

■ “A.A. at Its Best”: New Approaches to the Seventh Tradition



In mid-March of this year, at the onset of the Coronavirus pandemic, the lights went dark at the General Service Office as G.S.O.’s workforce dispersed to their homes to continue helping members carry the message of Alcoholics Anonymous. As the days went on, A.A.’s many central offices strove to remain open to fulfill their essential function, and A.A. groups turned to virtual platforms to ensure that alcoholics everywhere could meet and stay sober. Over the last number of months, a situation without precedent in the lifetime of A.A. has been faced with fortitude, hard work and creativity.

“The amazing thing,” says Leslie Backus, Class A (nonalcoholic) treasurer of the General Service Board, pictured above, “is that whether at the local, the area or the intergroup level, A.A.s have found a way to continue carrying the message. Our primary purpose is going strong. It is an awesome and humbling thing to watch.”

Suffering alcoholics have been turning to A.A. for 85 years, and the need for Alcoholics Anonymous has never been greater. Despite the physical separation of its employees, G.S.O. General Manager Greg T. wrote in a June letter to the Fellowship, “G.S.O. in New York is continuing to support all levels of service. Literature still needs to be published and distributed, calls need to be answered, online platforms still need to be updated, and support operations sustained.”

At the same time, according to G.S.O. acting Chief Financial Officer Bob W., there were challenges: “In the immediate aftermath of COVID-19, G.S.O. experienced a sharp decline in contributions and literature sales.”

The precipitous fall in both of these funding levels — because people could neither contribute in the same way at meetings nor buy books from the group’s literature table or at their local intergroup office — forced A.A. to take a \$3 million drawdown from its Reserve Fund at the end of April.

Fortunately, since then, there has been a dramatic increase in contributions from A.A. groups and members, culminating in \$1.1 million for the month of July — an extraordinary response. Leslie Backus, who reported on A.A.’s financial situation at A.A.’s virtual 70th General Service Conference and who was also featured in a video released to the Fellowship entitled “COVID-19 & the Seventh Tradition” (<https://vimeo.com/430834698>), says of the response from the Fellowship, “It was the spiritual nature of the Seventh Tradition in practice, one person stepping up to help other members over and over.”

Bob W. adds, “More than the actual dollars themselves, it is about participation, and that is what gets me emotional. That principle of participation is rooted in our Fourth Concept and the Seventh Tradition. Money and spirituality mix in the basket.”

Literature sales, meanwhile, have risen only slightly from April, according to Bob, and are nowhere near their average monthly sales levels pre-pandemic. And while some of the \$1.1 million in contributions came from groups, many others were made by individuals via aa.org (<https://contribution.aa.org>). Greg T. considers this a sign of these unprecedented times, when “individuals perhaps feel a level of responsibility in a different way, under the circumstances.”

As many in A.A. know, however, even in the best of times, only 40 percent of groups send a portion of their Seventh Tradition basket to help support the General Service Office. This is nothing new. Bill W. made note of it in a 1966 letter to the Fellowship in which he stated, “We cannot depend on A.A. book and pamphlet income year after year to make up for lack of Group contributions.” But the situation we are currently in is new — a global pandemic, an age of transformative technology — and finding solutions to the lack of group contributions that Bill refers to is a conversation that presents itself with some urgency.

Box 4-5-9 is published quarterly by the General Service Office of Alcoholics Anonymous, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10115, copyright © 2020 by Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc.

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G.S.O.'s A.A. Website: www.aa.org

Subscriptions: Individual, \$3.50 per year; group, \$6.00 for each unit of 10 per year. Check—made payable to A.A.W.S., Inc.—should accompany order. To have issues delivered directly to your inbox, register your email on the A.A. Digital Subscription Service on G.S.O.'s Website.

Note on anonymity: From time to time in this publication full names and/or pictures of G.S.O. employees, Class A trustees and other nonalcoholics are used. The anonymity of A.A. members is maintained, as they are identified throughout by first name and last initial only.

Jimmy D., Class B (alcoholic) Southwest regional trustee, is A.A.W.S. treasurer and chair of the A.A.W.S. Self-Support Committee, which is examining the issue of how the General Service Office can provide members with a clear picture of the current situation while letting them know the difference their contributions can make. “I believe in general we’ve done a poor job of allowing the Fellowship to see the tangible results of their participation in the Seventh Tradition,” Jimmy says. The issue, he believes, is one of communication. “People working at G.S.O. are doing a stellar job, but the way we talk to each other — to other members — needs to get better. An example is self-support acknowledgments. We need to provide living, breathing examples of specifically what your contribution lets us do for other suffering alcoholics. ‘Because of your contribution, we can do x or y .’ We need to use clear, concise language and encourage feedback.”

On the technology side, a lot of hard work has been done at G.S.O. since the pandemic hit to make it easier for groups to make their Seventh Tradition contributions via various digital platforms. It costs G.S.O. about \$1.60 to process each check sent by a group treasurer the old-fashioned way, even though, as Greg says, “we have streamlined the system to the degree possible in this environment and are processing quite effectively.” The new contributions portal at aa.org should help the situation, making the process of contributing digitally — if that is what groups choose to do — more user friendly.

Jeff W., staff member on the Group Services assignment, believes that “group contributions may still be lagging because some groups don’t fully understand how to pass the virtual basket. And it has been complicated. Individuals have stepped up, big time — intergroups say this, as well. But groups have recovered more slowly.”

Jeff is hearing from groups who are continuing the tradition of self-support in other ways, however. For

example, some are paying the rent on church basements or other spaces they can’t, for the time being, use. Groups in some areas are working on plans for reopening physical spaces, which may create a need for further Seventh Tradition support within the group itself. “We are hearing from groups about reopening in a safe and spiritual way. There are questions surrounding this that need to be considered. Should they provide masks, gloves, hand sanitizer? If it’s a hybrid meeting on a virtual platform, groups might have to invest in better WiFi, a Bluetooth speaker, perhaps a microphone and PA system.”

Jeff agrees with Jimmy D. that, generally speaking, while people don’t like to talk about money, “if we are transparent and clear and communicate the situation, then people will come through. We do need, in the long run, to change how we deal with the Seventh Tradition and emphasize the spiritual nature of it, which really goes back to a sense of belonging. Contributing reinforces that sense of responsibility.”

Ultimately, Greg T. thinks, Alcoholics Anonymous will not only survive, but thrive. “I believe A.A. members and groups have stepped up and realized that it is time to change the way we conduct our business and services during this very taxing and difficult environment and in the immediate future. This is A.A. in action. This is A.A. at its best — mirroring the founding period when there was a need for trial and error, when the communications and the technology of the day were used to their greatest effect in carrying the message.”

Jane E., a Panel 69 delegate from Area 49, Southeast New York, echoes Greg’s sentiments. “We are in the Flying Blind Period 2.0.,” she says — the first “flying blind period” being the earliest days of A.A. “But now we have the Traditions and Concepts to guide us.”

When it comes to money, Jane says, “many groups aren’t making coffee or paying rent — so they don’t need as much money. But G.S.O. does. Mail is answered; emails are answered; and an entire virtual General Service Conference was organized — and the staff is doing it all from home. I believe it comes down to word of mouth. I think it’s possible that when G.S.O. announced they had taken \$3 million out of the Reserve Fund, people began to think about that and talk about it. I know I did. In fact, in my opinion, people in A.A. actually have a responsibility to talk about it, to say, ‘We need contributions, right now.’”

Two quotes from Bill W. in *The Language of the Heart* may suffice in summing up the current situation when it comes to Tradition Seven: “The future would ... lack its full use and meaning did it not bring us fresh problems and even acute perils — problems and perils through which we can grow into true greatness of action and spirit.” And, second, “We don’t have to go to Akron, Ohio, to see Dr. Bob’s memorial. Dr. Bob’s real monument is visible throughout the length and breadth of A.A. Let us look again at its true inscription — one word only, which we A.A.s have written. That word is sacrifice.”

■ Back to the Future



It has been over five months since A.A. meetings have, for the most part, migrated online. There are now over 1,000 virtual meetings in Meeting Guide on the G.S.O. website. And recently, as there appears to be a movement toward reversing the trend, there are as many questions about these changes as there are meetings. One of the most common communications that G.S.O. has received relates to A.A.'s autonomy: just because a hosting church or venue is reopening doesn't necessarily mean that a physical A.A. meeting has to as well. However, many groups are eager to get back to business as usual, and as buildings unlock their doors, those groups are making plans to return. Two considerations, sometimes at cross purposes, often arise with regard to remaining online or reopening A.A. groups: safety and unity.

Many A.A. groups have shifted along technological lines. Some members remain uncomfortable with online meetings and so attend what few in-person meetings are available, or they use literature or the telephone to connect with the Fellowship. Others, who have more easily replaced physical meetings with online meetings, are not willing to return to live rooms yet, due to concerns about the proliferation of virus hotspots and upticks in certain areas. Eventually these two groups will need to come back together while sorting out any confusion or hurt feelings that may have been created along the way. It will take sensitivity and diplomacy as well as strict adherence to the A.A. Traditions. Traditions One (common welfare) and Five (primary purpose) can serve as handrails on the walk back, as can the consolation that *all* groups are experiencing similar stress. A.A. groups may be autonomous when it comes to the particulars of how a group functions, but in matters of the heart, we are not alone.

Workshops and committees that have met to consider reopening have found that thorough discussion before any decision-making pays the greatest dividends. There

are numerous guides, the essence of which we share here, that explain the steps some groups are taking. Most groups find it is essential to first identify the common challenges to group unity presented by any unresolved issues. Detailed, thoughtful reports and guides are incredibly helpful in smoothing things out, and being solution-oriented is paramount to help maintain a level of calm and trust as members attempt to return to the rooms.

A New York City group that hosts multiple meetings each week came up with the guidelines below. Prior to drawing up their recommendations, members reviewed federal CDC guidelines, N.Y.C. and N.Y.S. protocols, A.A.'s G.S.O. guidelines, A.A.'s N.Y. Intergroup materials, Area 49 (Southeast New York) outlines, and various articles in the press. Their criteria were set with the understanding that online meetings continue to meet during the transition, so the balance between availability and safety is being maintained. They also stress that all guidelines are subject to adjustment in response to changes in the status of the COVID-19 pandemic. These are some of their most practical suggestions:

- There should be only x chairs in the room and only x people permitted at any time. (The number x is adjusted to room size such that there is a six-foot distance between chairs.)
- Masks should be required at all times. Anyone refusing to wear a mask should not enter. The group should make an effort to supply masks for individuals who may not have their own upon entry.
- Bathrooms should be locked and unavailable.
- No cash collections should be taken. Seventh Tradition contributions can be made via PayPal or other digital means.
- A list of first names and last initial with phone numbers may be maintained by the chairperson (and destroyed after 14 days) in the event that contact tracing is required by the N.Y.C. or N.Y.S. Department of Health.
- There should be no shared literature.
- The group should supply spray disinfectant and attempt to maintain a supply of hand sanitizer so group members can disinfect between meetings.
- Similar to fire code maximum occupancy caps, group members should manage potential overflow issues by helping people find other meetings or offer their spots to those with burning needs/desires to be in the room.
- The option to "hybridize" by calling in to an online web platform should be provided (if there is a group conscience to do so).

- An announcement highlighting the COVID-19 risk to vulnerable populations should be read at every meeting.

Area 48 (Hudson/Mohawk/Berkshire New York) has made many of the same recommendations, adding a few others that hone in on hospitality, literature, newcomers and new/revised service opportunities:

- Hospitality should be suspended: members can bring their own beverage. Or, one person may be designated to pour coffee and deliver one-on-one with face-mask and gloves.
- Members should bring their own books (with no passing). And/or all literature may be disinfected.
- “Beginner’s packs” — plastic bags containing a pre-printed list of group names and numbers, pamphlets and other starter material (all disinfected) — should be available for newcomers.
- Groups may consider new service positions such as a “spiritual sanitizer”/safety person and a tech person for maintenance of virtual and hybrid meetings. Greeter duties might be revised to include handing out the Seventh Tradition card, printed group protocols and/or important lists and numbers. Revised chair and secretary duties may include handling contract tracing lists.

Hybrid meetings seem to be the most practical way to slowly bring groups back together, as they are able to reach both in-person members and those attending virtually at the same time. However, there are some specific considerations and issues that may complicate this practical solution. Many groups — having either anticipated these concerns or actually experienced them — bring several things to light:

- When a member feels uncomfortable in a hybrid meeting, their option to retire outside or to their car is only possible if they have a smartphone — a consideration for the newcomer.
- Many groups would need additional computers, as well as augmented sound, video and amplification equipment.
- Two chairpersons — one for the face-to-face meeting and one for the online meeting — would be required.
- A designated blackout area for those who do not want to be seen on camera would have to be available.

Groups that host hybrid meetings have learned that the overall guiding principle should be an effort to assure that *everyone* is at ease with the meeting — especially those who are not comfortable with or adept at using technology. Extra patience is essential in these cases.

There are a variety of ways to set up hybrid meetings involving the use of multiple laptops, tablets and smartphones, Bluetooth devices, PA systems, WiFi hotspots, and/or large video screens. There are also many online platforms available. Groups can hybridize their meetings to their own liking, depending on the physical venue, the equipment available, and the group conscience on how to proceed in implementing changes.

This is an unprecedented time in the history of A.A. ... and the world. During the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, Judith H. wrote in the July issue of AA Grapevine, “We need each other for sobriety; Bill and Dr. Bob found this out 85 years ago, as two drunks who got together and said, ‘I won’t drink, just for today’ ... Those two men left us a program to keep us sober through wars, hurricanes, tornadoes, and any kind of upheaval, personal or planetary — even this one.”

These are thoughtful words to consider as we slowly and gently work back toward meetings as we know and love them. With gratitude and humility, and in consideration of *all* alcoholics, these steps can be taken cautiously but purposefully, in the same way we learned from Alcoholics Anonymous how to live life — one day at a time.

■ A Celebration of Sobriety

In 1990, a vision came to a Paiute Indian named Earl L., Jr., an alcoholic from Bishop, California. Earl saw the Indian Nations coming together in unity — celebrating sobriety while embracing their culture. Ultimately, Earl’s vision led to formation of the annual national/international Native American Indian Alcoholics Anonymous Convention (NAI-AA), whose sole purpose is to carry the message of Alcoholics Anonymous to the Native American Indian, both in and out of the program, who still suffers. In 2020, with nearly three decades under its belt, the convention is a traveling one, having been held on reservations and in a broad variety of cities from Burbank to Billings to Green Bay. In August of this year, the 29th NAI-AA Convention was to be held in Las Vegas, Nevada, but due to current health conditions it has been rescheduled for November 26–29.

The NAI-AA Convention follows a time-tested format each year, with many activities having been proven beneficial, instructive and moving to all. Six general sessions featuring A.A. speakers are spread over the course of the weekend. A marathon meeting starts on Thursday and ends Sunday morning. Al-Anon meetings are scheduled throughout, with an Al-Anon speaker at the Saturday morning brunch. A banquet is held on Saturday, and there is an intertribal social pow wow later in the evening. Also on the docket are Talking Circles, open to all attendees; an oldtimers meeting; and a dance on Friday night.

Sunday closing ceremonies include a sobriety count-down and a Passing of the Big Book ceremony, in which the person with the most years of sobriety passes a Big Book signed by convention attendees to the person with the least amount of sober time. Another ceremony is the Tying of the Feather, in which the person with the least amount of sober time is honored with the job of tying a feather on the Convention Eagle Staff, representing the

culmination of another successful annual convention, and signifying the hope that sobriety will continue to be handed down from one generation to the next.

During the farewell ceremony, people form a circle while the drum group sings a farewell or “traveling” song. People dance, shake hands and say their farewells. At past conventions, many participants were overwhelmed by the miracle that is A.A. and by the multitude of precious bonds forged over years of sobriety and fellowship.

Despite recent spikes of COVID-19 in certain areas of

the country, NAI-AA organizers have no plans to cancel this year’s convention — contingent, of course, on other — higher — powers. One of the organizers, when asked to comment on the current situation, was hopeful and humble: “We are praying that the health circumstances across the country will allow our convention to take place. If it is cancelled, it will be cancelled by powers greater than ourselves.”

For further information about the convention, visit www.nai-aa.com.

Country-to-Country Sponsorship

This article is excerpted from service material from the General Service Office, which is available on aa.org in the International section.



In Alcoholics Anonymous, sponsorship is about carrying the message — among individuals, groups and countries big and small. It is a commitment that ripples outward with many new beginnings and no endings because, as A.A.’s Legacy of Service states, “We must carry the message, else we ourselves can wither and those who haven’t been given the truth may die.” (*A.A. Service Manual, 2018-2020, page S1*)

As one World Service Meeting (W.S.M.) delegate from the U.S./Canada put it, “In all A.A. service, we offer other alcoholics the same opportunity for hope that has led us to the miracles in our own lives.... It is in this same spirit of service that one country looks to the needs of the suffering alcoholics in another country. We understand that

A.A. will probably get there someday; we know that, once started, it will probably take hold, and, given time, will grow on its own to become a marvelous force for good among their lost and hopeless drunks, just as it has in our own country. We also know that the timetable for this process can be advanced by the application of a few simple actions.”

“Sponsorship is basically the contact of one alcoholic with another,” says a past W.S.M. delegate from Poland, “and this is the basis of country-to-country sponsorship. Success depends on the zeal and the persistence of both parties.... We can visit different countries, take part in numerous conventions organized by A.A. members in many of them. But such a journey in itself is not worth

much if it does not give anything to the A.A. community. The most important thing is to maintain these contacts across time.”

Another Polish W.S.M. delegate adds, “The opportunity to hear the experience of our sober friends from neighboring countries is the greatest reward for all those who feel responsible for A.A. unity and for carrying the message of A.A. to other countries. The Twelve Step program is a program of spiritual development and stems from love and a sincere heart. That is why borders, cultural differences and language are no obstacles in country-to-country sponsorship.”

Developed over the years as countries have reached out to one another, shared experience points to a few essential conditions that form the basis upon which A.A. can be built, take root and grow wherever in the world it may be: one alcoholic sharing with another the life-changing message of A.A.; cooperation with non-alcoholic professionals in order to reach more alcoholics; and participation at world service and zonal meetings to encounter solutions to problems faced in the course of carrying the message.

The Internet has proven itself a great tool for communicating the message of A.A., including from country to country. The Internet is being used for email among A.A. members and for the posting on websites of literature, events and public information. As one past World Service Meeting delegate noted, “Internet communication is fast and makes distances shrink by the speed of light. Plus, it’s cheap.”

While modern technology has enhanced the sense of connectedness across distances once thought considerable, A.A. is about communication by whatever means are available, and these still include mail, word of mouth, and face-to-face meetings when they resume.

“I hope we can achieve a more dependable worldwide integration to make more effective use of the experiences accumulated in public information work, which may in turn lead to a quantitative and qualitative growth and improve our methods of carrying the message,” offers a past W.S.M. delegate. He goes on to express this further hope: “That a sponsorship plan may emerge, with the larger more established structures assisting the smaller emerging structures; and that a system of communication may be developed, easy to use, sensible and low cost, that will keep the spirit of service fresh, lively and in constant readiness, and that through this effort the spark will be lit that ignites the daily desire to serve.”

For additional information on country-to-country sponsorship, please write to: General Service Office, P.O. Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163, Attn: International Desk; or email international@aa.org.

You can also visit G.S.O.’s website at www.aa.org and the webpage “A.A. Around the World.”

■ What’s a Prudent Reserve?



Prudence isn’t a concept usually associated with active alcoholics. But get a group of sober alcoholics together and the idea takes on new meaning. Fully aware — through painful personal experience — of the many things that can go wrong in life, once sober, A.A. members are often the very definition of prudence when it comes to supporting and maintaining an A.A. group and ensuring the continuance of A.A. services.

One of the most prudent things groups can do is to establish a financial reserve — a proverbial “rainy day fund” — to see the group through any difficult times. Such funds help to ensure the group’s primary purpose — to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers — and to provide a bulwark against uncertainty.

And, if nothing else, 2020 has certainly provided uncertainty, with groups dipping into their reserves to set up online meetings to take the place of face-to-face meetings cancelled by the pandemic, or continuing to pay rent for meeting spaces no longer occupied in anticipation of an uncertain return.

Like many groups across the U.S. and Canada, and, in fact, around the world, A.A.’s General Service Board also has a prudent reserve fund established to provide emergency financial resources to help support A.A. services, should such resources ever become necessary. With the authorization of the board of trustees, the Reserve Fund may also be used for extraordinary expenses. For example, it has been used to cover the costs of moving, related construction, and refurbishing of the G.S.O. and Grapevine offices, and to fund the costs of major technological upgrades. Its use has also been authorized for a limited period of time to underwrite the development of the Spanish-language Grapevine magazine, *La Viña*.

Well, in the spring of this year, an emergency draw-down of \$3 million was approved by the General Service Board to cover costs directly related to the Coronavirus pandemic which forced the General Service Office into totally remote operation and seriously impacted the level of group contributions and literature sales upon

which “A.A. Headquarters,” as Bill W. often referred to GSO, depend.

Dating back more than 65 years, the General Service Board Reserve Fund was established in 1954 to ensure the essential services of the General Service Office and Grapevine in the event of an unexpected and substantial reduction in the normal revenues of the organization, whether that situation be caused by severe economic recession, a disruption within the Fellowship, or a change in the manner of publication and distribution of A.A. literature, or any other cause. Unexpected and unprecedented as it is, the Coronavirus pandemic is exactly what the Reserve Fund was intended for.

Currently, the General Service Board’s Reserve Fund is limited by Conference action to no more than one year’s combined operating expenses of A.A. World Services, Inc., AA Grapevine, Inc., and the General Fund of the General Service Board of A.A., Inc., as the Reserve Fund is not intended to be a routine source of financial support in normal times, but rather a bulwark against the unexpected. Following the drawdown, the capacity now stands at 9.1 months. As Seventh Tradition contributions continue and literature sales begin to rebound, this number is expected to rise over the coming months.

“A solid, prudent Reserve Fund and good business management skills are both spiritual and practical,” notes Class A nonalcoholic trustee emeritus and former treasurer of the General Service Board, Gary Glynn. As a fellowship, we seek neither to build up huge sums of money nor do we run so close to the edge that we are unable to fulfill our obligations and pay our bills. “It is neither practical nor spiritual to accumulate more or spend more than we need to. It is also neither practical nor spiritual to run out of money,” says Gary. “As usual, Bill W. had a good phrase for what we need. He called it fiscal common sense.” And it is this fiscal common sense, developed early in A.A.’s history, that led to the formation of our Seventh Tradition of self-support.

Money — and what to do with it — has always been an issue in the Fellowship. In the pioneering days of A.A., great amounts of money were dreamed of and sought after, so that the miracle of Alcoholics Anonymous could be spread as quickly as possible. It took time and wisdom for those early A.A.s to see that the Fellowship had to be self-supporting or the entire movement could be lost forever. As A.A. grew in numbers and maturity, it became apparent that one of the surest ways to maintain the Fellowship’s existence was to ensure that it remain self-supporting and refuse outside gifts, no matter how compelling the need or how loving the offer.

In *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* a passage in Tradition Seven describes the debate at a meeting in 1948 of the Alcoholic Foundation, the forerunner of A.A.’s General Service Board. At issue was a bequest to Alcoholics Anonymous in the sum of ten thousand dollars. Should A.A. take the gift?

“What a debate we had on that one!” the text relates.

“The Foundation was really hard up just then; the groups weren’t sending in enough for the support of the office; we had been tossing in all the book income and even that hadn’t been enough. The reserve was melting like snow in springtime. We needed that ten thousand dollars....

“Then came the opposition. They pointed out that the Foundation board already knew of a total of half a million dollars set aside for A.A. in the wills of people still alive. Heaven only knew how much there was we hadn’t heard about. If outside donations weren’t declined, absolutely cut off, then the Foundation would one day become rich....

“Then our trustees wrote a bright page of A.A. history,” the text continues. “They declared for the principle that A.A. must always stay poor. Bare running expenses plus a prudent reserve would henceforth be the Foundation’s financial policy. Difficult as it was, they officially declined that ten thousand dollars, and adopted a formal, airtight resolution that all such future gifts would be similarly declined. At that moment, we believe, the principle of corporate poverty was firmly and finally embedded in A.A. tradition.”

Corporate poverty is more “a state of mind than the size of our bank account,” notes Gary Glynn. “We all know people and organizations that extravagantly spend money they don’t have, living beyond their means either by ignoring the facts of their finances or by assuming a rosy tomorrow. So, you can in fact be poor and not practice corporate poverty... The opposite is also possible, that we can maintain a prudent reserve without falling into the temptation of spending it just because it’s there.”

Whether it be for a group, an area, an intergroup/central office, or for A.A.’s General Service Board, establishing a prudent reserve is a key element in A.A.’s approach to self-support, one which can have profound implications, the most important of which is the assurance it provides that A.A.’s critical services will remain available for those who have come to count on them to sustain their sobriety, and, indeed, their very lives.

■ Three New Class B Trustees Join the General Service Board

Following their election in May at the 70th General Service Conference, the General Service Board of A.A. welcomed three new Class B (alcoholic) trustees: Josh E., of Durham, North Carolina, general service trustee; Mike L., of Omaha, Nebraska, West Central regional trustee; and Irma V. de B.-N., of Esterhazy, Saskatchewan, Western Canada regional trustee. While all trustees represent the Fellowship as a whole and no trustee can be said to “represent” a geographical section, these newly elected A.A. members bring extensive service experience

and invaluable regional and professional points of view to the board's deliberations.

Originally from Minnesota, **Josh E.** grew up in scattered places — first the East Coast and then Taipei, Taiwan, for high school. It was at that high school that Josh became a daily drinker and realized he had a problem with alcohol. While studying art at college in Manhattan, Josh continued to recognize that he didn't drink like "normal people," but he resigned himself to the fact that this was his "lot" in life and gave up on figuring out a different way to live.

In 2005, Josh found his way down to Durham, North Carolina, thanks to an attractive job opportunity. But even the possibility of a new life and more responsibilities did little to curtail his drinking habits. "I would be dry for a few weeks, but then I would go off the deep end," recalls Josh. "The second time that I called my boss from jail, I looked up A.A. on Google and found a meeting nearby. I picked up a white chip, and that's the only white chip I've gotten." That meeting took place on July 7, 2006.

Prior to being elected as a general service trustee at the virtual General Service Conference in May of this year, Josh served as an AA Grapevine director (2016–2020) and also as an appointed committee member on the trustees' Public Information Committee (2013–2015). In recent years, he has worked closely with other board members with a focus on strategic planning. "The office has had a lot of success revitalizing our website and other channels such as YouTube, making content more straightforward and easier to access," explains Josh. "We've made great strides during the last year. More recently, the July issue of Grapevine was filled with stories and hope about how to stay sober during the pandemic. The staff was so responsive, and all worked together in order to adapt this issue to the changing environment. It was fantastic to see." Another initiative Josh worked on was the LinkedIn page for A.A. World Services, Inc. "We had conversations over a long period of time, and it's rewarding to see how some of that history came to life and is now helping us to carry the message."

In his professional life, Josh has accumulated more than 20 years in film and television production. Currently, he serves as director of content production for a global advertising agency based in North Carolina. "I've always been grateful to bring my voice to our deliberations and conversations while being of service," comments Josh. "It's a privilege to be one of those voices — and it's a big responsibility. I hope to bring a different perspective, another way of looking at things."

Born and raised in Omaha, Nebraska, **Mike L.** is a third-generation member of Alcoholics Anonymous. His grandfather first attended A.A. but never managed to put together more than a couple of years before he passed away in 1959. Later, Mike's mom was also in and out of the program, but when she died, she had managed to maintain 10 years of continuous sobriety. Mike got sober himself on January 22, 1982, and over

the years, his home group has remained the Council Bluffs Wild Bunch, just across the state line in Iowa. In addition, two out of Mike's three siblings are sober, with multiple years of sobriety (20 years and seven years). "It's definitely a family disease," Mike says.

As soon as Mike joined his home group, he got involved in service beyond the group level, beginning with an alternate GSR position and then becoming the GSR shortly thereafter. "I'm very fortunate that there were good examples of individuals in my home group to show me how to carry the message and how to be of service," Mike reflects. After holding numerous service positions over the years, he was elected West Central trustee at this spring's virtual 2020 General Service Conference.

"One of the most revealing aspects of service work is that it doesn't replace the Twelfth Step," says Mike. "My main obligation is to carry the message to the still-suffering alcoholic. When I was first serving on the Grapevine committee, I had a full plate and wasn't aggressively approaching newcomers," he continues. "I lost a bit of ground, it felt like, and my solution was to jump in with two feet and start working with newcomers again. This is where I feel the connection with my higher power the most strongly."

In his professional life, Mike has worked for many years in operations in various companies and has extensive experience in management and operations. Currently, he is an operations manager for a large trucking company. "It's a tremendous honor to serve on the board," says Mike. "I hope to bring all 36 principles of Alcoholics Anonymous into my life — not only in my program and service, but also in my family and work life. My goal as a board member is to ensure that A.A. is there for the still-suffering alcoholic."

Since his election to the board, Mike has been overwhelmed with all the support from his friends as well as from countless members in the larger community of Alcoholics Anonymous. "I'm amazed how many people I have in my life who love me — and whom I love back."

The first time that **Irma D.** heard about Alcoholics Anonymous, she was 12 years old — when her mother was admitted into a treatment center in Saskatchewan. "When my mom returned from rehab, her excitement and passion for sobriety was so palpable," recalls Irma. The Serenity Prayer soon hung on various walls in their home. Tragically, one year after her mother got sober, she died suddenly of a heart attack. Then, a year later, Irma's sister passed away after a tractor accident. "At age 15, I only had alcohol," remembers Irma. "I didn't know how to grieve — and I went off the rails." She continued to drink and suffer from depression. "One of the things that helped me during those times of despair was knowing the Serenity Prayer," she remembers. "Even though I wasn't sober, I turned to those words a lot."

On June 17, 1987, Irma attended her first meeting and heard A.A.'s message of hope. "I started to attend meetings on a regular basis and got involved with service,"

she remembers, “and one day I started to feel like a useful human being. I didn’t want to die anymore.” Right away, Irma jumped into service work, serving on several committees at the group level and taking on positions such round-up chairperson, treasurer and secretary. After serving as a GSR, she became an alternate DCM and then a DCM. Her opportunities continued to change and grow. In 2009, Irma was elected as the Panel 59 Area 91 delegate.

About her first General Service Conference in 2009, Irma notes, “I had this moment at the delegate’s only meeting that really touched my heart. One of the French-speaking delegates was sharing, and he spoke with his hands, in the same way that my mom — who was also French Canadian — did. For a moment, I felt like she

was with me on this journey — because it did all start when she brought sobriety into our home when I was a child.” This powerful experience gave Irma a glimpse of what service work could mean for her: “I want to ensure that A.A. is here for me, and also for my children and grandchildren.”

Professionally, Irma has worked for over 35 years in the nonprofit sector with experience related to strategic planning and marketing, and she currently serves as executive director of a not-for-profit organization. Irma has also been involved with numerous organizations that help and support youth. “I hope to use what I’ve learned over the years and make a difference,” she says. “Gratitude is being in action. The more we do, the more we are ‘a part of.’”

Man On the Bed: A.A. Number Three

Do you ever wonder what it would have been like to be twelfth-stepped by Bill W. and Dr. Bob? Well, Bill D., a well-known attorney and Akron city councilman, who in the summer of 1935 had once again been admitted to Akron City Hospital, in DTs and strapped to a gurney this time (having already punched out two nurses), described it this way some years after the fact.

“I looked up and there’s two great big fellows over six-foot tall, very likable looking,” said Bill in a taped conversation he had with Bill W. in 1953. “Before very long we began to relate some incidents of our drinking and, naturally, pretty soon, I realized both of you [Bill W. and Dr. Bob] knew what you were talking about.... A lot of folks tried to talk to me about my drinking — the fact



This full-color painting first appeared as a Grapevine center spread in the December 1955 issue. It proved so popular that four-color prints were made available separately. The artist, Robert M., was a volunteer illustrator for the Grapevine, and in 1956 he presented the painting to A.A. co-founder Bill W. In his thank you letter Bill wrote: “Your representation of ‘The Man on the Bed’ hangs in my studio at Bedford Hills. ...The whole heart and essence of A.A. can be seen just by looking at it.”

is, they'd come around...and I'd just dry up and wouldn't listen to them. They told me I ought to quit. Of course, I knew that much better than they did, because on top of all the things they knew, only I knew how sick I got.

"Both of you were very likable fellows, and after a while I remember that I had been doing quite a bit of the talking.... So, after hearing some of my story, you turned around and said to Doc — I don't think you knew I heard you, but I did — you said, 'Well, I believe he's worth saving and working on.'"

"Of course, as time went on, I began to get my health back and began to feel I didn't have to hide from people all the time..."

Bill D., who later came to be known in A.A. circles as the "Man on the Bed," continued. "You both said to me, 'Do you want to quit drinking? It's none of our business about your drinking. We're not up here trying to take any of your rights or privileges away from you, but we have a program whereby we think we can stay sober. Part of that program is that we take it to someone else that needs it and wants it. Now, if you don't want it, we'll not take up your time, and we'll be going and looking for someone else.'"

They then asked Bill a number of questions. Did he think he could quit of his own accord, without any help? Did he believe in a higher power and, if so, would he be willing to go to this higher power and ask for help?

They left this with Bill to think over and, as he lay in the hospital bed, he went over his drinking history in his mind. "I reviewed what liquor had done to me...the opportunities that I had discarded, went over the possibilities and things that had been given me and how I had wasted them, and I finally came to the conclusion that if I didn't want to quit, I certainly ought to want to quit...."

When the two twelfth-steppers returned sometime later, Dr. Bob asked Bill if he wanted to quit drinking. "Yes, Doc," said Bill, "I would like to quit, at least for five, six or eight months, until I get things straightened up, and begin to get the respect of my wife and some other people back, get my finances fixed up, and so on."

Bill W. and Dr. Bob both laughed heartily. Then, according to Bill, one of the two turned to him. "We've got some bad news for you. It was bad news for us, and it will probably be bad news for you. Whether you quit six days, months, or years, if you go out and take a drink or two you'll end up in this hospital, tied down, just like you have been in these past six months. You are an alcoholic."

"As far as I know that was the first time I had ever paid any attention to the word. I figured I was a drunk. And you said, 'No, you have a disease, and it doesn't make any difference how long you do without it, after

a drink or two you'll end up just like you are now.' That certainly was disheartening news, at the time."

The next thing Bill W. and Dr. Bob asked was whether or not Bill thought he could quit for 24 hours. "Sure ... anybody can do that, for 24 hours," said Bill. "That's what we're talking about. Just 24 hours at a time," the two A.A. co-founders said. "That sure did take a load off my mind," said Bill. "Every time I'd start thinking about drinking, I wouldn't think of long, dry, arid years without having a drink, but this idea for 24 hours."

Noting that Bill W. and Dr. Bob seemed genuinely happy to be sober, Bill said, "You seemed to be so well pleased with your sobriety, and you looked it and seemed to talk so confidently yourselves that, really, after a day or two I

began to, along with my wife, have confidence, at least to a certain extent, that it could be done... I wasn't afraid that the program wouldn't work, but I still was doubtful whether I would be able to hang on to the program. But I did come to the conclusion that I was willing to put everything I had into it.

"I remained in the hospital eight days. During those eight days I had raw sauerkraut and raw tomatoes the whole time. On the Fourth of July, Doc came by the hospital and I had a friend who had told me I could have her cottage for a week out at the lakes." Piling into a car, Bill W., Dr. Bob and his wife, and Bill and his wife all went together out to the cottage. "There wasn't any liquor around. For the first week it was rather tough. The other folks would come out and visit us most every day, and we would go over on a little island there and take a picnic lunch and sit around and try to devise a means of staying sober, in addition to what we already had. Naturally, the fellowship and being busy all the time was a great help. I was out there for more than a week and was helped a lot by these fellows coming out there. It was rather rough, but I still was willing and still wanted to go ahead and get rid of this problem I had.

"Of course, as time went on, I began to get my health back and began to feel I didn't have to hide from people all the time.

"I still go to meetings," said Bill from the vantage point of many years of sobriety. "Because I like to go. I meet the people that I like to talk to. Another reason that I go," he concluded, "is that I'm still grateful for those good years that I've had."

Bill D. died in Akron on September 17, 1954. In memoriam, Bill W. wrote, "That is, people say he died, but he really didn't. His spirit and works are today alive in the hearts of uncounted A.A.s, and who can doubt that Bill already dwells in one of those many mansions in the great beyond. The force of the great example that Bill set in our pioneering time will last as long as A.A. itself."

NOTE: Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, events may be canceled or moved to online formats. Please contact the event coordinators as listed before making your plans.

Calendar of Events

Events listed here are presented solely as a service to readers, not as an endorsement by the General Service Office. Please note that we cannot attest to the accuracy, relevancy, timeliness, or completeness of information provided by any linked site. **For any additional information, please use the event contact information provided.**

September

- 4-6—*Chicago, Illinois.* 48 Conv. Hispana de Estados Unidos y Canada. Escribir: Box 945, Woodstock, IL 60098; www.conventionhispanadeaasaycanada.com
- 4-6—*Vayamundo, Houffalize, Belgium.* A New Pair of Glasses. Info: www.aaconv.be
- 5-6—*Concord, California.* Unity and Service Conf. Write: Ch., 5100 Clayton Road, Suite B1 Box 121, Concord, CA 94521; www.unityandserviceconference.org
- 11-12—*Lèvis, Québec, Canada.* Congrès de Lèvis. Info: www.aa89.org
- 11-13—*Stamford, Connecticut.* 62nd Area 11 Conv. Write: Box 370005, West Hartford, CT 06137 www.ct-aa.org
- 17-20—*Ventura, California.* VII SWACYPAA. Write: Ch., Box 91855, Santa Barbara, CA 93101; www.swacypaa7.org
- 18-20—*Grand Junction, Colorado.* 35th Color Daze Wknd. Info: www.colordaze.com
- 18-20—*Wichita, Kansas.* 63rd Area 25 State Conf. Write: Ch., Box 1543, Garden City, KS 67846; www.ks-aa.org
- 18-20—*Williston, North Dakota.* ND State Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 2578, Watford City, ND 58854; www.aanorthdakota.org
- 25-27—*Wakefield, Virginia.* 27th Wakefield Campfire Conf. Write: Ch., Box 1732, Hampton, VA 23669; www.wakefieldcampfireconference.com
- 25-27—*Richland, Washington.* Third Three Rivers Big Book Weekend. Write: Ch., 3019 Duportail St. #108, Richland, WA 99352; www.threeriversbigbookweekend.org

October

- 2-4—*Oacoma, South Dakota.* Area 63 Fall Conf. Write: Ch., Box 471, Parker, SD 57053; www.area63aa.org
- 2-4—*Toowoomba, Queensland, Australia.* 55th Australian Nat'l Conv. Online. Write: Ch., Box 1218, Toowoomba, QLD 4350 AU; www.aanatcon2020.com.au
- 9-10—*Louisville, Kentucky.* Falls City Conv. Write: Ch., Box 37137, Louisville, KY 40233; www.louisvillehostcommittee.com
- 9-11—*Coralville, Iowa.* Area 24 Fall Conf. Write: Ch., P.O. Box 173, Fruitland, IA 51106; iadistrict13dcm@gmail.com
- 9-11—*Biarritz, France.* Biarritz Int'l English-Speaking Conv. Info: www.aaconventionbiarritz.com

November

- 13-14—*Egg Harbor, New Jersey.* Waves of Sobriety Roundup Via Zoom. Write: Ch., 3153 Fire Rd Suite #1-C, Egg Harbor Township, NJ 08234; www.roundup.apeatlanticaa.org

- 13-15—*Alexandria, Louisiana.* CENLA Sobermania. Write: Ch., Box 118, Tioga, LA 71477; www.sobermania.org
- 13-15—*Lancaster, Pennsylvania.* 63rd E. PA Gen. Svc Conv. Info: www.area59aa.org
- 27-29—*Stockholm, Sweden.* STOCKYPAA. Info: stockypaa2020@gmail.com

January 2021

- 15-17—*Spring, Texas.* SETA Conv. Write: Ch., 448 W 19th Street, #696, Houston, TX 77008; www.setaconvention.org
- 22-24—*Biarritz, France.* Second Biarritz Int'l English-Speaking Virtual Conv. Info: www.aavirtualconventionbiarritz.com
- 29-31—*Cambridge, Massachusetts.* Freedom Trail Conf. Online. Info: bgbbwkd@gmail.com

Planning a Future Event?

To be included in the *Box 4-5-9* Calendar, information must be received at G.S.O. four months prior to the event. We list events that are area, regional, national or international in scope.

For your convenience and ours — please type or print the information to be listed on the Bulletin Board page, and mail to Editor: Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163 or literature@aa.org

Date of event: from _____ to _____, 20_____

Name of event: _____

Location (Please indicate if online.): _____
CITY STATE OR PROVINCE

Address to list: _____
P.O. BOX (OR NUMBER AND STREET)

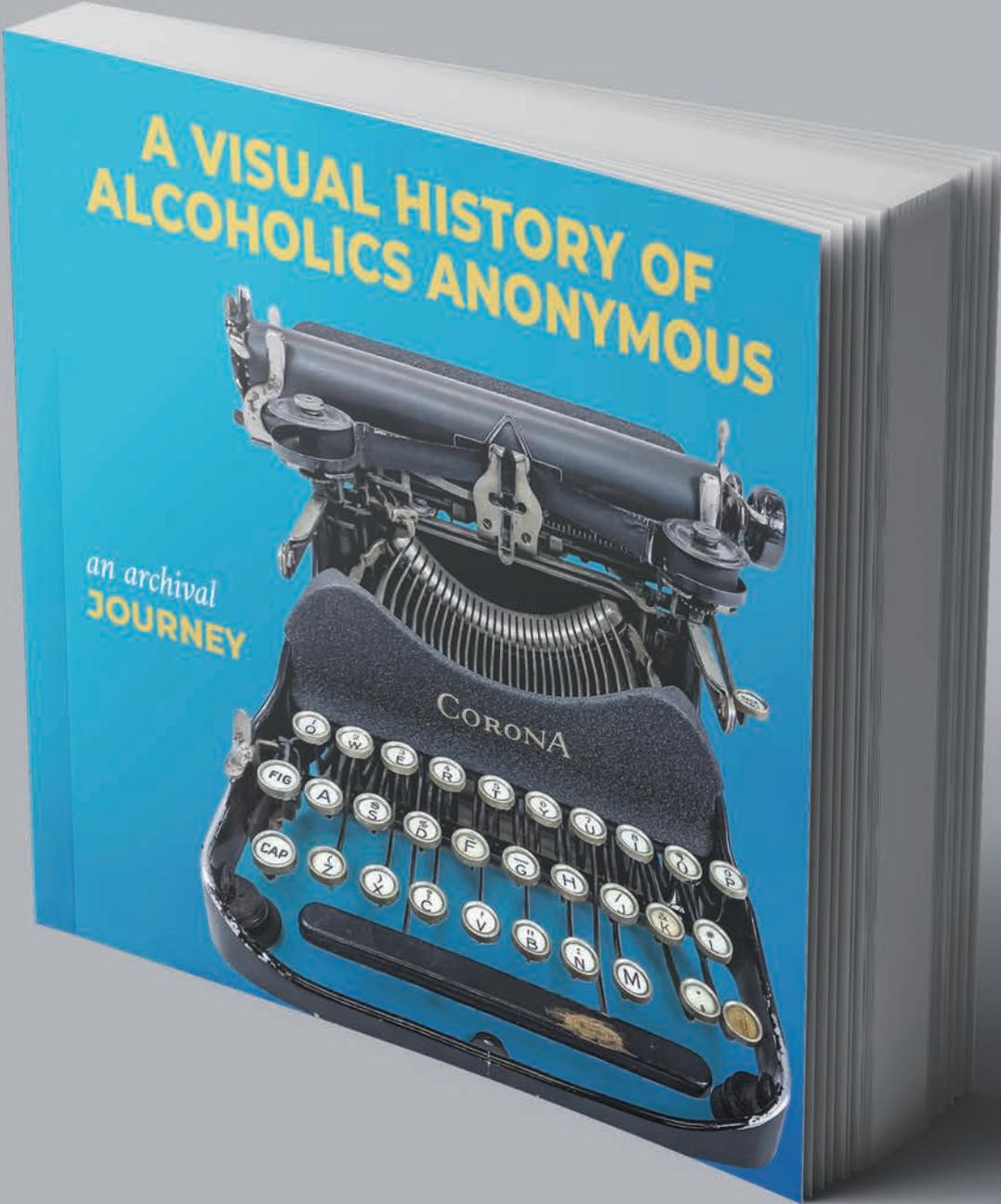
CITY STATE OR PROVINCE ZIP CODE

Website or email: _____
(NO PERSONAL EMAIL ADDRESSES)

Contact person: _____
NAME PHONE # AND EMAIL

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COMING SOON:
FEBRUARY 2021