



FINAL REPORT

WEST CENTRAL REGIONAL FORUM

SEPTEMBER 6-8, 2013

BLOOMINGTON, MN

Dear A.A. Friends,

Please mark your calendar for the next West Central Regional Forum, which will take place in Casper, Wyoming, August 21-23, 2015 at the Parkway Plaza 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 2013 West Central Regional Forum was held in Bloomington, Minnesota. Registration for this Forum topped at 518. This included 305 members attending their very first Forum—several who were welcomed at the Forum Orientation on Friday evening. Sunday morning included a session for first-time forum attendees, followed by sharing from past trustees.

WORKSHOP REPORTS

“Primary Purpose—Tradition Five” (Moderator: Jim K./Reporter: Mary Allen) The workshop members were asked to discuss the question “What does it mean for a group to be a spiritual entity?” The members responded that for a group to be a spiritual entity it must be an example to the newcomer, both inside and outside the rooms; be aware of what the group is presenting to newcomers; have a desire to pass the solution along; join within a larger community, and present deeper values and meanings by which to live; emphasize that this is a *spiritual* program not a religious one; and project that there is a solution and we will help you find it. The workshop members were also asked the question “What message is the group carrying?” The members responded that messages include “one-solution” the consistent message of A.A. from the Big Book; welcome the newcomer, and share our stories so they can relate; provide phone numbers and get phone numbers; there is a solution to all the problems that we have; there is a solution and hope; how to live sober; explain that newcomers can come and stay sober regardless of anything; and speak their language so newcomers feel welcome.

“A.A. Growth—Now and in the Future” (Moderator: Terry L./Reporter: Lisa G.) The workshop members were asked to discuss the question “C.P.C.-Making Friends with Our Friends-What are various ways to reach out and form relationships with professionals in our communities so that they would not only have an understanding of A.A. but would also refer their potential A.A. clients to us?” The members responded that we can reach out by hosting C.P.C. brunches and lunches through areas and districts and even if these meals are small they will still be effective; have the brunches and lunches be area, district or group funded; be able to distill A.A. information down to a few minutes so that we as individual A.A. members can personally approach the time-strapped professional; meet the professionals where it is convenient for them—e.g., associations, speaker lunches, and on their time-frame; suggest your group have a C.P.C. Representative; get the judges, P.O.S. police departments to think outside the box —e.g., personal trainers, fitness centers, yoga studios, etc.; stamp A.A. literature with personal contact information or Intergroup or central office contact information; emphasize the value of C.P.C. work in our homegroups; C.P.C. is a hard position to fill but inform your group what the position entails to dispel their fears; the key is to follow-up with the professionals you are trying to foster relationships with; and have a General Service Conference theme to be C.P.C. to engage a fellowship-wide discussion. In general, the members thought it was important to dialogue and foster relationships with C.P.C. professionals and have effective ways to do that in order to continue to grow A.A.

The workshop members were also asked “How do we retain young people in A.A.?” The members responded to be aware of our behavior in meetings —e.g., 13th Stepping, excluding or alienating young people, not making them feel welcome or behaviors that chase them out; give

young people commitments and invite them to fun fellowship events to let them know that we are not a glum lot; bring meetings to halfway houses, county jails, treatment centers; clarify A.A. is a spiritual program not religious; social media can be a way to reach young people but do this in a way that does not conflict with our Traditions; let young people know that we have fun in A.A. and do Fellowshiping; let young people know we want them to participate in A.A.; cultivate relationships; young people don't always know they are alcoholics so there is a need to have love and tolerance, don't chase young people out or ignore because they are coming in from treatment centers, rather help them find themselves in the Big Book. In general, the members reported that it comes down to putting out the extra effort to forge relationships and relate to our young people, as we are responsible.

“The Spirit of Rotation—Principles before Personalities” (Moderator: Sharon S./Reporter: Gerry R.) The workshop members were asked the question “How can we in small communities encourage and help our new members into and through service?” The members responded that it was important to understand that people have fear about service and we can help by sharing our experience in a positive way; by being service sponsors; we can ask new members face-to-face “how about you?”; educating them in positions by sharing the duties of the positions or showing by example and “growing them”; if the position is ready to rotate and is not filled then leave it open for the next person to volunteer. The workshop members were also asked the question “In the spirit of rotation and putting principles before personalities, how does one learn to act as an elder statesman and not a bleeding deacon?” The members responded to get out of the way but try to help; one often learns by being a bleeding deacon and making mistakes and amends; bleeding deacons are easily identified and are in the minority; bleeding deacons have trouble doing the 10th Step but elder statesmen do not; by striving to be an example; understand that one needs to continue to grow even after rotation; never hold the same position twice and hold only one position at a time; read the literature that defines these roles; be encouraging and not discouraging; and remember the need for minority opinion.

“The A.A. Group: Where It Begins” (Moderator: Chase R./Reporter: Joanie M.) The workshop members were asked the question “What is the ‘It’ in where it begins?” The members responded that nobody recovers at service board meetings, rather it begins in the group; groups have the responsibility to practice and teach the Twelve Traditions where recovery starts; in meetings everyone seems to be happy, shaking hands; the beginning is in the ‘We’ and hope that we receive at meetings; it also happens between meetings, 12th Step work and sponsorship, business meetings and group conscious; when members are honest with themselves and each other; recovery – the journey begins when a call is made and a call is received; when members demonstrate patience, tolerance, love and responsibility and appear genuinely wanting to help; groups carry the message of A.A. outside the meeting times; first the individual recovers, then they learn in the group and finally they help A.A. as a whole; and when we offer the whole of A.A. and its opportunities to others is when it all begins.

The members were also asked the question “What is the function of the group and what does the message look like?” The members responded that some groups stay close to themselves and many of these groups do not make it; strong groups teach what to do outside the meetings; change starts with the members; some need events/fellowship to get started and learn the message afterwards; clubs can be problematic and may be a good place to start, but it may be hard to stay sober in the club; carry the message “one drunk at a time” and learn patience, tolerance and love through the informed group conscience.

“Special Needs/Accessibilities Committee” (Moderator: Curt K./Kelli S.) The members of this group were quite diverse, including A.A. members who were deaf and hard of hearing, blind, facing physical mobility challenges, living with traumatic brain injuries, living with cognitive learning challenges, and many other alcoholics. Five topics were discussed because of this diversity in members: First, ensuring that public information pieces, websites, meeting directories and A.A. event flyers clearly and accurately designate if and how those meetings are accessible. There should always be a contact listed from which to request assistance with special needs. Second, it is important to raise awareness among those who sponsor that sponsoring A.A. members with special needs requires acceptance, patience and understanding and a willingness to search out alternative resources such as literature on CD, Braille, a video or translation. Third, A.A. members with mental health challenges such as traumatic brain injuries, mental illness and cognitive learning challenges are often not easily identified. We are all encouraged to check our prejudices and assumptions at the door of A.A. Fourth, choosing locations for A.A. meetings that are truly accessible for those who have physical mobility challenges is very important. Districts and Intergroups are encouraged to verify that meetings that claim to be accessible really are in all respects. Finally, funding professional sign-language interpretation at A.A. meetings is both crucial and challenging. Some groups, districts and Intergroups are using various mechanisms to do this, from budget line-items to special collections at meetings. Prioritizing 12th Step work can be complicated but rewarding for the group conscience.

“Grapevine: The Grapevine Rep and More—Bringing our Message of Hope to Alcoholics” (Moderator: Jon W./Reporter: Mike M.) The workshop members were asked the question “How do we get people to subscribe to the Grapevine?” The members responded to make the free material including subscription forms available at groups; give a Grapevine to a newcomer; bring old copies to jails and treatment centers; give away subscriptions as a prize; promote the Grapevine Representative; and get homegroups to buy a subscription. The workshop members also discussed the content of the Grapevine. The members reported that they like the Three Legacies section and suggested: have a section for representatives to promote the Grapevine; include more references to the Big Book; have more comics and jokes; print in a bigger font; and take out gray pages. Finally the members were asked “How to raise the importance of the Grapevine Representative at the district level?” The members responded to invite homegroup representatives other meetings to promote the Grapevine; invite homegroup representatives to be a committee member at the district level; inform groups what a Grapevine Representative does; and have more Grapevine workshops.

“A.A. and Advancing Technologies” (Moderator: Blaine B./Reporter: Karl R.) The workshop members were asked the question “Can A.A. make technology material user-friendly and understandable for all abilities to use?” The members responded that multilevel technology is needed to meet our needs; security needs are most important; and to have data that is correct and easy to find. The members were also asked, “Can we get a centralized area for using A.A. technology information – codes, templates, etc.?” The members responded that if technology were centralized it could help, especially meeting locations; centralize emails and calendars; share code/templates, etc.; an emerging consciousness that there are codes, template experiences and practices that could be shared centrally and would be of great benefit; there is also demand for these efficiencies –e.g., national meeting locator

for example; a national meeting to share these ideas (the possible help/use of the General Service Office to create packets to help centralize ideas were seen as promising options.

“Sponsorship” (Moderator: Sheryl F./Reporter: Dorte B.) The workshop members were asked the question “What is the difference between a sponsor and service sponsor?” The members responded by reading the pamphlet on sponsorship where it is explained many times; to ask people with previous service position experience to guide; have a group sponsorship coordinator to help people to get a sponsor; start with service at the group level – e.g., coffee, cleanup, setup; there are many ways you can sponsor a deaf person –e.g., computer; service sponsors showed me how to conduct myself and carry the message through action; service sponsors got me into the Service Manual and took me through the Twelve Traditions and Concepts; sponsor takes us through the Twelve Steps and service sponsors get us busy doing things for others so we don’t think about ourselves.

The workshop members were also asked the question “How were you sponsored versus how you now sponsor?” The members responded that their first sponsors showed them how to do things but sometimes let them down when they needed him/her, while current sponsors help with the Big Book, service and cares; several people got drunk trying to do it without sponsorship but with a sponsor they found growth and sobriety; sponsor helped “me” find “me” in the Big Book and showed me how to find a solution; Big Book thumpers directed which meetings to go to, pages to read every day, prayers to pray and gave me direction and stability when I had none; sponsorship is not teaching, rather it is learning; when changing sponsors I was to told to thank my old sponsor for everything she had done for me, specifically and why I was changing; my sponsor taught me to treat people with respect and gratitude and be specifically grateful; my sponsor told me when I was finished the Steps to sponsor before I felt ready and taught me to ask for guidance of others when I did not have specific answers for a sponsee. In summary, a majority of members found that how they sponsor now is a mix of the good and avoidance of the bad experiences they themselves received from their sponsors.

“Welcoming the Newcomer” (Moderator: Brenda L./Reporter: Stacy M.) The workshop members were asked the question “Are there behaviors that we participate in that may be unwelcoming to a newcomer and what can we do to help newcomers feel more comfortable?” First, members discussed things that might make the newcomer feel uncomfortable, such as hugs as some newcomers don’t want to be touched, having too many greeters, figuring out who to ask for sponsorship when people are busy talking to their friends and don’t approach you, ignoring or not saying anything to the newcomers or not telling people where to go –e.g., if your meeting breaks off into groups, not being friendly, introducing newcomers to other people, when everyone in the meeting talks at the newcomer once they identify themselves as such, don’t give someone your name and number if you aren’t willing to talk to them, don’t preach to newcomers from a spiritual hilltop, Traditions policing because someone introduces themselves as something other than an alcoholic, chanting at the end of meetings, predators, not explaining how to do their job, the tone of your voice, assuming something about a new person in the meeting, talking about outside issues and not following the Traditions.

Things that might make people more comfortable include having greeters, greeters are really important for the newcomers and for the group member, raising hands for sponsorship, giving them options to connect with a sponsor both on the break and after the meeting, talking to the newcomer and letting him/her know what to expect, approaching them after the meeting and letting them know you are glad they are here or that you liked something they said,

remembering names and information about people we talk to, admitting that you don't remember their name (showing that it's okay to be vulnerable), practicing the principles in all of our affairs (group culture), keeping outside issues outside of the rooms, including political t-shirts and bumper stickers, remembering that the still-suffering alcoholic might not be new, sticking out your hand and showing the new person around, giving back what we receive, letting newcomers know that they are welcome to share if they want to, including everyone in group rituals (like praying with the speaker), focusing on feelings that might be more appealing to newcomers because we all have feelings, explain what the problem is so we can all relate, making sure newcomers have phone numbers, insert ourselves between newcomers and potential predators, remember to put ourselves in the newcomer's shoes, provide the newcomer with meetings –i.e., a place to go as a newcomer.

The workshop members were also asked the question “What are the ‘hooks’ that keep a newcomer coming back and feeling welcome?” The members responded hearing things that I related to pertaining to their alcoholism and realizing that they understood me - followed with a solution that worked, having a positive message, feeling like the group needs my help (they were hugging everyone and I felt I could help change that), let the newcomer know they have something to give (get them greeting or helping with setup right away), developing relationships with other members, when everyone in the group is focused on greeting the newcomer, having organized (and unorganized) fellowship and inviting people to attend, we are the hooks, we know what it is like and can connect with newcomers, let people know about other meetings in the area, an old-timer who took me under her wing, gave me a Big Book and connected me with someone my own age, and coffee and treats.

“Communication in A.A.: Connecting the Group with A.A. as a Whole” (Moderator: Missy P./Reporter: Jason H.) The workshop members were asked the questions “How do we foster a sense of commitment in new people and sponsor them into service?” and “How do we hold them accountable and help them keep the commitment?” The members responded that we make service available and attractive; finance service work for our trusted servants; give them a voice and listen to their reports; help trusted servants to see the big picture and understand why we do what we do; we also have to be attentive to who we ask to be our trusted servants as not just anyone will do. The workshop members were also asked “What are tips or strategies for getting General Service Representatives (GSRs) and groups involved in districts and/or areas?” The members responded that there are reasons groups are not involved, usually resentments and sometimes, ignorance. We must follow principles and procedures and be respectful of each other; and be a cheer leader and get people excited as service work can be dry, so we have to try to make it interesting. Finally, the workshop members were asked “How transparent should officers be?” The members responded that transparency means being honest; people are willing to be more than supportive and helpful if they realize you need help; process and principles is very important; perception versus reality; and the truth shall always set you free.

PRESENTATIONS

“Our Primary Purpose” Greg B., Delegate Panel 62, Area 76 Wyoming

Tradition Five: Each Alcoholic Anonymous group ought to be a spiritual entity *having but one primary purpose*—that of carrying its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

What is the primary purpose? When first reading Tradition Five it appeared to me that each group has its own message to carry. After trying to live up to the principles for quite a few twenty-four hours, I realized I had misunderstood. Each group’s primary purpose is to carry the message of Alcoholics Anonymous.

If you want what we have then do what we did: “Abandon yourself to God as you understand God. Admit your faults to Him and to your fellows. Clear away the wreckage of your past. Give freely of what you find and join us.”

There is a process I went through to accomplish that. First, I had to become desperate enough to make a truly honest effort. With the help of a sponsor I followed the precise instructions contained in the Big Book.

The advice that I hear today is “Go to rehab and come to meetings.” It sounds to me like most people are getting the message that A.A. is an aftercare group therapy. A.A. is not aftercare, nor another alcohol avoidance class. A.A. is a fellowship of people who have found a way out from under the terror, bewilderment, frustration, and despair of alcoholism.

Carrying the message does not mean sitting in a meeting of my home group, waiting for others to come through the door, and checking the answering machine once a week. It requires effort and sacrifice. Sacrifices like carrying the message into correction facilities and treatment centers, and answering the phone after 9:30.

I am concerned about all of the “digital” emphasis in our services. If there is a computer under a bridge it certainly is not connected to the Internet. What message are we carrying in this arena? That if you don’t have a smartphone you are not good enough for A.A.? I have been at meetings where an inebriate has walked in and then subsequently been ignored by the other attendees. Who are we here for if not for the still-suffering alcoholic? There are still people dying of alcoholism who have not had the opportunity to hear the message.

So I urge you to look at *your* program and ask yourself if you are following *the* program. My life has been much simpler since I started doing *the* program instead of working *my* program.

“Rule #62—Not Taking Ourselves too Seriously” Kit J., Delegate Panel 62, Area 41
Nebraska

Hi, I am Kit J., alcoholic, Area 41, Panel 62 Delegate from Nebraska. As quoted in the chapter on Tradition Four in the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, Rule #62 reads “Don’t take yourself too damn seriously.” This was excerpted from a list of rules and regulations to ensure continuous operation of a group called the Middleton Group. Rule #62 was established after an attempt to create an alcoholic center of glorious magnitude which would sober up multitudes of drunks by offering financial aid, educational opportunities, and, of course, curing the lonely heart. You can read the whole story, which ended in disaster and the creation of Rule #62, in the Twelve and Twelve. Tradition Four established the group’s right to be wrong, the importance of non-affiliation, and the importance of our singleness of purpose.

Bill’s essay on Tradition Four in the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*—“Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole”—starts with the word “autonomy.” As I searched for the definition of “autonomy,” other terms like “independence,” “freedom,” “self-government,” “liberty,” “self-reliance,” “self-direction,” self-sufficiency,” and “self-governing community” popped up. These terms are seemingly contrary to how I’ve been taught to apply our thirty-six principles of living, through our Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions, and Twelve Concepts.

I was full of “self” as I entered Alcoholics Anonymous. I was sure if others would leave me alone or do as I wanted my problem would be solved. As I began to experience the loving power of recovered alcoholics sharing their journey in A.A., I understood how I played a part in my life experience and how my drinking was affecting me and others. Characteristics I cherished had to be examined and put in my Higher Power’s loving arms, to be changed or discarded if peace were to be obtained. I’ve always said that if I could have been a fly on the wall and hid in the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous I would have been a happy camper. As a new member of A.A., somehow developing a new way of living through osmosis, I realized that A.A. doesn’t work that way. I could not be autonomous if I wanted to live.

Remember, I said I *began* to experience and understand my part. Prior to A.A., I could only drink when I felt restless, irritable, or discontented. I slowly began to participate in my recovery. Experiencing the Twelve Steps with Higher Power’s grace I saw how I needed to change, primarily by watching others participate in Alcoholics Anonymous through service and discussions with A.A. sponsors. This has been a slow and sometimes painful journey. Page 174 of *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* states that “Great suffering and great love are A.A.’s disciplinarians; we need no others.” Drinking had quit working so I had no other choice but to pick up this “kit of spiritual tools.” I watched individuals, groups, districts, areas, committees, and, now, the General Service Conference engage in passionate discussion and make mistakes (which I of course thought would be the end of Alcoholics Anonymous), only to see that through mistakes growth is possible. Participating in Alcoholics Anonymous involves this form of communication and growth.

This brings us to a discussion regarding the exception in Tradition Four: “. . . except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.” As stated earlier, my drinking affected everyone in my life without exception. I didn’t participate in healthy communication to resolve differences of thinking; all I could do was drink and create havoc. Recovery affects everyone I touch today.

My autonomy is limited as a sober participant in recovery. When what I do touches others, which is most of the time, I need to consult with them and discover how my actions are affecting them. This ripple effect includes all entities of Alcoholic Anonymous. Groups, districts, areas, the General Service Conference, and A.A. Boards make decisions and take actions which affect Alcoholics Anonymous as a whole.

How much autonomy do I really have? I can decide how to comb my hair, which way to brush my teeth, boxers or briefs, which leg to put in my pants first; I hadn't been out of bed too long. From there I begin to interact with others. Considering others becomes an integral part of the remaining hours of the day. I'm now reminded of page eighty-four of our Big Book: "Love and tolerance of others is our code And we have ceased fighting anything or anyone—even alcohol." Fighting would have accurately described every interaction I had with others while drinking. Through our recovery actions I've been given the tools required to stop fighting so I don't drink. This allows for effective communication, *if* I'm spiritually fit, which happens *sometimes* today. Group autonomy includes group members deciding where to meet, time to start, and the format of its meetings. District autonomy includes groups of districts consisting of sober members deciding where to meet, time to start, and the format of its meeting. As we move further down our inverted triangle of service, autonomy becomes less effective, and the exception stated in Tradition Four (" . . . except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole") correlates with Tradition Nine: "A.A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve." Direct responsibility to those they serve doesn't mean authority; usefulness depends on respect, as evidenced in the long form of Tradition Nine. Respect includes taking inventories of ourselves, showing responsibility for behavior before acting, and considering the common welfare of our Fellowship. Autonomy, applied to Tradition Four, allows for fulfilling our primary purpose in reaching out to others with love and tolerance to carry our message of recovery.

As I bring this presentation to a close I'm reminded of the simple action taken by the lead fellow from the Middleton Project. He was willing to humbly admit the errors of his thinking and acted by sharing Rule #62, "Don't take yourself too damn seriously." Under the direction of a loving Higher Power we can share our mistakes, laugh, and move forward, applying what we learn by sharing our many imperfections. An act I observed as a new member of Alcoholic Anonymous, relieving me of the bondage of myself.

Thank you for allowing me to serve.

"Self-support" Mike R., Delegate Panel 63, Area 52 North Dakota

Through sobriety and sober life experiences, I have had to change my thoughts regarding what self-support means to me. I am not here to preach to the choir; I am here to share my experiences, strengths and hopes with each of you while trying to practice the principles in all of my affairs.

In the past, when anyone would mention the term self-support I would get uncomfortable, fidgety, and immediately become close minded. Fear, shame, guilt, and resentment were the basis of my life. I would compare my insides to your outsides and I kept coming up short. Self-support meant money, and putting money in the basket as it went around the room. I tended to watch as others did or did not put money in the basket. My mind became judgmental with wild

stories about others, with thoughts like *they make more money than I do, so they should put more money in the basket, because they have a better job than I do*. The stories were endless. My thinking had to change. If it progressed this way it was going to lead me to bad behavior, and my attitude towards weakness and despair. And that's where my old definition of self-support ended and a new one developed.

As an individual member, I am responsible for my own self-support. It is my own responsibility to ensure I get to A.A. meetings. I know what happens when I don't go—I get sick in the head. My focus becomes *wants* instead of *needs*. But I wanted what you had, so I had to become willing to live a better way of life that involved more than just surviving. Other ways I am self-supporting include regularly talking to my Higher Power, who I choose to call God. I enact this by reading literature, sharing with others, and meditating. Another way is by talking to my sponsor, and in turn being a sponsor. As long as I continue to practice what is taught to me, I can be self-supporting (though of course with help).

When I was newcomer, I had taken for granted that coffee would be made, chairs would be set up, and the building would be unlocked. I didn't give a second thought as to how this all happened. The more I regularly attended, the more I realized how things were getting done. These members were doing this to ensure the meeting would be available for all those who needed it. It was my turn to start giving back. So I joined a group. Having a home group, I was able to chair meetings, make coffee, help with set up and take down of the meeting, and even cleanup afterward. These are all examples of being self-supporting, and declining help from the outside.

Getting involved in service work opened my heart and mind to what else was needed to make sure the hand of A.A. would always be there for the alcoholic who needs it. Groups do this by declining outside help. By helping others, I also help myself. One of the benefits I receive by giving freely is staying sober another day.

Groups become responsible for their own survival and growth by having a solid foundation. This solid foundation is its members. The group's members are individuals who believe in self-support.

As an old cliché goes, the strongest survive. Old-timers pass their wealth of knowledge on how to stay sober by applying the Steps and Traditions to their own lives. I became a better person, a better employee, a better friend—the list goes on. The longer I came to A.A., the more I learned that being responsible starts with myself. Fear of rejection, economic insecurity, making mistakes, saying the wrong things, and others started to fade. When I open my mail, I know what it is that I need to pay to keep a roof over my head, food in my refrigerator, and gas in my car. It all started by learning the basics of being a responsible adult.

“Spiritual aspects” of money and time was something that took a while for me to understand. Discussion of money would bring up uncomfortable feelings. What does money have to do with A.A.'s purpose of carrying the message to the alcoholic who still suffers? I had more questions than answers. Slowly but surely, sponsors led me by their examples. The phone bill has to be paid so that the suffering alcoholic can call someone for help. Pamphlets are needed to help spread the message when talking is too threatening. Meeting lists are printed and made available so that I could find a meeting when I need one. I started to see that services,

materials, money, and time are essential and required to spread the message of Alcoholics Anonymous. So I learned what it takes to keep a meeting going, such as paying the rent for meeting room, and maintaining an inventory of pamphlets, books, coffee, and other supplies.

The spirit of giving started with two drunks talking to another, and is exemplified by their willingness to give freely of themselves in order to help another alcoholic recover. That alcoholic is me. When I came to A.A., I came to get something—relief. Relief from stress, family problems, pain, work concerns, misery, and . . . and . . . and . . .

What I found instead was relief from the desire to drink. And I learned that in order to get something, I needed to give something. Others led by example. They shared the benefits they receive by being sober. If I am willing, my body, mind, and behavior follow their example being of service in and to A.A., and the benefits that come as a result. That something became my willingness to be of service.

Other alcoholics provided me with a solid foundation which my sobriety would ultimately depend on. There are benefits that I receive from being a part of this Fellowship. Service work is what I gave of myself. Being of service became insurance—extra support to help me stay sober. Being of service is self-support. Self-support and Tradition Seven both call for a commitment. For me, commitments were scary. I had guilty feelings in the past for things I said I would do and didn't follow through on, because drinking and its activities came first. Others guide me through their faith, sharing, and determination of what self-support means. Today my sobriety depends upon my commitment to self-support.

Individual meetings, groups, districts, areas, and regions which flourish have a solid foundation of willingness from groups and members who give back freely the benefits they receive by being sober.

Self-support not only includes financial matters; it also involves the individual members who commit themselves to being of service. Members share their experiences, strengths, and hopes of how being of services supports the continuance and insurance that A.A. is here today and tomorrow for alcoholics from all walks of life, whether they live in the United States, Canada, Africa, Italy, China, Spain, South America, and other regions from all over the world.

“Public Information” Terry L., Delegate Panel 63, Area 36 Southern Minnesota *for* Chris D., Delegate Panel 62, Area 63 South Dakota

My name is Chris D. and I am an alcoholic. It is my great pleasure and honor to present today on the subject of Public Information. I serve as South Dakota Area 63 Panel 62 Delegate. During the past two years I was a member of the Public Information committee, reporting to both the 62nd and 63rd General Service Conferences.

Public Information is the process of carrying the A.A. message to the still-suffering alcoholic, through interactions with the general public. This is accomplished by coordinating activities, which create a greater public understanding of the Fellowship, including: producing video and audio public service announcements; preparing press releases; following up on anonymity breaks at the level of press, radio, and films through contact between the General Service

Office and area delegates; coordinating health fairs, as well as community and school exhibits; conducting the tri-annual membership survey; and carrying A.A.'s message through electronic and print media.¹

So why does A.A. have a public relations policy? First, I draw your attention to our society's first interaction with the general public, which occurred in 1939 with the publication of our basic text, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, in 1939. The original members had recovered from a seemingly hopeless state of mind and body, and they felt they should expose their message and unique experience to the world.² The intention of the book was to manifest to the public that a group of alcoholics had discovered a solution to their common problem.

The next decade saw a barnstorming of public interactions that included the favorable review of the Big Book by Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick, the first nationally published article about A.A., which appeared in *Liberty* magazine, the Rockefeller dinner event, and the Jack Alexander article in the *Saturday Evening Post*. It was during this time, from 1939 to 1950, that A.A. members learned valuable lessons, resulting in our Eleventh Tradition statement "Our public relations policy should be based on attraction rather than promotion." It was thought that we, as members, ought not to praise ourselves. It was deemed best to let "our friends" recommend us. And finally, it was also decided that all members ought to be anonymous at the level of press, radio, and films. These principles, which have no force of rules or laws within A.A., were so widely accepted by 1951 that they were confirmed by our first International Conference. And they led to a strong unity (considered one of our Fellowship's greatest assets) within A.A.³ Alcoholics Anonymous adopted an official public relations policy in 1956. The policy states: "In all public relationships, A.A.'s sole objective is to help the still-suffering alcoholic. Always mindful of the importance of personal anonymity, we believe this can be done by making known to him, and to those who may be interested in his problem, our own experience as individuals and as a fellowship in learning to live with alcohol. We believe that our experience should be made available freely to all who express sincere interest. We believe further that all our efforts in this field should always reflect our gratitude for the gift of sobriety and our awareness that many outside A.A. are equally concerned with the serious problem of alcoholism."⁴

So what is the "message" that we carry to the still-suffering alcoholic, and how can we encourage attraction to A.A. without promotion? Herein lies what I believe is a critical issue facing Alcoholics Anonymous today—the unity within our Fellowship in defining the problem of alcoholism and the solution to that problem. After I had my last drink, I began attending A.A. meetings in 1988. During these past twenty-five years I have heard a wide variety of descriptions of alcoholism by members that I can't begin to list them all. And the number of solutions offered to any one of the noted problems is wider than the actual number of problems heard. Yet when I read the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*, I quickly noted the original members indication that "the feeling of having shared in a common peril of drinking is one element in the powerful cement which binds us." They went on to say "but that in itself would never have held

¹ "The Sixty-Second Annual Meeting of the General Service Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous," 2012 Final Report, page 44.

² "Forward to the Second Edition," p. xvii, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, Fourth Edition, 2001

³ "Forward to the Second Edition," pp. xvii and xix, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, Fourth Edition, 2001

⁴ "Public Relations," p. 12, *A.A. Fact File* prepared by the General Service Office of Alcoholics Anonymous, New York. Copyright 1956, A.A. Publishing, Inc, now A.A. World Services, Inc.

us together as we are now joined.” The original members felt so strongly about this that they published the following line: “The tremendous fact for every one of us is that we have discovered a common solution. We have a way out on which we can absolutely agree, and upon which we can join in harmonious action. This is the great news this book carries to those who suffer from alcoholism”⁵

The idea or comment that we all drank differently and therefore, we all get sober differently is one which I believe fosters a position of personal choice, and perhaps it is a choice made at the expense of A.A. as a whole. Our ability to communicate with the general public should begin with individual members knowing what the A.A. definition of alcoholism is and agreeing on the common solution outlined in our Big Book. Upon this “tremendous fact” we can, as a fellowship, embark on a unified mission of carrying the A.A. message to the still-suffering alcoholic.

I would like to close by telling you about a recent experience of mine. A friend in A.A. died from Alzheimer’s disease not too long ago. He was sixty-three years old. His widow was telling me about their preparations for the funeral service, and she said her son was having difficulty writing the eulogy because he wanted to tell the world how A.A. had changed his dad’s life and helped to make him such a good father. The wife said that they wanted to read the Serenity Prayer and Seventh Step prayer, but that they didn’t want to violate that “anonymity thing.” I asked if I could share my perspective on the matter and she agreed. I explained to her that the spirit of anonymity had its roots in the publication of the first edition of the Big Book. It was thought at the time the book was published that the members would be so overwhelmed by large number of inquiries that they would not be able to carry on their occupations. So they decided to remain anonymous. Over the course of the next twenty years, the growth and success of A.A. attracted much attention and public writing in the form of stories and news reports. During this time, the Fellowship began to see examples of A.A. members who broke their anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films for their own benefit—whether to encourage a pat on the back, to improve their position within the community, or to benefit their personal and business affairs. As a result of this, A.A. adopted—within the Twelve Traditions—a statement on anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films. It was thought that members should remain anonymous at the public level as a matter of humility and also as a matter of placing principles ahead of personalities. I told my friend’s wife to encourage her son to express his gratitude for A.A. in his father’s life in any way he felt would appropriately acknowledge how A.A. had helped shape and guide his father’s life for the better. I explained to her that this was the spirit behind the principle of allowing our “friends” to recommend us. And who are those friends? Those friends are our family members, the clergy, coworkers, doctors, lawyers, judges, neighbors, teachers, and all others whose lives we have touched before and since joining A.A.

Thank you for allowing me to make this presentation on Public Information.

⁵ “There is a Solution,” p. 17, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, Fourth Edition, 2001

PAST TRUSTEES' SHARING

Chuck B., West Central past trustee, 2004-2008

There was a lot of talk this weekend about the Seventh Tradition. A few people mentioned increasing contributions. If we increase contributions then we wouldn't have issues with some moneymaking propositions used to help with expenses beyond group contributions. I like using the Birthday Plan envelopes. When people are exposed to them, it's amazing how many will begin to utilize them. This is what I do: When anyone tells me about their sobriety birthday, I take a Birthday Plan envelope and I put their name and their group number on it. Then I put a stamp on it. Sometimes, if they are in dire straits, I'll even put in a little money.

We have to be careful when we are putting money in the basket. Where is the money going? A hog roast? How active is the group in general service? Do we contribute to the district, intergroup or central office? What about to the General Service Office? Personally, I think controversy is good. I've been on both sides of arguments, I've done research, spoken to people on both the minority and majority side, and sometimes had a change of conscience as a result. But ultimately, it is the loving God as he may express himself who really runs this deal. It's not me, you, them, or us — it's God that does it. So, I think seeking God's conscience in whatever I do is the ultimate goal. I'm not very good at it, but sometimes I listen and sometimes I wait and sometimes I agree.

About three months ago, I was out in California and was experiencing some pains in the left side of my chest. The pains kept me up on Friday and I prayed about what to do, and what came to me was, "Trust God, clean house, and help others." But what resonated with me was "trust God." I prayed again and went to sleep. Saturday night I prayed again, I couldn't sleep. And what resonated with me was "trust God." So about 5:30 a.m., I woke my wife and I said, "I have some pains, I think I have to go to the hospital. No hurry, but I think I need to go." When I got to the hospital, I told the ER nurse, my wife, and my son that I felt safe there. And then I had a heart attack. My heart stopped and my eyes rolled up back in my head. They did CPR and they shocked me twice. During this, I had a near-death experience and I went to a place that was warm and safe and friendly and calm and peaceful and serene. Frankly, I did not want to come back. But I heard the ER nurse's voice saying, "Stay with us Charles, stay with us." The only reason I am telling you this is because in trusting God, I felt safe. He stopped my heart; he started it again because there is a purpose for me in this thing. I don't know what that purpose is, but I think part of it must have been to be here today and see you wonderful people — so many of whom I have known for years and years. I love A.A. Thank you.

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

My *Final Conference Report* arrived last Saturday. I dug right into it. I'd like to comment on a few things: We talked a lot this weekend about the inverted triangle of service — it serves us well. But one thing wasn't mentioned, and I learned this from the final report, it's not exactly an inverted triangle. It has a lumpiness to it. Groups are at the top, then GSRs, Districts, Area Assemblies, (Bulge), Delegates, and the General Service Board. Any reports, requests for changes of policy, or any other agenda item proposals take this bump and go to the General Service Board whose committees and affiliate boards noodle with the proposals and decide

which one will be advanced up to the Conference and come down to the Board. In the *Final Conference Report*, this particular issue is mentioned, along with the suggestion that delegates be involved in future agenda selection. In the next few years, it will be interesting to see how our Conference handles its own inventory and its own findings.

And finally, one finding really intrigued me. It is sort of a finding that is a “non-finding.” In the Additional Consideration section of the Final Report, the trustees’ conference committee brought out an additional consideration regarding the board’s request for an interlocking directorate, and they simply took no action on it. The Additional Consideration was that they took no action on a request from the General Service Board. And, not only did the conference decline to consider a proposal from the board, but they also directed the board regarding some of its other thinking and proposals to come back to them and that committee before implementing any other changes.

The service structure is really sponsorship in service. The groups are at the top, they train the GSRs; they encourage them, maybe browbeat them (at times). They send them out with the responsibility to make decisions at the district and area level. As time goes on, the GSRs become the pool from which delegates are selected. So, groups sponsor GSRs and delegates. There is a line in the conference charter that describes how delegates have the right to decide which items need to go back to groups for a decision. The delegates get to New York, and combined with the trustees, non-trustee directors and staff people, form the Conference — the collective group conscience of Alcoholics Anonymous. The General Service Board, as Bill envisioned, will turn to the “Conference for its guidance, its approval of a recommendation, or for its actual decision and direction.”

Larry N.: past-trustee-at-large/U.S., 1993-1997

I need a home group because I am alcoholic. I couldn’t stop once I started, and once I managed to stop for a little while, I always had the insane idea that it would be different, and quite frequently I didn’t give a damn whether it was different or not. I just wanted to drink! My advisor in college described me to the dean as a pathological liar. They were trying to get rid of me. Other people recognized my alcoholism far before I did. I thought the pathological lying part was somewhat of a joke — until I did my Fourth Step a few years later. Then I saw it was true. A.A. gave me the opportunity to make amends for all that I’d stolen, for all the lies I told, and for all those bad checks I wrote. I got sober in South Dakota, December 31, 1971. I am sober because of Alcoholics Anonymous — because people helped me and the grace of God helped them to help me. I’ve tried to give it back. I think it’s important for us to realize that the people who serve us on the General Service Board and those who work in the General Service Office are deserving of our trust and our care. They are not always going to be right, but we can give advice and encourage them. It’s important that we live by those two words that Dr. Bob said the whole of A.A.’s program boils down to: Love and Service. In Bill W.’s essay on the Third Concept, he writes in the final paragraph: “Our entire A.A. program rests squarely upon the principle of mutual trust. We trust God, we trust A.A., and we trust each other. Therefore we cannot do less than trust our leaders in service.”

When I rotated sixteen years ago, I felt that trust and love deeply. During my four years as trustee, my focus was on international A.A. and I was part of encouraging new translations for the Big Book. There are now over twice as many translations as when I rotated off.

Translations are important, because even if someone speaks English well, when they read the Big Book in their mother tongue, they catch the fire and the love — I've seen it happen.

Finally, many Class A trustees have served A.A. in so many phenomenal ways, even though their life doesn't depend upon their service. If there is anything in Alcoholics Anonymous that is greater than the love of one alcoholic for another, it is the love of our Class A trustees for us. Thank you.

Ted S. West Central past trustee, 2000-2004

I believe it's true that everything we do in A.A. boils down to love and service. Although at some A.A. conferences there are heated discussions, we know how to handle it. That was a growing process for me. Not only was I encouraged to bring my opinions and my experience to the microphone and to the group; sometimes I was in the minority. That experience was good for me. It doesn't mean my passion was reduced, but it did mean that I had to learn to reduce my ego and let things go. And eventually, maybe bring them back up at certain points in time — if I thought they were unresolved. But that is the process we go through to get that informed group conscience.

I am blessed to be a member of A.A., to be from this region, and to have been involved from the beginning. I think it all goes back to sponsorship, because I was sponsored into service. I didn't know any better, so I jumped in the car and went to district meetings. I asked questions and I found out early in A.A. that there really wasn't any such thing as a dumb question. Once in a while, there were few answers that were a little suspect, but my sponsor explained to me that the difference between a wise person and a fool is that the fool won't ask the question he has. The wise person will ask it, appear foolish for a minute, but at that point it's over. If you are new, remember that much of the learning is in the doing, and when you are asked to serve this Fellowship, do it, because the benefits far outweigh what we put into this thing. In A.A. there is no hierarchy, we are here to serve, and that's it. We believe in servant leadership and that is what Alcoholics Anonymous is all about. To be a good leader you have to be a good servant. I got my feet on the ground with the Twelve Steps and the Twelve Traditions in our group and in my own life. That's what allowed me to get more active within the general service structure. Anything we do here we do for one reason only, and that is to carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

I challenge each and every one of you to bring a new person or a sponsoree to the next conference or assembly. I challenge you to do that because that's how this thing works. My sponsor once said, "Service is no more than gratitude made visible." If you are grateful, then become of service. I will continue to serve A.A. on a daily basis to the best of my ability. Thank you.

“CLOSING REMARKS”

Terry Bedient, Class A (nonalcoholic) Trustee, General Service Board chairperson:

18 million people in the U.S. and Canada suffer from a life-threatening problem. Not drinking is not the solution. The solution is spiritual growth and application of the Twelve Steps in all areas of our lives. Former trustee, George Valliant, said that service is linked to survival and spirituality is not just about a solitary guru on a mountaintop. Spirituality includes service. Your presence here this weekend demonstrates your commitment to service and to growth along spiritual lines. As Dr. Bob said, it comes down to love and service. We should never forget either of those pieces. This weekend there has been a substantial amount of discussion about the Seventh Tradition. At its core, the Seventh Tradition is about service — service in all its various forms. Look around; in this room you'll see our future Concept Nine leaders. I hope each of you looks at your leadership with a sense of wonder and delight and joy.

I sense a great enthusiasm with our electronic media plans for Grapevine and A.A.W.S. At the same time, I am also reminded that fighting isolation is a key to ongoing sobriety. In today's world it is easy to buddy up with a laptop or a smart phone or a television instead of a real person. And that can be a challenge for all of us. This weekend, the spirit of gratitude has been alive and well. I have heard your discussions and I sense the serenity that comes from knowing we have been straight with ourselves and with those around us. Today, every successful mutual help group in the world is modeled after your Twelve Steps. No other group in the world comes close to providing your kind of support to others suffering from a common illness. But at the same time, remember that A.A. is Alcoholics Anonymous, not Alcoholics Invisible. For those who are restless, irritable, and discontented, drinking is not the solution. And not drinking is not the solution. The solution, as you know, is spiritual growth through application of the Twelve Steps in all aspects of our lives. Thank you for attending this forum.
