my oral and written conversation skills. In Area 16 we have made a conscience effort to include our linguistic district at our area assemblies and D.C.M. meetings with translation. While I was preparing for Conference, I met with the linguistic district to review the agenda items which they would go over with other districts during the pre-Conference meeting. Besides this meeting, I have attended group anniversaries and local forums. It is always enlightening to be on the other side of the language barrier; the language of the heart is always spoken.

Sponsorship is vital for correspondence. When I arrived in Alcoholics Anonymous, I felt like I missed a day in life class and I didn't want to tell anyone. With sponsorship I learned how to ask questions, and my sponsor shared her experience on how to act and live. Also, through working the Steps, I saw that my Higher Power became a working part of my life.

My actions are a form of communication. This brings to mind the saying “Your actions are speaking so loud; I can't hear what you are saying.” Do I pick up the phone, return phone calls, e-mails, and text messages? How am I as a home group member? Do I try to run the group conscience meeting, or do I try to be an elder statesman? I am grateful for a home group where I go and be part of a place where my voice is heard.

I need to be in touch with another alcoholic on a daily basis. God has richly blessed me with a full life, and how I reach out to others is meaningful to my sobriety. We are conduits of information; there is a network of experience that we can share with each other.

May we be ever mindful of our primary purpose of reaching out and talking, one drunk to another.

“Passing It On Through Sponsorship” Scott G., Panel 63 Delegate, Area 71 Virginia

My name is Scott G. and I am an alcoholic. I have the privilege and honor of serving Area 71, Virginia, as its Panel 63 Delegate. My thanks to our forum coordinator, Mary, and everyone in Area 77 for allowing me to share a few thoughts and words on the topic “Passing It On Through Sponsorship,” something that was especially poignant in my early sobriety and laid the foundation for my spiritual journey in Alcoholics Anonymous up to this point.

Whenever I think of sponsorship I am taken back to my early inroads to A.A., an excursion that began almost twenty years ago. For me, it was a time when our Steps were something you shared about taking, but they were certainly not applicable to me; when our Traditions were foreign and boring to talk about; and when our Concepts only received passing reference from those involved in A.A. politics. In other words, it was a time when I thought my troubles were unique; when I questioned whether you were telling the truth when you said you had not had a drink in a whole year; and, of course, when I was still trying to achieve sobriety on my own terms without any success.

Then I met this magical man. A man that asked me how I was feeling after an especially brutal weekend and I was honest with him, saying I felt like—well, you can probably guess the words I used. He then offered to be my sponsor by telling me I could feel the way I did, but that I didn't have to if I was willing to accept some spiritual help. Thus began our trek on the Road of Happy Destiny together.

Sometime shortly after that he asked me to show him my most recent sobriety chip. He pointed out three words on that chip—Recovery, Unity, and Service—and said that as we continued on this path we would be involved in all three aspects. More important than his words were his actions. He showed me how taking the Steps gave him a new freedom and a new happiness; he accepted and implemented the group's conscience when that differed from his own opinion; and he served the group in whatever capacity it needed, even when that interfered with his personal ambitions. He even saw that general service might be a wrench that fit this nut and encouraged me to get involved, and then eventually suggested I ask another man to be my sponsor.

The man that became my second sponsor was involved in general service and his example demonstrated the value of giving something back to A.A. as a whole; the program and Fellowship that saves our lives and gives us lives worth living. He also reintroduced me to the first part of the first step of service—Get in the Car—and gave me the decoder ring that put meaning behind our long abbreviation list and service phrases, like G.S.R., D.C.M., P.I./C.P.C., minority opinion, Right of Decision, etc. I traveled with that man to assemblies and planning meetings for many years, by getting in the car and then watching our service processes unfold, all the while learning that expressing our collective conscience isn't politics at all.

The time then came where a service sponsor was required. She had a deeper grasp of our Concepts and their practical relevance to our business processes, a fuller understanding of how our World Service entities related to each other, and displayed the trusted-servant qualities that I wanted and needed in order to continue serving Alcoholics Anonymous. She taught me the difference between a statesman and a politico, the importance of prudence, and that compromise is often not such a bad idea. She is the one who provided the example and mentorship necessary to be one of the very few fortunate souls having the great honor to serve as a delegate to the General Service Conference.

I've only addressed my personal exposure and experiences with "Passing It On Through Sponsorship" thus far. I did so because experience is our best teacher, bringing deep meaning and eventual relevance to the words contained in our literature or spoken by those who came before us. Without those experiences, the words are largely theoretical. Our experiences make those words tangible.

Our "Questions and Answers on Sponsorship" pamphlet is probably the definitive word on the topic of this presentation. In it, on pages 14–15, is the section titled "What does a sponsor do?" and begins with this: "A sponsor does everything possible, within the limits of personal experience and knowledge, to help the newcomer get and stay sober through the A.A. program." While that quote seems to concentrate on our First Legacy, Recovery, the follow-up bullet points suggest that even in the beginning of a newcomer's journey we, as sponsors, have an obligation and responsibility to plant the seeds for our other two Legacies, Unity and Service.

One point suggests that we urge the newcomer to join in group activities as soon as possible. For me that meant becoming the group's coffee maker. (Actually, I did that for what seemed like a very period long before getting sober, but that is a story in itself.) Another aspect to this point was my first sponsor's recommendation that I pick a home group and attend that group's business/group conscience meeting. Since I was making coffee anyway, you can tell how much thought and effort went into selecting a home group.

Another point suggests we impress upon the newcomer the importance of all our Traditions. Early on, I was unable to see how our Traditions played any part in getting or staying sober. Today I can confidently state if our Third Tradition said "The only requirement for membership is sobriety" that I not only wouldn't have made coffee at my home group, it might have been a much longer period of time before I got sober. I don't know if there was a group conscience on my determination to make coffee even though I was still drinking, but I do know my sponsor just kept telling me "keep coming back," which I did until I had an honest desire to stop drinking.

One last point from this pamphlet: we are advised as sponsors to "give the newcomer some scope of A.A. beyond the group, and [direct] attention to A.A. literature about the history of the Fellowship, the Three Legacies, the service structure, and the worldwide availability of A.A.—wherever the newcomer may go." At different junctures the three sponsors I mentioned provided exposure to all three legacies and the many facets of our wonderful program. The vast majority of what I was told and shown by them has held true throughout the years. I only hope that I can strive to be as good a steward of A.A. for those that I sponsor as those that sponsored, and continue to sponsor, me.

The closing of the essay on the Ninth Concept in *The A.A. Service Manual/The Twelve Concepts for World Service* states that "Every sponsor is a leader. The stakes are about as big as they could be. A human life and usually the happiness of a whole family hang in the balance." I offer that as sponsors, whether in recovery or service, after our newcomers begins to overcome the fatality of destructive drinking and starts their sobriety journey, the lifeblood of A.A. then hangs in the balance. We owe it to our sponsees and to the society of Alcoholics Anonymous to sponsor them into all Three Legacies—Recovery, Unity, and Service—through our Steps, Traditions, and Concepts, so that what we have been freely given by our sponsors is passed along to those that we sponsor.

I consider myself very fortunate to have sponsors who, in their own way, communicated our legacies through their examples to me. I am blessed to have that experience and I hope the God of your understanding continues to bless and keep you.

Thank you.

"Corrections Correspondence Presentation" Cathy B., Delegate Panel 63 Delegate, Area 73 West Virginia

How would you like to make a Twelfth Step call from the comfort of your own home or office, or maybe even sitting under a tree? In a sense, that's what Alcoholics Anonymous members are doing when you agree to start writing to an A.A. member behind the walls. It is just another form of service.

What have I found by participating in this type of program? In a way, it's even better than having a one-on-one discussion with someone, because I get to consider and reword what I'd like to say. For me, Corrections Correspondence is like giving a drawn-out lead with many side journeys to reflect

on my own recovery. With each letter I can share my experience on a Step or how I've been able to integrate the principles of the program into my life.

The side benefit, just like any other Twelfth Step work, is that I get to understand myself a little better though attempting to carry the message on paper. Maybe the hardest part is keeping my handwriting legible and not having spell check available when I decide to use regular stationery! When I was asked what I was willing to do to stay sober, I had no idea that would entail actually making a trip to the post office to purchase stamps.

Historically, the G.S.O. staff member who receives the greatest number of letters has been on the Corrections desk. According to the *Corrections Workbook*, this service desk receives approximately thirty-five letters a day from inmates requesting literature, information, and contacts on the outside. Which makes sense, since A.A. members who are in jail have a lot of time to write.

And apparently, just like the new A.A. members on the outside, female members on the inside don't initially trust other women—hence the greater need for men to participate in this service. But that doesn't mean we women shouldn't continue to try and reach out. Whether inside the walls or out, it takes time to build trust.

Another important point is that unlike taking a meeting into the jails, you don't have to go through all the red tape that some facilities require to participate. All you need is the pamphlet "Corrections Correspondence—A Special Kind of A.A. Service." For those who may be a little nervous about working with inmates, G.S.O. will connect you with someone well outside your region. I have written to inmates in California and Nevada and I have never been afraid of someone showing up on my doorstep.

To wrap up and for inspiration, I'd like to read a couple of comments from the quarterly newsletter *Sharing from Behind the Walls*, which prints excerpts from letters with the inmates' permission. These are both from individuals living in our own Southeast region.

The first is from Mildred G.:

"Through the Corrections Correspondence Service (CCS), I've gained a tremendous amount of support. It's through these letters that I gained the determination to start my Steps. This is something that I've never done before because I thought I could do it on my own. My correspondent has helped me to pinpoint areas in my life that I've kept hidden for years. She's my sponsor, the first one I've ever had in all my many years of alcoholism. From day one, she's showed me nothing but support and understanding. She has helped to build me up where I was torn down. Today I thank you for providing such a service to the incarcerated, sick and suffering alcoholic."

The next is from Jerry C.:

"Before I came to prison this last time, I had completely given up. I really just wanted to die. I isolated, lived in the swamps of Florida, stole for my beer and drugs. When I was arrested—rescued is a better way of putting it—I felt like a great load was lifted. I live one day at a time and I'm trying to repair the damage I did to my family. I pray my father hears my prayers because I didn't get a chance to tell him before he died. We don't currently have anyone that comes in from outside A.A., but we have the A.A. Big Book and through reading we share our experiences with alcohol and the desire to stop. I truly believe it begins here, not just when I get out. I would like to have someone to correspond with on the outside who could maybe help me with questions I might have,

and my Twelve Steps. I look forward to hearing from someone, and I think it's great that you guys help us here in prison."

With that, I'd like to open it up for sharing and questions.

“Singleness of Purpose” José R., Delegate Panel 64, Area 77 Puerto Rico

Good morning. My name is José “Chepo” R. and I am a recovering alcoholic. I would like to share some thoughts about and experiences with the Alcoholics Anonymous singleness of purpose. Let me start by mentioning a part of what is stated in our A.A. preamble, which defines in a simple way what we are to society: “Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.” The men and women who belong to this program have different spiritual beliefs and ideals, which have taken shape in each of us. If that uniqueness were the reason we are here, A.A. would no longer exist. We see different people with various academic backgrounds and different missions in their personal lives. Over the years, members of and with different nationalities, cultures, languages, and ways of seeing the world have joined our program. In fact, A.A.—this great treasure for us and for future generations—is now in the seven continents.

I would like to focus my presentation on some points which I believe help illuminate the importance of staying united in purpose, for our recovery and for the recovery of those who will join us in the future.

I know a fellow A.A. member who jokingly says that alcoholism’s only good quality is that it is a democratic disease. It attacks anyone, regardless of age, color, belief, nationality, sex, and social status; in other words, it does not care who you are or where you are from. This disease can affect us all. So, regardless of the differences we may have, at each A.A. meeting in every part of the world there is something that maintains our singleness of purpose: the disease of alcoholism. This disease has certain characteristics that make it possible for us to identify and to feel, but for the grace of God, that we are not struggling with our problem alone. That identification makes me place the principles of this program before personalities. I am invited to look out for our common welfare and for the unity of the group so that I may have a place to recover, for I understand that I cannot do it by myself and that I need you to continue my recovery. As a basic principle, I have learned that the only way I can keep what I have (sobriety) is by sharing it with other alcoholics who suffer from the same disease.

Also, outside of the rooms, we have a society that is divided by many factors. It is our responsibility not to mix our program with all those things that divide our families, peoples, and countries. This unifying element leads me to understand that we do not close the door on anyone in A.A. Anybody who identifies as an alcoholic is welcome to join our Fellowship the moment they wish. That is why the desire to stop drinking is the only requirement for membership; thus avoiding membership rules, we are able to unite in purpose—not in a corner of our planet, but around the world.

In A.A. we have a service structure as a tool to freely give this great gift of sobriety to others. Contrary to other movements or organizations, we do not showcase the virtues of any member or have as our goal the personal or collective profit for any A.A. member in particular or the Fellowship as a whole. We simply share our experience with the objective of fostering the principles of the A.A. program, and thus knock on the door of the alcoholic who still suffers. As I see it, each A.A. servant

has to ask him or herself, *Am I carrying the message or helping the A.A. message reach those who need it?* The answer to this question tells us whether or not we are on the right service path. Whatever service we do, the goal is the same. For this reason, our structure is united in purpose. Also, the philosophy for living that the A.A. program offers us can help any person, whether or not he or she is an alcoholic: live better. But in the case of our A.A. Fellowship, as our Fifth Tradition suggests, we should stick to what we know. We focus and invest all of our resources on the alcoholic who is in the program and that person who is still to come. Are there people in A.A. with other afflictions? Yes, but if they are in A.A.—though it may sound redundant—they are alcoholic. From the beginning of our program we have seen cases of A.A. members like me—that is, members who have been plagued by other problems—but as long as we identify as alcoholics we are welcome and we can be a part of this wonderful Fellowship.

Alcoholism is the reason I am here with you, and the rest of the program will help me get rid of my all of my other problems. As Bill says in one of his essays collected in the book *The Language of the Heart*, titled “We Approach Maturity,” “Therefore, our Fifth Tradition declares: Each AA group ought to be a spiritual entity having but one primary purpose — that of carrying the message to the alcoholic who still suffers. So long as we remain grateful for what has befallen us, and for so long as this Tradition of high and single purpose in indelibly emblazoned in our hearts, our destiny will be assured. We shall be worthy of God’s Providence.”

Thank you.

“Grapevine/La Viña Goes to Prison in North Carolina! Carrying Our Message with Subscriptions” Homer M., Panel 63 Delegate, Area 51 North Carolina

Good morning and hola. I am an alcoholic named Homer M., Delegate, Area 51 North Carolina, Panel 63. I would like to thank Clay for the loving invitation and the gentle reminder that my presentation was due! I am grateful for this opportunity to share about both the A.A. Grapevine/La Viña and Corrections service programs. A.A. service involves passion and money, and this is especially true concerning programs that are new and different. Well, this program has it all! We in Area 51 have recently implemented the new program Grapevine/La Viña Goes to Prison—Carrying Our Message with Subscriptions, with two simple objectives:

1. Carry our message of recovery to the inmates and A.A. groups in NC prisons.
2. Support the A.A. Grapevine and La Viña through the purchase of subscriptions.

In May of this year, Area 51’s assembly voted to purchase 120 two-year Grapevine subscriptions for the A.A. groups in North Carolina’s thirty prisons. An additional three two-year La Viña subscriptions for the three Spanish-speaking groups were also approved.

This program supports the Grapevine/La Viña with almost \$6,000 in subscription revenue over the next two years! Additionally, there is an additional \$1,200 for Big Book and pamphlets that was requested and approved by the groups. This provides a one-time funding for literature support from Area 51. This is in addition to normal local A.A. community support, which includes taking individual copies of Grapevine/La Viña into prisons on a regular basis.

I would like to share first about the development of the idea, and then about the intense debate that was held before reaching a truly informed group conscience to approve this program.

First let's talk about the source of the \$6,000. In the early 2000s, Area 51 was in possession of surplus funds but had no process for using the extra money. After having the surplus for a couple of years, the groups cut back on contributions to the area, and soon the surplus became a deficit, then a huge deficit, and it took several years to build back our prudent reserve. Once the area's prudent reserve was restored, a process to handle any surplus funds developed. Basically it allows the area nine months to develop plans to use the surplus funds and the remainder is automatically sent to G.S.O. At the end of the delegate term in 2012 we had a surplus of approximately \$11,000. The \$6,000 came from this surplus. Several other programs were funded from the remainder, and the balance was sent to G.S.O.

The origination of the Grapevine/La Viña Goes to Prison started with several A.A. members suggesting similar ideas. We have been taking individual copies of the Grapevine to jails and prisons for a while, and some groups have provided individual subscriptions to prison groups. But it was a G.S.R. in a small community who had a prison service commitment that involved sending e-mails to both the Area 51 Corrections coordinator and the Grapevine coordinator that started the ball rolling. The G.S.R. even personally visited the Corrections coordinator to develop the idea more. As a result of the area Budget and Finance Committee, the area treasurer, and both coordinators working together, a motion was drafted and submitted to the area committee last winter.

Our Corrections coordinator worked closely with his prison contacts. He first worked closely with the North Carolina Department of Corrections and personally visited the program director of substance abuse several times. Once the program director approved the idea, they jointly developed the communications to the individual prison wardens and superintendents in each prison to get their support. He also worked with the local Corrections committees, the D.C.M.s, intergroups, and the person responsible for each home group in the individual prisons.

Concurrently our Grapevine coordinator and area treasurer worked closely with the Grapevine staff on the subscription process and the cost. It is not often that the Grapevine receives an order for \$6,000 to be shipped to a large number of individual addresses!

After planning work was completed, the motion was presented at the area committee meeting in March, and after much intense discussion it was approved to be presented to the area assembly. The primary objections were related to the difficulty of getting the actual Grapevine/La Viña copies from the prison mailroom to the A.A. groups. Each prison has its own challenges. The prep work by the coordinators helped ensure that the motion passed and then sent to the area assembly for consideration.

The Corrections coordinator used the time (approximately ten weeks) between the committee meeting and the assembly to communicate with all concerned to ensure understanding and to answer specific concerns. He developed a specific contact for each prison group to get the job done!

Yes, it takes a lot of effort to make something new work, and especially so with prisons and A.A. members!

Several very important things occurred when the motion was considered at our assembly:

1. There was an immediate substitute motion to remove the Grapevine subscriptions, leaving just the literature and La Viña in the motion! After some discussion, this was defeated.
2. The main motion was again considered. Several A.A. members who had been in prison shared

their personal experience on the importance of having the Grapevines for prisoners. They had very powerful personal experiences of the hope they received from the Grapevine while they were in prison.

3. Those who spoke in opposition to the motion were respectful and concerned that our money would be wasted if the Grapevines did not get from the mailrooms to the groups. Those in opposition included several long-time prison group sponsors. One of the best responses was that not all attempts at Twelfth Step work are successful, and just because a magazine did not get to the intended recipient does not mean it does not wind up helping an alcoholic.

After much sharing, careful consideration, and intense debate, the final vote was 238 for, 16 opposed, with two abstentions; therefore, the carried with substantial unanimity at 93 percent. Now the hard work and fun really begins! It is my hope that this level of funding will continue beyond the current two-year program. Yes, the Grapevine and La Viña is really going to prison in North Carolina to carry our message of recovery and hope!

Our Area 51 trusted servants are willing to share their experience, strength, and hope on this amazing adventure. We all learned a lot!

Thanks for the opportunity to share!

PAST TRUSTEE AND PAST DELEGATES' SHARING

Tito T., Past Delegate, Area 77, Panel 56

Alcoholics Anonymous has given me the opportunity to grow as an individual, to grow as a good father, as a good son, as a good husband. It was given to me as a gift and it is my responsibility to pass it on to whomever needs A.A.'s help.

It's been a miracle. When I served as delegate, the Puerto Rico area had asked me to ask why we couldn't have forums in Puerto Rico. They had asked me to request a forum in Puerto Rico. The last special forum had taken place in 1999. So I began to ask, and then my fellow A.A.s—Antonio, Oscar—the ones who came after me, kept asking why there was no forum in Puerto Rico.

Thank you to the Southeast region of Alcoholics Anonymous, who also helped bring this about, because today we are celebrating a great forum in Puerto Rico. It's been an enormous blessing for us, as well as an opportunity for growth. It's a huge joy to have had you all here in Puerto Rico. We are part of the Southeast region, and we will always remember this great forum, celebrated in our "Island of Enchantment," once again.

We have you in our hearts. We will continue to see each other and we will see each other in Atlanta, God willing, next year, at the International Convention, because a great majority of Puerto Rico will be present there, giving thanks to God and to Alcoholics Anonymous. May God bless you and, when you leave this forum, may you have a happy return to your homes. Thank you.

Eladio M., Past Delegate, Area 77, Panel 54

I am a "past delegate," not an "ex-delegate," because I keep active in Alcoholics Anonymous. I intend to keep active as long as I live. I remember many nice, positive things about the Conference in 2004-2005. I got to the Conference because I understood that my Higher Power had willed it so.

One of the nicest moments at the Conference was when Greg M. did the roll call and he mentioned my name. I jumped up from my chair and I nearly said: "You tell me what needs to be done!" I felt so moved and I was so excited about being there.

Another truly nice memory I have has to do with the trustee we had back then, the Southeast regional trustee, my fellow A.A. member, Dick G. I saw Dick as our team captain. I felt protected when I was around Dick. I felt safe. I didn't feel afraid. And I think that role, or that function of the regional trustee is very important. Someone who is close by and supports the delegates, because we go to the Conference feeling scared. I remember very fondly the committee to which I was assigned, the literature committee, where we were able to do several pamphlets. The first year I wasn't able to contribute as much as I wanted, because that first year is a year of learning, isn't it? But by the second year I prepared myself better. I participated in everything and was much better prepared than that first year. I learned so many things from the Conference. You see, in the groups you learn some concepts like love, humility, tolerance, and acceptance. All those concepts are implicit in the program of Alcoholics Anonymous. So, when you go to Conferences and you see all

these concepts being expressed to their fullest, and it's truly incredible. Seeing some of the things that one has read about in the literature over there is just fantastic.

One of the things I saw from up close over there was service rotation. Dick left in 2004. It was so hard for me to accept that Dick had to go. When he was done, I came over to him as he was saying goodbye. I said to him, "You're not staying?" He said, "No, I can't stay. I have to go." I will never forget seeing these concepts in action. And I will rely upon these experiences my whole life.

Inocencio (Ino) F., Past Delegate, Area 77, Panel 36

I am a past delegate from Panel 36, 1986-87. These matters of service, well, you get used to them little by little, and I was not the exception. The first time I ran into service outside my group it was as GSR, and then, when they told me about it, I asked a guy who had a lot of time in the program and he said: "Don't get involved in that, because a lot of messy things happen there." I said to him, "That's what I like." And from that time on, I've continued. There have been others who have said that the matter of service is a problem and I have told them: "The matter of service is part of my being a grateful A.A." That's what it's about, about me giving thanks for what the A.A. program has given me.

When I was a delegate, there was a forum like this one here—in 1986 it was a special forum. I understood then that this kind of activity is a wonderful opportunity to break away from what happens in A.A. groups, thinking of people as "them" and "us." They, our fellow A.A. members, say that it's very hard to break away from this, the fact that those of us who are outside, the GSRs, and those who serve the area, are "them," and those who are in the group are "us."

What we have here is a bunch of wonderful human beings. It doesn't matter what level of service we are at—we are all doing what we have to do in Alcoholics Anonymous, which is to carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers. I thank all of you for coming here to help us carry on with this role. This role is my life and is the reason I'm alive. And, until God decides to take me, I will be here with all of you.

Luis Raul H., Past Delegate, Area 77, Panel 32

I am also a past delegate, Panel 32, 1982-83. Living in accordance with A.A. principles has given meaning to my life, it has added years to my life and, above all, it has given life to my years. I try to show my gratitude toward Alcoholics Anonymous through my actions. The opportunity I have of being able to address you for a couple of minutes is yet another reason to be grateful to God and to Alcoholics Anonymous. The special forum that took place here in 1986 was mentioned. Back then; I was part of the host committee, along with my fellow A.A., Jaime, who is no longer with us. Our fellow A.A. member, Susan from G.S.O., coordinated that forum. And then, in '99, we went to another special forum and she was with us again. She gave us the nickname "the three musketeers." There were three of us—past delegates coordinating that activity.

But at this forum, specifically, I would like to thank all of the Southeast region, and the new and old servants at the General Service Office. I've been able to see and feel that Alcoholics Anonymous is

alive, that its message will continue to be carried, that we will continue to be the hope for so many people affected by alcoholism. They will have the opportunity to know a different way of life and to be able to feel grateful. And that you have demonstrated here today. You have not said it in words; you have shown it through your actions in helping to carry the message. Ultimately, this is what Alcoholics Anonymous is, a program to keep those of us already here, sober, and to continue to carry the message to those who still suffer.

And I sincerely want to thank Irene for the work she is doing to try to keep La Viña alive. It is necessary; it's vital that that A.A.'s message continue to be carried. Aside from being an alcoholic, I'm an accountant, and I have some experience about finance. It would have taken me only a second to close an operation that is losing money, like La Viña. That is, if we look at it only in terms of dollars and cents. But there is a lot more that cannot be measured with those terms. I don't know how long this can be kept up, but we must do it a day at a time, and we are the ones who should set the example. We need to show that we do want that magazine. And how do we show it? Through subscriptions, through participation, and by submitting our stories. Thank you, and may God give us his blessing.

Trinidad [Trini] C., Past Delegate, Area 77, Panel 24

I am very grateful for Alcoholics Anonymous, but I came to A.A. reluctantly. I didn't come—I was brought here. I was brought to the group, they carried me, they held my hand, they picked me up. Later on, the group allowed me to walk alongside them, and then they said I should serve them and I began to feel well. Seven years later, I was asked to be a delegate. When I was elected delegate, I had no idea the mess I was getting into, because there was no service structure in Puerto Rico. Each group was going nowhere fast, and each group was doing its own thing. Thank God, there were only a few. There were thirty-six groups, with about three hundred alcoholics. So, I wrote to the United States—the secretary was Cora Louise B. I told her about our situation. She instructed me; they sent me a pamphlet: “How to set up a new service area.” We visited the groups—each one—and guided them and asked them to appoint a GSR. All the literature I got was in English; there was no Spanish literature at the time. I went to the groups and I talked to them. People saw me starting to open, they started seeing the interest I had, and they began collaborating with me.

Within two or three months, a service structure was started in Puerto Rico. Good or bad, there was a service structure. And we would protect them because, as they say in Alcoholics Anonymous, there is a Tenth Step that we can also use in service. I had read somewhere that: “We made mistakes before, we are making mistakes now and we will make mistakes tomorrow—but well-thought-of mistakes, well-made mistakes. We can turn mistakes into triumphs with the practice of A.A.'s Step Ten.” Thank God, this is what happened: five or six months later we were working like ants and the program was working. The area structure was born and, as I was finishing my two years of delegate service, we had gone from three hundred members to more than a thousand, and to more than ninety groups. Thanks to God and the help of those trusted servants who started doing the work.

In 1974, we approved what we are enjoying here today, the first forum, at the request of the chairman of the General Service Board at that time, Dr. Jack Norris. The first forum was in Atlanta, Georgia, and we called it “mini-conference,” or “mini conferencia.” I had the joy of being there to enjoy it. And I went to the others. The name was eventually changed to the one we use today,

forums. In Puerto Rico we celebrated three, one in '86, one in '99 and the one this weekend. I enjoyed them, but believe me — I never enjoyed any of them as much as I've enjoyed this one. I don't know if it's because of my age, because of my Parkinson's, or because of my blindness, but I know that I'm enjoying it to the core. At group anniversaries, we celebrate a “party of the spirit” at the group. I'm going to call these three days “the spiritual party of Alcoholics Anonymous.”

EI N., past trustee, Southeast region, 2009-2013

I reflected on my four years as a general service board member and as a Grapevine board member. I miss you terribly — the people of passion, the people who express gratitude through general service. I miss your area assemblies, the committee reports, your stories, and how you carry the message into prisons and how that young man who you carried the message to inside the prison is now sitting beside you. I miss your questions, what is happening, what is changing, sharing your challenges. I miss hearing your concerns for the welfare of A.A. — Your questions of, “How can I help carry the message?” and, “Self-support, what is that and how can I begin to do it?” Last night, I attended the workshop on self-support, and the difficulty was that I didn't understand the language until someone sat with me and translated. And I want you to know that regardless of the language that we speak, the love and concern for the future of Alcoholics Anonymous are a concern for all of us.

I miss hearing, at the assemblies, the curious question regarding our Class A nonalcoholic trustees: Who are they? I miss watching our Class As give their time to us. They serve unconditionally, and most of them practice the 36 Principles of our program better than I do. They have a passion and an interest in us that is beyond my comprehension. I miss the ladies and gentlemen at the General Service Office and at the Grapevine. These are dedicated workers; they get paid to do a job. But they do it with a heart that understands the importance of the job. Our staff members do not dream these things up by themselves — they depend on you and me through the group conscience and our delegates to be given the loving guidance and direction so that we may be more effective in carrying the message. It's their work that makes our Twelfth Step work possible.

Rotation from general service has carved a huge hole in my heart, and there is work to be done in my home group through sponsorship and recovery but also through sponsorship into general service. I truly want the hand of A.A. to be there for those who reach out. And if A.A. is going to be here, general service must function. As your past trustee, I leave you with a recovery challenge right out of the Big Book: “See to it that your relationship with him is right and great things will come to pass for you.” And I think a service challenge is right and appropriate: *If not now, when? And if not me, who?* It is only by God's grace that we all have this opportunity and only by God's grace and this loving program that we will all gather together in Atlanta to celebrate the hand of A.A. throughout the world.

“CLOSING REMARKS”

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

I hope that every A.A. member is made to feel as welcome at their first A.A. meeting as you have made us feel at this meeting.

It has been said that 18 million people in the U.S., Puerto Rico, and Canada suffer from a life-threatening problem.

Fighting isolation is a key to ongoing sobriety. It is easy in today's world it is easy to buddy up with a laptop or a smart phone or a tablet instead of a real person. And that isolation can be a challenge for all of us, just as we are challenged to effectively utilize technology to deliver our message of A.A. To deliver that message of hope, A.A. must be a clear and authoritative voice that can be sorted out and heard in the midst of misinformation, miscommunication and uninformed personal opinion. We are Alcoholics Anonymous, not Alcoholics Invisible.

You can't convince a drunk to get help—the booze does that. We don't need to convince the world that A.A. works. 180 countries around the world have discovered that. All we have to do is show up, get a good sponsor, follow our Higher Power, and the rest will take care of itself.

Today, every successful mutual help group in the world is modeled after A.A.'s Twelve Steps. No other group in the world comes provides your kind of support to others suffering from a common problem. A member wrote, “When I drank, I had a drinking problem that I could not handle. When I stopped drinking, I had a living problem I could not handle.” For those who are restless, irritable, and discontent, drinking is not the solution. Not drinking is not the solution. The solution is spiritual growth and application of the Twelve Steps in all aspects of our lives. Bill said, our message to the world is not that we have succeeded in ceasing to drink, but that in ceasing to drink, we have succeeded in learning to live. Thank you for the opportunity to serve.
