

FINAL REPORT
NORTHEAST REGIONAL FORUM
MAY 20-22, 2011
STURBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

Dear A.A. Friends,

Please mark your calendar for the next Northeast Regional Forum, which will take place in Cromwell, CT, at the Crowne Plaza Cromwell Hotel the weekend of June 7-9, 2013.

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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 2011 Northeast Regional Forum was held in Sturbridge, Massachusetts. Registration for this Forum topped at 500. This included 265 members attending their very first Forum—several who were welcomed at the Forum Orientation on Friday evening. Newly elected Northeast Regional trustee, J. Gary L. set the tone for a weekend full of love and enthusiasm for service. The host committee chaired by past delegate Francis G. did an outstanding service staffing the registration tables, greeting attendees, distributing programs, giving directions to meeting rooms, etc. Simultaneous translation services were available for all Spanish-speaking members present.

Presentations by trustees, directors and staff members included information on A.A.W.S. and the A.A. Grapevine, and were captured in the “early bird” Forum newsletter that was distributed on Sunday morning to all attendees. All of the General Sharing Sessions and Workshops were well attended. Delegate presentations and workshops covered several topics and are summarized in this Final Report.

On Sunday morning five past trustees from the region shared their comments and, along with General Service Board chairperson Ward Ewing’s closing remarks, are captured on the last pages of this report.

WORKSHOP REPORTS

New G.S.R. – Now What? (Moderator: Chip K./Reporter: Karl H.) Given that there was a large number of new G.S.R.s who said they were unsure how to proceed in their posts, participants focused their comments on the responsibilities of the position. Among the duties of a G.S.R. is to attend monthly districts, assemblies, and round-ups, said those at the workshop. All G.S.R.s should also familiarize themselves with the Traditions and the Concepts, and with the Service Manual. G.S.R.s are also expected to give reports to their home groups on the district and area meetings they attend – while also making announcements about events. Finally, said those at the workshop, G.S.R.s can put a good face on service by projecting a positive image of the position and its responsibilities.

DCMs – District Challenges, Anyone? (Moderator: Chazz C./Reporter: Pauline T.) The first issue addressed was how to make contact with groups that don’t have a G.S.R. One suggestion was that those A.A. members visiting other groups, such as when going on speaking commitments, can talk about the benefits of being connected to the service structure. According to a participant, his district used a surplus in its account to purchase *Service Manuals* for every group. The books were delivered to each group with a note about the value of service. This same district, according to the participant, had a picnic at which the area committees were introduced. Another district brought copies of the Conference Report to the business meetings of groups in dark districts, with the result that all of those groups now have G.S.R.s. Those in attendance agreed that regular communication with groups is key to encouraging participation.

Carrying the Message in Institutions – What Works, What Doesn't? (Moderator: Jean M./Reporter: Brett S.) The best way to line up speakers for meetings in institutions is to approach them individually, said those at the workshop. It is a good idea, said one participant, to have as speakers A.A. members who have themselves been patients in institutions. At meetings, those doing service in institutions should talk about the benefits, both to those in the institutions and to those bringing in meetings. It's also a good idea to have a supply of A.A. literature to bring into institutions. At meetings in the institutions, said those at the workshop, make sure to describe what A.A. is, making it clear that Alcoholics Anonymous is not affiliated with the facility. One participant suggested there be no discussion meetings, while another advised against war stories. In general, the goal should be to show the best face of A.A. in bringing the message of recovery into institutions.

Service Sponsorship — Staying Focused on Principles (Moderator: Elaine M./Reporter: Amy C.) Among suggestions offered by workshop attendees to new service sponsors were: read the pamphlet "Questions and Answers on Sponsorship;" lead by example; take sponsees to service commitments and events; read and study the Concepts and Traditions together; and share your enthusiasm. As a sponsee, you should review the requirements for a service position with your sponsor before standing for a commitment. You cannot transmit something you don't have, so service sponsors are advised to work the program with willingness and an open mind. As noted at the workshop, service sponsorship has been around for 40 years. Attendees were advised to read Bill W.'s essay in Concept Nine, "Leadership in A.A.: Ever a Vital Need."

A.A. Grapevine – Today (Moderator: Albin Z./Reporter: Richard P.) Among the comments by those at the workshop were that there have been issues with billing and subscription problems. In response it was pointed out that the Grapevine has switched fulfillment providers with the aim of improving service. In response to critical comments about content, one participant said it is inevitable there will be differences of opinion given the magazine's independent editorial voice. And since content is made up of stories contributed to the magazine, critics are free to contribute their own stories. The consensus was that the magazine is still a great tool and a perfect gift for the newcomer. Participants in the workshop agreed that, ultimately, it is up to the A.A. Fellowship to support the magazine, to raise its profile, and to encourage fellow A.A. members to read A.A.'s meeting in print.

Bundles of Enthusiasm – Making Service Attractive! (Moderator: Coop C./Reporter: Cheryl T.) To increase enthusiasm about service and encourage members to attend events, workshop attendees made several suggestions, including: car-pooling to assemblies and other service events; being an enthusiastic service sponsor; organizing workshops about service work; talking up the benefits of general service; and reporting back to one's home group the experience one had at the assembly. To fund attendance at assemblies and conferences, those at the workshop recommended car-pooling, sharing rooms, and asking your home group, district, or area for help. If one's home group is small and no one steps up to fill a position, the advice was to let it stay unfilled, that someone would eventually take on the job.

Informed Group Conscience – What's That About? (Moderator: Nancy B./Reporter: Cate M.) One attendee mentioned the value of a slow decision-making process, while another pointed to the importance of giving the minority opinion a thorough and fair hearing. For an

informed group conscience, A.A. members in attendance should make it their business to learn the particulars of the issues at hand. Being knowledgeable about the Traditions and the Concepts are important if a group is to follow the right course. The ultimate goal is group unity, within the workings of the Traditions. The consensus was that group members should be given at least two weeks' notice of a scheduled group conscience gathering. A group member with experience in Alcoholics Anonymous and some knowledge of a group's history is a good choice to chair a group conscience session. One workshop attendee noted that it can take follow-up by group members to ensure that the decisions agreed upon are put into effect.

Twelve Concepts – Who Knew? (Moderator: Spencer R./Reporter: Yvette N.) The general sense of the meeting was that with patience, time and participation – and employing such tools as the Concepts Illustrated and Checklist – we can come to a greater knowledge and understanding. We can learn the Concepts by living them, and teach them by relating their principles to everyday life. According to those at the workshop, it is important to weave the Steps, Traditions, and Concepts into our recovery and to pass all these principles on through sponsorship. Workshop attendees agreed that the Concepts relate one to the other -- and that providing information and communicating freely at all levels is important in helping our trusted servants make decisions for the good of the Fellowship.

G.S.O. – How Can G.S.O. Possibly Help? (Moderator: Gayle S./Reporter: June C.) Among the points made at the workshop is that the General Service Office is a conduit for shared experience. A.A. members and groups have for years been in touch with the office to share their experiences, and the lessons of those experiences are available to the Fellowship. The G.S.O. also maintains group records and publishes current A.A. information in such newsletters as *Box 4-5-9*, *About AA*, and *Markings*. Through the publications department, A.A.W.S., the G.S.O. prints all of the Fellowship's Conference-approved literature, from the Big Book and the *Twelve and Twelve* to the pamphlets and workbooks. The G.S.O. is also responsible for the A.A. Web site and for audio visual materials. Also discussed at the workshop are the ways that the G.S.O. Archives is making its collection more accessible to the Fellowship.

All About La Viña (Moderator: Gladys H./Reporter: Amy C.) One participant said that the stories in the magazine could be improved by making them more diverse. According to this person, the magazine's stories stick too much to one formula, namely: "I was a terrible drunk, then I stopped drinking, and now everything is wonderful." Other attendees agreed that the stories should include more about the spiritual and emotional growth that the A.A. program offers. To encourage members to submit stories, someone suggested that writing workshops could be helpful. A form with simple questions could be put together to be answered by inexperienced writers, so as to draw their stories from them. To boost readership of the magazine, subscriptions could be given to newcomers and to institutions, said a workshop attendee.

Unity -- Working Together (Moderator: Ricardo C./Reporter: Francisco A.) Those attending the workshop first addressed the question: How important is a local Spanish bulletin? The consensus was that a bulletin is important because it enables the Spanish-speaking members of the Fellowship to have more access to information, which facilitates connecting with others. A bulletin would also include translations of material on general service and on directories, the benefit of which is to boost participation in the Fellowship. A bulletin in Spanish

promotes the aim of inclusiveness, noted one attendee. Those at the workshop said that A.A. members with experience in the program should encourage young people to get involved in service translation. The workshop then addressed the issue of the value of bilingual workshops at the Regional Forums in the Northeast. Attendees were unanimous in supporting the idea, saying that such workshops foster unity and greater participation.

PRESENTATIONS

“Three Legacies” Chris S., Panel 61 Delegate, Area 11 Connecticut

What are the Three Legacies and what do they represent? The quick answer is Recovery, Unity and Service.

The long answer goes so much deeper than that. First of all, what is a legacy anyway? The dictionary defines one as “something that is handed down or remains from a previous generation or the past.” The reason this is important to me is that I become a part of this legacy when I hand it down to the next generation. Our three legacies are the 36 principles: Recovery – the 12 Steps; Unity – the 12 Traditions; and Service – the 12 Concepts.

Our First Legacy is Recovery, the working of the 12 Steps to maintain a daily reprieve from alcoholism, which enables me to live a useful and purposeful life – one that was not possible before arriving at the doors of A.A. Upon arrival, I was informed of my problem, and given a solution - a Higher Power and the 12 Steps - a set of tools to pick up and use which, when used, have enabled me to keep from picking up that first drink a day at a time.

Our Second Legacy is Unity – the 12 Traditions. This provides me with the fellowship I crave – the people who, like me, are alcoholic and understand what it was like to walk in my shoes as an active alcoholic. The Big Book states no one can affect an alcoholic like another alcoholic. This has proven very true for me. I never liked listening to so-called professionals telling me how I needed to do this or that – I was different and they just didn’t understand me. You guys understand me, you won’t let me get away with any nonsense and you know when I’m in trouble. You love me and are there to help me whenever I need you – no strings attached. All I have to do is be willing to ask. When our A.A. groups operate within the guidelines of the Traditions they tend to flourish, and just as the steps are to the individual, the traditions are to the group – they protect us from ourselves.

Our Third Legacy is Service, the implementation of our Twelfth Step – our primary purpose *“to carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers.”* This is the Legacy that is most misunderstood, I believe - likely because of the infinite ways we can serve. Some people in A.A. talk about how A.A. is a selfish program? I’m not one of them. I believe that after we start our journey in recovery it isn’t long before the opportunity to be of service presents itself – greeting the newcomer, cleaning up after the meeting and, soon after that, getting a coffee commitment, then perhaps chairing meetings. These are all wonderful opportunities to be of service – a way for me to get out of myself and become a member of A.A. and ‘own’ my A.A.

Once we have worked the 12 Steps we discover that “in order to keep it we must give it away.” This was hard for me to understand in concept, but in practice it has proven to be the most wonderful experience of my life. I have had, and continue to have, many opportunities to sponsor men and take them through the Steps. Some of them have found lasting sobriety and many have not. One constant though is that I have not had to pick up a drink. Freely giving of my time to be of help to others has allowed me to live a dream well beyond my wildest imagination.

Then there is general service, the glue that holds A.A. together. It has grown to fill the needs beyond the reach of groups, from the G.S.R. who communicates the group conscience, to the A.A. general service structure, through the districts and areas to the delegates, trustees and General Service Office staff. If a group does not have an active G.S.R., it is effectively giving up its right to participate in the direction of A.A. This vital link of communication and participation ensures A.A. will be democratic in nature and remain open-minded to the ever-changing world about us, thus our legacies may be handed down to our fellows yet to arrive.

“How I Hope to Repay My Debt to A.A.” Deb D., Panel 60 Delegate, Area 48 HMB/New York

When I started thinking about “How I Hope to Repay My Debt to Alcoholics Anonymous,” my first thoughts were drawn to the monetary aspects of the topic. The words “repay” and “debt” seemed to steer me in that direction. What is amazing is that after years of recovery, I am still drawn to the non-spiritual side of things. After further reflection and discussion with others, I came to the realization that, in fact, a lot has changed in my thoughts and attitudes.

My home group in early recovery gave me the opportunity to make coffee, and it was the first sense of belonging I had felt in a long time. That same group instilled early on our primary purpose of carrying the message of Alcoholics Anonymous. As the Big Books says, “nothing will so much insure immunity from drinking as intensive work with other alcoholics.” An obvious and direct benefit from this is that in trying to help others we become less selfish – thus many of our problems and excuses for drinking disappear. A very real but not so obvious benefit is a much greater awareness of and insight into our selves.

As a member of a different home group, I was elected as their group service representative. I did not realize at the time, but the sense of trust that they gave to me in representing the group was a huge lift. I began to experience a sense of self-respect versus being filled with egotism. Almost six years ago I was given the opportunity to help overcome some apathy or lack of interest in our area. The opportunity came in the form of putting together and editing our area’s A.A. newsletter. I thought this was a chance to Twelve Step some of those A.A. members who still suffer; to encourage more members to get involved in service; and thus to help us overcome some of the shortcomings within A.A. as a whole. I do not believe that I was very successful at any of these things. However, as with all of my Twelfth Step work, I have been helped more than those that I have tried to help.

My sponsor is right about always being able to find ways to repay our debt to Alcoholics Anonymous. As a DCM and an area chairperson, when I visited groups and districts, I was often asked to talk about the Seventh Tradition. I have come to love the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous, not only for the message of hope it gave, but also that it is a concrete

example of how members carry the message to those still suffering. Money from the basket has gone over the years to translating the Big Book into more than 56 languages. When I see a translated Big Book, I am drawn to the fact that in each translation you can always find where the Fourth Step inventory is and how it works is. The message of our Fellowship is reaching those I never would have imagined. And that is just one aspect of what our basket money does.

Repaying my debt to Alcoholics Anonymous enables me to stay in recovery and stay active in Alcoholics Anonymous. Being active in Alcoholics Anonymous is not just about being active in service, but in all aspects of the program. We are all members at one level.

In Dr. Bob's story, he reflects that he spent a great deal of time passing on what he learned to others who wanted and needed it badly. He did it for four reasons:

1. Sense of duty
2. It was a pleasure
3. Because in so doing he was paying a debt to the man who took time to pass it on to him.
4. Because every time he did it, he added more insurance for himself against a slip.

I can very much identify with those thoughts. I know that I personally owe a huge debt to Alcoholics Anonymous, and the longer I stay sober, the bigger the debt I owe.

Judging from my past, when I have done so little and received so much, I know I must continue to be involved in Alcoholics Anonymous. Through involvement, I have discovered the joy of helping others. I have found real reliance on God, and I have found freedom and happiness.

"The Need for Good Service Leaders" Hugh H., Panel 61 Delegate, Area 59 Eastern Pennsylvania

Does my title sound vaguely familiar? I hope so; it's based on Concept IX: "Good service leaders, together with sound and appropriate methods of choosing them, are at all levels indispensable for our future functioning and safety. The primary world service leadership once exercised by the founders of A.A. must necessarily be assumed by the Trustees of the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous." Please note that my remarks are largely based on what Bill wrote about Concept IX.

Why are good leaders indispensable? Because, Bill says, "Good leadership cannot function well in a poorly designed structure. But weak leadership can hardly function at all, even in the best of structures." Our general service structure, though surely not perfect, was designed by men — Bill W., Leonard Harrison, Bernard Smith, Michael Alexander — who foresaw our society's needs and provided very well for them. Whatever problems we have can hardly be blamed on poor structure.

Furthermore, whatever problems we have, in some sense, we will *always* have. As Bill says, "Furnishing our service structure with able and willing workers has to be a continuous activity. It is therefore a problem that in its very nature cannot be permanently solved."

But whose problem is this to solve? The GSRs. Again, quoting Bill, "... [I]t is only the GSRs who, in Group Assembly meetings (or in caucus) can name [Area] Committee Members and finally name the Delegates. Hence great care needs to be taken by the groups as they choose these Representatives.

"Personal ambitions will have to be cast aside, feuds and controversy forgotten. 'Who are the best qualified people that we can name?' This should be the thought of all."

How does Bill define leadership? First he insists, "Our leaders do not drive by mandate, they lead by example."

Then he gets more specific. "A leader in A.A. service is... a man (or woman) who can personally put principles, plans and policies into such dedicated and effective action that the rest of us want to back him up and help him with his job."

How? you may ask.

Bill answers, "Good leadership originates plans, policies, and ideas for the improvement of our Fellowship and its services. But in new and important matters, it will nevertheless consult widely before taking decisions and actions... [and] will also remember that a good plan or idea can come from anybody, anywhere...."

"Good leadership never passes the buck. Once assured that it has, or can, obtain sufficient general backing, it freely takes decisions and puts them into action forthwith."

But it's not that simple. There are rocky shoals to be navigated. "A statesman is an individual who... recognizes that even large majorities, when badly disturbed or uninformed, can, once in a while, be dead wrong...."

"When called upon, leadership must always give its reasons, and good ones...."

"These... are... the kinds of careful discrimination and soul-searching that true leadership must always try to exercise."

Then there are the straits of compromise.

"Another qualification [of a good leader is]... the ability to compromise cheerfully whenever a proper compromise can cause a situation to progress in what appears to be the right direction.... [P]rogress is nearly always characterized by a *series of improving compromises.*"

And what about the feedback leaders inevitably get?

"There are always the constructive critics.... We should be willing to let them modify our opinions or change them completely. Often too, we shall have to disagree and then stand fast without losing their friendship." He continues, "Then there are... our 'destructive' critics. To begin with, we ought to listen carefully to what they have to say.... If they have got the whole truth, or even a little truth, then we had better thank them and get on with our respective inventories, admitting we were wrong. If it is nonsense, we can ignore it."

Bill recognized that good leadership requires the ability to think ahead, pointing out that "Vision is, I think, the ability to make good estimates, both for the immediate and for the most distant future.

"God's real Providence has endowed us human beings with a considerable capacity for foresight, and He evidently expects us to use it."

At the end of his essay on Concept IX, Bill sums up: "We shall be in continual need of these same attributes — tolerance, responsibility, flexibility, and vision — among our leaders of A.A. services at all levels."

Does all this make leaders somehow special? "Maybe this seems like an attempt to stake out a specially privileged and superior type of A.A. member. But it really is not so. We simply are recognizing that our talents vary greatly.... [W]e ought to select that leadership on the basis of obtaining the best talent we can find."

In the most fundamental and probably most important way, A.A.'s at *all* levels of service truly lead, and hopefully do so well. Bill tells us why this is so important: "Every sponsor is necessarily 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."

And *that*, my friends, is why I trust we're all here.

"Delivering the Message With the Help of Technology" *Wayne R., Panel 61 Delegate, Northern New Jersey, Area 44*

In May 1935, an alcoholic dropped his last nickel in the pay phone of the Mayflower Hotel in Akron, Ohio. That call ultimately connected that man with a fellow alcoholic and set forth a series of events that led to the birth of our Fellowship, Alcoholics Anonymous. Those two men were, of course, our cofounders, Bill W. and Dr. Bob., and that little bit of technology back then, the simple telephone, was the tool that brought about the recovery of millions of alcoholics from a hopeless state of mind and body. In its simplest form, that is all that technology is -- a tool.

For over 75 years A.A. has used technology to help carry the message. Be it the telephone, radio, television, or publishing, increasingly advanced technologies have enabled us to reach out. Cell phones now allow us to reach out, and to be reached, almost anywhere we travel. A.A. answering services can now contact members with a 12th Step opportunity within seconds, and those members can arrange for a personal visit within minutes. Reaching a person at their moment of greatest willingness gives us a better opportunity to carry the solution to the fellow alcoholic.

The Internet has ushered in a whole new era in communication. Now a single message can be transmitted to many people simultaneously. The use of e-mail to send messages is helping our members, districts, areas and Intergroup/Central Offices to make good 12th Step work possible. It also enables individual A.A. members keep in touch between meetings and during travel and vacations. Local and national web sites have also given us the opportunity to reach out to those in need and bring them into contact with us, anytime, and from anywhere. Online meeting lists show the newcomer when and where to find our meetings. They show them how they can get involved, and they can answer basic questions about the program and how it works. The technology enables us to be there when anyone, anywhere reaches out for help.

But what about actually *delivering* the message with the help of technology? One current way includes having our literature online for all to read. Having our pamphlets, service material and the Big Book on the Web allows us to share the solution. But at the same time, of course, it is

important to point readers who may not be in A.A. to members in recovery who can share their personal experiences. Another method is online meetings. In the case of individuals who are geographically isolated, have a language barrier, or are unable to travel to meeting locations, online meetings offer a lifeline to stay connected with the Fellowship and also help the newcomer.

There are other possibilities for delivering the message using technology. Conference-calling and video-conferences are becoming more and more affordable communication paths for one alcoholic to connect with another. Streaming video, such as our public service announcements, allow us to deliver the message in a general way, to almost any web site visitor in a manner that can help them understand and identify. Internet-connected mobile phones, or smart phones, plus tablet computers and ultra-portables are becoming increasingly more popular and, for many, their preferred method of communication.

But the real question is 'are we taking advantage of all that these technologies offer?' The good news is yes, and we are continuing to expand that effort. Alcoholics Anonymous World Services and the A.A. Grapevine are moving toward digital delivery of our books and magazines, which closes what our Fellowship believes is a gap in communication for the Internet-savvy generation. With such delivery options available, the potential member can now learn about the physical allergy and mental obsession, the hopeless nature of their malady, plus where to go and what to live happy and purposeful lives.

To be as effective as possible will require "sustained personal exertion" on all these technologies and keeping an eye out on emerging technologies that might help us help others. The job we do is too important to practice anything less than true dedication.

“Avoiding The “Politics” Of A.A. Service How Does One Do That?” Tom T., Delegate
Panel 61, Area 47 Central New York

“A.A.’s Legacy of Service” by Bill W. explains exactly what A.A. service is. (This can be found in the front of the *A.A. Service Manual*, as well as in pamphlet form.) It states that “Services include meeting places, hospital cooperation, and intergroup offices; they mean pamphlets, books, and good publicity of almost every description. They call for committees, delegates, trustees, and conferences. And, not to be forgotten, they need voluntary money contributions from within the Fellowship.”

Where could there be room for politics in A.A. services? Politics would require a multi-party system. We are all carrying the same message of recovery, the Twelve Steps. Tradition Five states that “Each group has but one primary purpose - to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.” The only competition in A.A. would be in the form of an election, when we elect our G.S.R.s, district committee men, area officers, delegates and trustees. The Traditions are the solution to the political problems in A.A. Once the politicians in your group commence to apply those Traditions to all their affairs the political problems will disappear. The Traditions are about unity. One for all and all for one.

Let’s look at what happened in my district that might be considered politics. A Sunday morning group was forced to find a new location. Upon doing so, there was a stipulation that the door to

the building must be locked during the meeting, as the meeting room was far from the door and the building owner required security. There was a group conscience proposal to post someone at the door for latecomers, but it failed to pass. The doors would be locked when the meeting started. A member of that group could not live with the decision to lock the door during the meeting. He went and started another meeting at the same time, just across town. Could the political differences that caused an action like this affect other groups, or A.A. as a whole? That person's decision to start another meeting did in fact affect another group. The lack of acceptance of the group's decision (Second Tradition), and the starting of another meeting at the same time (Tradition Four), separated members that attend meetings on Sunday mornings. This one person has affected another group, and because of all the paperwork, and how the money flows it affects A.A. as a whole also. "But how, in electing delegates, could we cut down destructive politics with all the usual struggles for prestige and vainglory?"

What about the group's politicians at election time? One of the candidates is in favor meeting at 7 and the other prefers 8. The group conscience will decide those things. In fact, the group conscience will decide how the elected person will vote. You are a trusted servant to the members of your group. What if there is more than one person seeking the service position? Are there politics involved here? No! Alcoholics Anonymous has the "Third Legacy Procedure." Names are listed and voted on by written ballot. The object is to receive a two-thirds majority. No one can complain if you lost to a two-thirds majority. If there is no person with two-thirds after two votes, the names of those not receiving at least one-fifth are removed. After a third ballot candidates with less than one-third are removed. After four the candidate with the fewest number of votes is removed provided there are more than two left. Should there be no candidate with two-thirds majority after five votes, the winner is drawn from the hat. Holding the election in this fashion guarantees that you will be selecting from the best possible candidates available.

When I hear someone describing A.A.'s general service as politics, they usually are repeating what someone else has said, someone who found it confusing, or couldn't handle the necessary debate and needed an excuse for why they couldn't do the job. General service is not for everyone. There are no politics in Alcoholics Anonymous.

PAST TRUSTEES SHARING

Bill C. *served as General Service trustee form 1986 to 1990.*

I am, if not a relic, then an antique; I am the last of the in-town trustees. We were the guys who served without the credentials of service and of coming up through the ranks. I am very fortunate that I got to serve sixteen years. After serving on PI Committee I was asked to serve on the AAWS board. In 1986 I was asked to serve on the General Service board.

I think my most challenging and rewarding lesson in service occurred when I was asked to present the argument in favor of keeping in-town trustees. This was in 1990, and it was to be presented to a Conference that I knew opposed that idea. I had to put together the best rationale I could while staying true to what I felt was the tradition of having in-town trustees. It was originally set up with everyone nearby. The trustees could jump on the subway or bus and be at G.S.O. in 15 min. However, over the years, improved communications eliminated that

need. It was also set up to conserve finances. But I did the presentation as best as I could. And the vote was roughly 102 to 3. It was a great lesson in humility.

Also, after I completed my service and rotated, I was fortunate to be involved in the production of a few videos. One was "Carrying the Message Inside the Walls" and I traveled around the country going to maximum-security prisons. I got an up-close look at how A.A. works with the people who are incarcerated. The second video I was involved in was "Markings on the Journey," the history of A.A. based on the archival material. I am very fortunate that I can look back at almost twenty years of service and say it was the most significant part of my life, without question. I did not have a service background when I got involved in A.A. service. But it became my recovery. I was walking with giants. I felt that I was surrounded and consumed with quality recovery. But then I rotated and it's very interesting what happens after that kind of immersion. When I rotated I learned, and needed to learn, for the first time, what having a personal recovery program was all about. I am happy to say that I am a grateful member of the Early Birds Group in Martha's Vineyard.

John K. *served as General Service trustee form 2001 to 2005.*

Early in my A.A. service, I was my group's GSR, so I attended a District Committee meeting, but I wasn't paying attention. So they made me a DCM. Years later, from 1997-2005, I was an AAWS director and then a General Service trustee. Every couple of years, we past trustees are dragged out from our otherwise exciting lives, we are given blue blazers and are told, "Get up there and say something profound, witty, or amusing -- preferably all three!" It gives me an opportunity to think about things I probably wouldn't otherwise think about.

Barry L., an early A.A. member and the author of *Living Sober*, told a story up at A.A.'s 50th anniversary up in Montreal. He said that in the early years of A.A., up at the 23rd Street clubhouse, a guy showed up. The man, who was black, walked in and said, "The policeman on the corner told me that maybe you could help me." Not only was he black, but also had long blond hair like Veronica Lake. Barry said that he was beautifully made up and had all his belongings strapped to his back. The man continued, "I'm a dope fiend, and I'm also an alcoholic and I need help desperately." Nobody wanted to deal with him, so finally it fell to Barry. And Barry said, "Well, I'm going to call the man who has been sober the longest." He called Bill W. who was quiet for a minute. Then Bill said, "Well then, did you say he's a drunk? And Barry said, "Oh, yes." Bill said, "I think that's he only question we have any right to ask. It's now up to us to help him."

I like to think back, before the Traditions, before anything else, when that single-minded purpose made for inclusion. "Is he a drunk? I don't have a right to ask anything else." That's what causes me to reflect on whatever the issue is, and ask, "Are we drawing the circle to include, or are we drawing it because of some sort of pride in our analysis of the Traditions, or the description of this, that or another thing, so I don't have to extend my comfort zone?"

I live in a metropolitan area. I got sober thirty years ago and no one walked around with a bottle of formaldehyde or had to drive thirty miles in the middle of the night to sober someone up. I sponsor a lot of people and they may occasionally call in the middle of the night if they are having a meltdown, but by and large we meet at mutually convenient times. Occasionally, I get to come to lovely places like this to engage in some service and that's as far as I have to extend my comfort zone. But think of those early members, of what they did, the cultural and

social prohibitions that they just cast to the wind because they wanted to focus on getting help to another alcoholic. And I see that in the Fellowship today, that's the driving spirit and I hope we always have that.

Mike P. *served as regional trustee form 2003 to 2007.*

When I came to A.A. in 1985, I had one foot in the grave and one foot out of my job and things weren't looking good at all. You people cleaned me up and turned my life around. I got to do things I never thought I would be able to do.

Alcoholics Anonymous saved my life. It gave me a life. Today I have the right to change my mind. In the past, I was a victim of whim. I didn't make decisions. My environment made decisions for me. By coming to A.A., I was able to become an active participant in my own life. I enjoy making the decision about what and where I am going to do something. I appreciate the last Box 4-5-9 that had a wonderful article on the Twelve Traditions. After reading that I realized again how important this thing is and how fragile it really is. There are other groups that have had the answer or damn close to it and they are not with us anymore. And all we have to do is take it down the wrong road for a certain period of time and we won't have this any more. And people will say, "Oh, remember what a great thing A.A. used to be?" This got me thinking and then I read some stuff. Then I realized that twenty years ago people were saying the same thing.

There are some important things I hadn't realized. One of those videos talked about how to hit bottom. If you haven't hit bottom, this book [*Alcoholics Anonymous*] and the Twelve Steps isn't going to make any sense. Once I've hit bottom then I have to surrender to alcoholism. I have to surrender to the fact that there is an answer. And what a relief that is. And the truth of that is that it doesn't have to be the last time. Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps is an ongoing thing. It is an ongoing series of surrenders to those things that are blocking me from God and God's will. There's a line in the Big Book, at the end of "There is a Solution." It says, "Yes, I am one of them too, I must have this thing." And when this realization occurs, I have no choice but to do the rest of the Twelve Steps. If you are an alcoholic, then the answer is here—if you want it.

One of our Traditions says each group has one primary purpose and that is to carry its message to alcoholics. What's the message that your group carries? Is it the same as the message that my group carries? I sure as heck hope so. I have a whole lot of growing up and learning to do and in A.A. is where I get my stuff. Thank you for my life.

John Q. *Trustee-at-large/U.S. 1989-1993.*

Twenty years ago, at a regional forum in Bethesda, Maryland, I was giving my report and someone asked me a question: What were we doing in Africa? I answered to the best of my knowledge and said, "Well, we are translating the Big Book into Zulu, and we have a presence in South Africa." And then a big guy from the audience came up to the microphone. He was wearing African garb -- he was a student from Kenya. He clarified, "But what are you doing in the rest of Africa?" And then he asked me, "Why don't we have a Big Book in Swahili?" And I said, "I don't know." After that particular instance at the forum, the gentleman came back out with me and we spoke with the staff member on that assignment. She told me, "John, there was an attempt several years ago to translate the book but the translation was not a good product so we shelved it." So I looked at the guy and I looked at the staff member and I said,

“Well, I think it’s about time that we unshelve it and take another look at it. A year later, in 1992, we had the Big Book in Swahili. And that came as a question from a regional forum. You never know what you are going to say or do that is going to prompt something.

I watched how everyone at this regional forum and conducted themselves. I listened to the questions asked, the passion and love for A.A., and I feel very comfortable about of the future of A.A. Now I have the highest position in Alcoholics Anonymous. I am at the door at my home group and I look for newcomers. 33 years ago when I got sober, I went into a meeting and I didn’t know anyone and there was no one at the door. Fortunately, a man came up to me before the meeting ended and said, “Are you new? I haven’t seen you before. Welcome.” Your job is to get people in the rooms. My job, now, is to be in the room and help those people get sober. Thank you for allowing me to be with you.

John K. *Immediate past trustee.*

I’d like to share with you how I like to close my talks:

When I am down and, oh my soul, so weary;
When troubles come and my heart burdened be;
Then, I am still and wait here in the silence,
Until you come and sit awhile with me.

You raise me up, so I can stand on mountains;
You raise me up, to walk on stormy seas;
I am strong, when I am on your shoulders;
You raise me up... To more than I can be.

There is no life - no life without its hunger;
Each restless heart beats so imperfectly;
But when you come and I am filled with wonder,
Sometimes, I think I glimpse eternity.

We have a new general manager, a strong board, and the present trustee is doing a great job. We will continue. Thank you.

CLOSING REMARKS

Ward Ewing, Class A (nonalcoholic) General Service Board chair: In these closing remarks I like to summarize what I have heard this weekend from you. Usually this summary consists of a list of concerns that have been raised by you in conversations, workshops, and sharing sessions. This Forum has been different in that as I listened and talked with you, I continued to hear one underlying concern: the lack of significant growth in membership over the past 10 to 15 years. So I have organized these closing remarks around that concern.

I have three areas: 1) What is the picture regarding membership growth? 2) What are some of the possible reasons for a lack of growth? 3) What can we do to reach out more effectively to the still-suffering alcoholic, which, of course, is how we increase the membership?

1) What is the picture regarding membership growth?

Let's begin by recognizing that getting accurate numbers is difficult. As I said earlier, in a Fellowship where anonymity is our spiritual foundation, counting members is challenging. While the numbers may not be as accurate as membership numbers for a dues paying group like a union or a country club, they have been developed through scientifically based surveys and are certainly valid for comparison from one year to the next. While we can be modestly pleased that over the past three years we have added approximately 60,000 members to the Fellowship, that represents a growth of only 4.5% over those three years. When we look at a longer period of time, as was pointed out by one of you, the lack of growth in membership is clear.

2) What are some of the possible reasons for a lack of growth?

Here I heard some new ideas both in individual conversations as well as in the sharing sessions. I will hit them lightly; I'm sure there are others.

There are a lot of other 12 Step groups – N.A., Crystal Meth Anonymous, and hundreds more. In A.A.'s time of rapid growth it was the only option. Today multi-addiction seems to be the norm, which means people are getting help from other groups. The total number of people in 12 Step programs dealing with addiction may well be continuing to grow.

Another person suggested there is a demographic factor and referred to the baby boomers. In the 70's and 80's when A.A. was growing, the boomers were in that age bracket of 25-40 years old – a time when for many their drinking results in lives becoming unmanageable.

While those factors may affect our membership growth, they are not factors we can do anything about. But there are other reasons for the plateau in membership. In the 70's and 80's we became comfortable with a pattern of intervention, followed by rehab, followed by referral to Alcoholics Anonymous.

C.P.C. focused on getting doctors and lawyers and EAP officers to refer people to treatment. For many reasons, that system no longer provides large numbers of referrals to A.A. One reason involves changes in what insurance companies cover, but some of you expressed concern that doctors, lawyers, courts, EAP, and rehab centers are just not referring people to A.A. And some suggested that among those who would refer there is a perception that A.A. is some sort of religious sect.

In our world, which is growing more and more secular, professionals who might refer people to A.A. have difficulty understanding that while alcoholism is a disease, a physical disease, the only solution that truly works is a spiritual program. We need to be clear about the power of this spiritual program, but we also need to draw the line clearly between A.A. and any religious institutions, theology, or ritual. We have a problem in how people perceive us.

Another of you suggested that we have expanded the number of our meetings, but the number of members has not kept up. As a result, what were once large, welcoming, even exciting meetings have become smaller and less attractive to newcomers.

Then there are those who attend for a couple of years and after turning their lives around, stop attending meetings. I personally know a couple of people who have done this and are still

sober. I tell them they are missing the fun, but they have left and won't be back unless they drink again.

Another reason for our lack of significant growth that I have heard this weekend is the challenge of being truly inclusive. From the beginning, A.A. has been more inclusive than any organization I personally am aware of. There is only one requirement for membership – the desire to stop drinking. Anyone who desires to stop drinking is welcome.

However, when we look at our membership – in this room and through our survey – we recognize that we do not actually include -- *in proportion to the population* -- African-Americans, persons of Hispanic background, Native-Americans, other minorities, and even women and young people.

I've heard conversations about our singleness of purpose which is also about inclusion of those who struggle with multi-addiction. Do we unintentionally exclude such persons by asking them not to share about their drug addiction? I understand that some groups may do so. Do we exclude newcomers who have no belief in a God with our use of spiritual language? As I listen to your stories, I have not yet heard a story of someone who had a conscious relationship with God when they first entered the doors of A.A.

Inclusion is a challenge. There are thousands of ways to turn people off, especially people who are looking for excuses not to attend meetings. Just the lack of diversity at a meeting can make a minority person feel excluded. It will not change overnight, but I think we must work at living the fact that there is only one requirement for membership.

3) What can we do to reach out more effectively to the still-suffering alcoholic?

There was much discussion about technology and communication in our new, electronic age. As one participant said, we must remember that technology is only a tool, like the phone Bill used to make that first, critical call. We are working and will continue to work with technology in order to carry the message more effectively.

We talked about politics in A.A. It was a good conversation. I think we were talking about how we deal with differences and personalities and maintain our unity. Personal recovery depends on A.A. unity, and so does our ability to carry the message. If we are bogged down with unresolved differences or personality conflicts, we will not carry the message effectively.

Finally we need to do our 12th Step work – individually, through C.P.C. and P.I. work, and in any other way possible. The principle of personal anonymity is at the level of press, radio, and public media. It does not mean you should not share your story with your doctor, your lawyer, your minister, your employee assistance manager or anyone else who may have contact with those who suffer from this addiction. As I shared in response to one of your questions, I cannot intervene effectively without you. Hope comes when one alcoholic hears his or her story on the lips of another alcoholic who is recovering. How can I sum this up? We need to grow, and those who suffer from this disease need A.A. You have shown me this weekend that we can do this by living the basics: Welcome anyone who desires to stop drinking, work with your sponsor and with your sponsees, and take every opportunity to live out the 12th Step.
