

**SOUTHEAST
REGIONAL FORUM
FINAL REPORT
DECEMBER 6-8, 2024**

Biloxi, Mississippi

LAST NAMES OF CLASS A (NON-ALCOHOLIC) TRUSTEES

AND NON-ALCOHOLIC EMPLOYEES APPEAR IN THIS REPORT

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Dear A.A. Friends,

Please mark your calendar for the next Southeast Regional Forum that will be held September 18–20, 2026, at the Hilton Raleigh North Hills in Raleigh, North Carolina.

CONTENTS

Introduction	04
Unanswered Ask-It-Basket Questions	05
Delegate Presentations	06
Workshop Reports	15
Past Trustees' Sharing	24
Closing Remarks	29

INTRODUCTION

The 2024 Southeast Regional Forum was held in Biloxi, Mississippi. The final attendee count was 377, and this included 222 members attending their very first Forum.

UNANSWERED ASK-IT-BASKET QUESTIONS

Q. Please share your experience in dealing with Delegates who insist on giving reports in their area with a “jaded” or personal view of the issues.

A. When the Delegate report is being given, is there an opportunity to address any concerns at that time directly with the Delegate?

For those trusted servants doing service within the general service structure, the Twelve Concepts help to guide and inform their actions; however, the understanding is subject to individual interpretation and actions. The challenge articulated in your question may be a topic for a group and/or area discussion on how to best address the situation.

Q. How can we as a fellowship foster cooperation/unity with a “peacemaker” attitude rather than attitudes of condemnation and theories of conspiracy?

A. This is a great question. It seems this is the work of all A.A. members as we recover and practice the 36 Spiritual Principles laid out in the Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions and Twelve Concepts. To practice an attitude of gratitude and extend charitable assumption to our fellow members is a day-at-a-time process.

Q. What is the percentage of active groups donating for the past decade (2014–2024)?

A. In 2023, 31.64% (Number of Active Groups 57,222 divided by number of groups contributing, 18,105)
In 2022, 33.48% (Number of Active Groups 58,455 divided by number of groups contributing, 19,572)
In 2021 (Not provided — data errors discovered in methodology)
In 2020, 34.8% (Number of Groups [not designated as Active or not] 71,190 divided by number of groups contributing, 24,779)

These numbers are from the Picnic Table Slides found on page 38 of the 69th General Service Conference Report.

2019 40.6%
2018 41.3%
2017 43.7%
2016 41.5%
2015 40.3%

DELEGATE PRESENTATIONS

Accessibilities

Corey D., Area 26, Kentucky

Good evening. My name is Corey, and I am an alcoholic. My sobriety date is July 22, 2014, and my home group is the Owensboro 1728 Group located in Owensboro, Kentucky, in Area 26. I am a past GSR, past DCM, past area Finance Committee Chair, past Alternate Chair for my area, past Alternate Delegate for my area, and I'm currently the Panel 74 Delegate for Area 26 in Kentucky. I also have the honor of serving the 75th General Service Conference as the Chair of Conference Finance Committee. There are lots of things that we can talk about tonight, and this whole weekend will be amazing hearing about all kinds of stuff like GSO, literature and finances, but I want to bring us back to our roots, back to the real sole reason we are here this weekend, working one-on-one with another alcoholic, working our Twelfth Step. I want to share with you a story that involves accessibilities.

Accessibility challenges apply to all alcoholics who have difficulties participating in Alcoholics Anonymous, whether those are mental, physical, geographic, cultural or other factors that vary among people. Some of these alcoholics may experience barriers to accessing the A.A. message, including the literature, meetings, Twelve Step work, and the service structure.

I would like to get back to Twelve Step work. I attended a speaker meeting in Owensboro, Kentucky. A gentleman showed up to be the speaker, and his wife was pushing him in a wheelchair, and they got hit by the door trying to come into the clubhouse. I asked the gentleman; I said to him after the meeting, "Are you having issues getting in here? Are there accessibility issues that you're running into?" I had heard people talk about accessibilities from attending Area meetings. I had heard people talk about that but accessibilities was not something that I had really delved into or gotten involved with in A.A. service. I had mainly done Cooperating with the Professional Community and Public Information work. I did not know that accessibilities would end up being so rewarding. This gentleman's name was Richard. I asked him if he was having difficulties, and he said they were having trouble. Richard was about six foot five, and probably weighed 250 pounds, and he was being pushed around by his little wife, who couldn't have been five foot tall and probably didn't weigh 105 pounds. She was pushing him around everywhere and they were having trouble getting around. I offered to bring a meeting to his house, and he said that he would like that. So, I did what any responsible A.A. member would do. I talked to a couple of my sponsees that were members of my home group, and I said, "Hey, what are you doing on Monday? You all have to work?" And they said, "No." And I said, "Oh, you don't have to work. Well, guess what? You're going to come with me." So, I voluntold my sponsees they were going to come with me, and we went to Richard's house that Monday and started taking a meeting to his house every week. Sometimes we just sat back and talked. Sometimes we read out of the Big Book. What happened after that? One day, Richard was not there, and we didn't know what had happened, but we did know that something wasn't right. Nobody was there. Nobody answered the phone. I

got a text message from his wife about a week later stating that he was in the hospital, that he had fallen in the shower, and an ambulance had to come and get him. They were sending him to a nursing home. Richard had Parkinson's disease. Once he got into the nursing home, we started going up there every week. Every week for two years we went to the nursing home and took a meeting to Richard. We never missed a week. We started having meetings with the Big Book, but that got to be difficult for Richard to follow. So, we toned it down. We started using the Grapevine. He could follow the short stories out of the Grapevine. After some time, I started to exhaust my Grapevine collection, so I started buying Grapevine books and reading the stories out of them. Richard really enjoyed it. He could follow the short stories. I even got the *Take Me to Your Leader* joke book, the Grapevine joke books, and they were good too. It was good because times were tough in that nursing home. One thing I learned in Alcoholics Anonymous, a lot of people are real quick to go to the treatment centers. A lot of people are real quick to go to the jails. Those are important; we have reached a lot of alcoholics through that. But there aren't too many alcoholics ready and willing to go to the nursing home. It's not a fun place. I asked around and couldn't find anybody. Some of my sponsees started to fall off on it, and soon there was just me and one other person, and we went every week. One of my mentors, Jim, got sick and went to the same nursing home to live. We started taking a meeting to him right after we finished the meeting with Richard on Monday nights. We would then walk across to the other side of the nursing home to see Jim. We did that until he passed. It gets lonely in some of these places. Richard was a strong member of the church. After so long, the church stopped coming to see him. After so long, his kids lived in a different city, and they started only coming every couple months. He was a member of another Twelve Step fellowship, and they stopped coming to see him. The only thing consistent in Richard's life in those two years in a nursing home was his loving wife and Alcoholics Anonymous. He always told us how much he appreciated it. This work is very important. I hope somebody would do that for me if I was ever in that position. Richard told me that he was going to walk out of that nursing home one day. He was pretty much paralyzed in the bed from the Parkinson's and some things happened with his insurance and his medicine. Richard started to get a little better. Then COVID happened. The first place we had to stop going was the nursing home. They wouldn't even let us pull into the parking lot after that.

About a year and a half into COVID, Richard sent me a video text message of him walking on a walker, with balloons, out of the nursing home. From that time until now, Richard has had a miraculous recovery. Richard is now the district treatment and accessibilities chair, and Richard takes meetings into the nursing home and into the hospital, when people need it. Accessibilities work is so important because the suffering alcoholic is not always the newcomer. I can easily be the suffering alcoholic. We can easily be suffering alcoholics given certain circumstances. It is very important that we have the message available to anybody who needs it and that we're willing to go to any lengths to make sure that this service is available. Experiences like this have convinced me that there is a power greater than myself. I was fortunate enough to be in attendance when Richard picked up his 30-year sobriety chip.

Accessibilities involves more than just chronic illnesses. It involves the deaf or hard of hearing, it involves the blind, it involves people who can't read or who struggle with

reading comprehension, people who have childcare or job issues. It also includes people with developmental disabilities or brain injuries, for instance, people that have had a stroke. These are just a few examples. Accessibility committees can be formed at either the group or the district level. What I did was ask some friends and people that I sponsor to be a part of it. I searched aa.org for accessibilities material. I found there was quite a bit of literature and the accessibility workbook, as well as the literature, was also available at aa.org. You can also call the General Service Office and ask to talk to the Accessibilities Desk; they have a lot of resources there. To quote the A.A. Guidelines on Accessibility for All Alcoholics, "Group unity grows stronger when all members are included and respected and able to function as fully participating members of the group, and everyone's sobriety is strengthened. When faced with the challenges of meeting the diverse needs of some members, we would do well to remember A.A.'s Responsibility Declaration: 'When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A. always to be there. And for that: I am responsible.'" If you are curious if there are people who need this in your community, you can contact your local Intergroup or Central Office and ask. You can call the local hospital, VA, or nursing homes or assisted-living facilities. You can ask other members or any old-timers that you know if they know of anyone in need. You can check to see if your home group is accessible. There is an Accessibilities Checklist available on aa.org. I leave you with something another mentor of mine, Martin G. from Evansville, Indiana, told me. He said, "Son, if you don't do it, it won't get done."

Tradition One – Unity

Molly E., Area 27, Louisiana

I picked the topic of Tradition One as my top choice when asked to do this presentation. The reason for this is that Tradition One has always felt very personal to me. In Tradition One in the "Twelve and Twelve" it states, "The A.A. member has to conform to the principles of recovery. His life actually depends upon obedience to spiritual principles."

I certainly did not come to A.A. with the idea of "conforming" to anything. In fact, had you told me that I was, I would have defiantly argued with you. I was bound and determined to be different, because I had never felt like I really fit in anywhere. Once I started relating and believing that those around me felt and acted the same way that I did regarding alcohol, I started believing that I belonged here too. By the time I discovered the Traditions, I could relate to that line in the first Tradition because I had experienced it. So it was the first Tradition that I understood, and knew that I could practice.

I believe that Tradition One is one of the most visionary principles that our founders ever conceived. As our Declaration of Unity says, "For on A.A. unity depend our lives and the lives of those to come." After studying our history, it is evident to me that our founders always saw the absolute necessity for unity within Alcoholics Anonymous as a whole. It is clear that underlying all of our traditions, or "twelve points to assure our future," is the idea that unity *must* be maintained, because if it fails, so will A.A. Think about the language surrounding the two sentences I just quoted. Our lives "depend" on it; it will "assure" our future. Bill writes, "When an alcoholic applies the Twelve Steps of our

recovery program to his personal life, his disintegration stops and his unification begins.” He continues, “Exactly the same principle applies to each A.A. group and to Alcoholics Anonymous as a whole. So long as the ties which bind us together prove far stronger than those forces which would divide us if they could, all will be well. We shall be secure as a movement; our essential unity will remain a certainty.” What powerful language.

In order to do this, our founders saw that we had to place our common welfare first. This means that even though the individual has almost unlimited rights within A.A., we are asked to put those aside when they interfere with the well-being of the whole. I have heard it said that if Tradition One is the question, then the rest of the Traditions are the answers. Meaning that if unity is our end goal, we will maintain it as long as we follow all the rest of the Traditions. Therefore, Tradition One sets the basis of our future together on the principle of sacrifice. The rest of the Traditions ask for specific types of these sacrifices. You can easily see how each one adds up to protecting and maintaining our unity.

If you believe that the unity of A.A. is the most “cherished quality that our society has,” as Bill says, then you must be willing to practice all of the Twelve Traditions. We need to ask ourselves, whenever we are making a questionable decision, or trying to determine whether a group action is principled or not — will it cause disunity? Would this potential disunity be worth it? These questions are very often not black and white. You cannot make everyone happy in your life, in A.A., or in your home group.

Based on this sacred belief that unity is needed for the longevity and health of our organization, I think we all need to do our part to remember that we must put “our” common welfare first. I do this as an individual in many aspects of my life. In my family, my marriage, my job, my home group. All levels of service where I am given a voice, a vote, or any kind of delegated authority. This requires self-introspection and the ability to put the welfare of the group before even perhaps, my own. Doing what’s best for the whole can sometimes feel like I’m not doing what’s best or easiest for me. And it certainly can mean that I’m not doing what’s best for my comfort, or for my own reputation. I am not new to putting my own comfort or fear aside in order to accept a group conscience that I don’t agree with. I believe accepting informed group consciences is a very direct way of maintaining unity. I am also not new to sometimes being cast as the “difficult” one because I believe that the group welfare comes before the perceived welfare of any individual. I often think about the part in the leadership essay in Concept Nine in which Bill describes “an acid test,” where we are sometimes called upon to face heavy criticism. Members of our General Service Conference are often heavily criticized, sometimes constructively, and sometimes not. I am so grateful that the members of my Area — Area 27 — have almost always been able to have frank and honest discussions with me, sometimes hard conversations, but in a constructive way which is respectful and still maintains unity. This is not the case in all areas of A.A. This is also nothing new to Alcoholics Anonymous. There is always some kind of controversy within A.A. and within our General Service Conference, and thus far, it has not failed.

Recently, my experience as a Panel 73 delegate has greatly influenced my thoughts on this principle. Mainly, that I am personally greatly affected when I feel disunity in our Fellowship. Throughout this last year, I have wondered if it was just me that felt this way. So when I am thinking about this, I rely on our spiritual axiom: that when I am disturbed, there is something wrong with me. But I have to say, I do not think this disunity is only felt by me. I think we have entered a period where we are changing our foundational literature, and also printing new potentially revolutionary literature, and this has caused great disunity and fear within our fellowship. I myself have felt caught in the middle, being in the role as a trusted servant for Area 27. Having the delegated responsibility to not only represent their conscience but perhaps make some of the largest decisions I will ever make, which could potentially truly affect Alcoholics Anonymous “as a whole.” So I have thought about our common welfare a lot in my time as delegate. I know that in the years to come I will look back and think of things I could have done differently. But I can assure you that the decisions I have made as delegate have been made with the knowledge that I “owe it to A.A.’s future” to help protect our unity.

In 1958 Bill gave a talk at the Conference titled “Constructive Use of Trouble.” I have found a lot of comfort in the words he spoke. Clearly, the conference has faced disunity and controversy since its inception, and whether it is 1958 or 2024, this outlook can be useful. Bill writes, “What democracy has not been disturbed? Friction of opposing viewpoints is the very modus operandi on which they proceed. What should we be afraid of here?” I find this entire speech full of vision and the principles of leadership described in Concept Nine. I am left with the hope that if we can function in the spiritually sound methods and using the principles laid out for us in our Traditions and Concepts, then any trouble the Conference, or the Fellowship as a whole, may encounter, can be met with this understanding that it is a step to the way of progress. That what comes out of that disunity, can be converted into an asset.

I’d like to end with a reminder which is found in *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age* on page 98: “Pride and fear and anger — these are the prime enemies of our common welfare. True brotherhood, harmony, and love, fortified by clear insights and right practices, are the only answers. And the purpose of A.A.’s traditional principles is to bring these forces to the top and keep them there. Only then can our common welfare be served; only then can A.A.’s unity become permanent.”

Bringing Love into Service

Julie R., Area 51, North Carolina

I am nearing the end of my term as the Area 51 Panel 73 delegate, and I have experienced so many things floating down the triangle in General Service. I have seen love and service from both sides now, from the top to nearly the point of the triangle. I would like to describe bringing love into service in a “what it was like, what happened, and what it is like now” story format.

I remember sitting in the audience at an assembly during early sobriety in awe of the women serving at the Area level. I recalled them carrying themselves in a manner that

was gracious, knowledgeable and kind. I knew that I wanted what they had, so I tried to do what they did. They didn't know that I was watching because I could not speak to them. This began my foundation of love and service, watching those who are doing the work. I heard sharp remarks from the assembly floor microphone and these ladies would always thank them for their comments and questions. Meanwhile, I was terrified by the tone and demeanor of the inquisitor. Afterwards, I was astounded to see them eating ice cream together!

When the time came to stand for Area office, I had determined I was willing to walk through my fears and shyness because my love of the program and the Fellowship was more powerful. When we love each other as a fellowship in service, then all things are possible.

I have spent ten years serving, at the officer level, a loving Area 51. As delegate and area chair, I have been privileged to experience the cheerleaders and the critics. Fortunately for me, my critics have been able to express their concerns and then tell me that they love me and trust me anyhow. Love and Tolerance played a big role in my service journey, as I have made some mistakes, but no one person can break A.A. When we focus on love into our service journeys with each other, tolerance is not a problem.

However, I have also seen the critics that Bill talks about in Concept Nine "...our destructive critics. They power-drive, they make accusations. Maybe they are violent, malicious. They pitch gobs of rumors, gossip, and general scuttlebutt to gain their ends — all for the good of A.A., of course!" I had not experienced this until I became a delegate. I have seen fellow trudging trusted servants be ruthlessly attacked for actions that were not taken alone, being judged prior to investigation. Although sometimes through gritted teeth, love and tolerance did show up again to help me navigate through the discomfort of seeing and hearing such unkind remarks. Hateful words and bullying do not sit well with me, but I can still love my fellows while not love their actions. Hopefully my Love and Tolerance can morph into someone else's Love and Service. Bill reminds us in Concept Nine regarding the critics that "...we ought to listen to what they say. Sometimes they are telling the whole truth; at other times, a little truth..." Could this be the language of the heart? It is hard to hear the heart through some of the hateful vitriol coming out of the mouth. It is hard to see the "good intent." It is hard to put principles before personalities. Bill tells us, "Gossip barbed with our anger, a polite form of murder by character assassination, has its satisfaction for us, too. Here we are not trying to help those we criticize; we are trying to proclaim our own righteousness" in Step Six in the "Twelve and Twelve."

I looked through the alarming words for the language of the heart. Yet, when did it become okay for personal attacks and name-calling? Have we lost our way in being able to disagree without being disagreeable? Where is Bill's "Cheerful Compromise" and the harmony that is strewn throughout our concepts? Have we isolated ourselves in echo chambers because it is comfortable? Are social media, blogs and websites the way we air our grievances? Are they the new way to form a group conscience? Can a Higher Power, a Loving God, enter that space? Our world has changed through the "colossus of modern communication." This communication tool can be used for love, but unfortunately, I have seen online bullying, slander and disrespect of our trusted servants. Is this the

“politics” that many complain General Service is all about? What if it is just the way we speak to each other that is the “politics”?

As I look to the horizon and I see rotation looming, I think about what kind of past I can be. I have been watching the “Pasts” as a delegate, learning from the best live and in-person examples of what Bill describes in “Leadership in A.A.: Ever a Vital Need.” I don't need to describe to you what I saw that was principled or unprincipled behavior, I just need to commit to show you what I have gleaned through my observations and will purposefully apply to my future actions and words. I choose to do that with love.

In Bill's 1955 conference talk, he describes himself as the parental figure cheering from the sidelines as the conference was now the guide for the Fellowship. I began this journey standing on the shoulders of past trusted servants. Their Love and Service and Love and Tolerance has shown me how to best serve the Fellowship. As a future past, rusted, “has been” servant, the plan is to love those in service and empower them to do the job as a kind of pay-it-forward. I trust that our Fellowship and A.A. as a whole is in good hands. I send my love to those who are stepping up to fill the roles of our seated trusted servants. I look forward to watching from the sidelines and when asked, offer my experience, strength and hope. Most of all Love. Let's use Love and Tolerance as a bridge to bring Love into Service and band together in Unity, for our lives do depend upon it.

Love is a power that is greater than fear. I stand here before you as an example of what love can accomplish. The formerly terrified who felt she was not worthy has been transformed by love into someone capable of accomplishing our purpose: Carrying the message and being of service. Bringing Love into Service is the way to attract more members into service. Showing that we can love, trust and support each other even when we disagree is much more attractive than hate, fear and threats. Communication is the key, and when it is done in a loving manner, our Fellowship will grow and be strong. How we speak to each other and about each other matters. I have not always been the best version of this, as I have been critical and judgmental of others. Through those lessons I have learned that I can choose to be kind, that I can start by assuming good intentions as I try to gather understanding and information. Today, I choose love. Our actions as trusted servants matter. Let's bring Love into Service.

Our Financial Responsibility in Carrying the Message

John P., Area 71, Virginia

My name is John P., and I am an alcoholic, serving as the Panel 73 delegate for Area 71, Virginia. As a member of the Conference Committee on Agenda, I asked to speak on the approved Workshop Topic for the 75th General Service Conference. That topic won't be covered at Conference next year because the 2025 Conference Inventory will take up time slots normally reserved for presentations and workshops.

The Agenda Committee believes this question — **How do we address the new financial reality facing our spiritual movement?** — needs to be addressed at every level of

Alcoholics Anonymous: This presentation could easily be retitled, **“This is so much more than a math problem.”**

As our GSO General Manager Bob W. said in his November Gratitude message, many groups and members have stepped up their contribution in response to the Fellowship’s financial challenges. As of October 31, contributions were up by \$760,000, or 9%, compared to the same period in 2023. Yet, while more groups are stepping up, nearly 40,000 of the 57,000+ active groups in the U.S. and Canada did not contribute at all last year.

And yet the Board’s Reserve Fund — the safety net that carried us through the pandemic — is at its lowest level in 25 years. The general expectation is that the Reserve Fund should cover 9–12 months of operating expenses. As of now it would only fund 6.4 months. To meet the nine-month mark, we need an additional \$4.8 million.

Although we’re making progress, we’re still far from our Seventh Tradition goal of being self-supporting. Sales of the *Plain Language Big Book* and the upcoming Fifth Edition of the book Alcoholics Anonymous should generate significant revenue. And complete subscriptions to AA Grapevine can help, too.

But should we still be relying so heavily on literature sales? What if every A.A. member followed the Birthday Plan, contributing at least a dollar for each year of sobriety, every year? That would easily cover all our costs and help clear the backlog of work the General Service Conference has asked A.A. World Services and the AA Grapevine to carry out. Instead of a dollar, a past delegate friend contributes the cost of a beer at Nationals Park in Washington, D.C.

Of course, this isn’t just a Board concern. Home groups, districts, areas, intergroups and central offices are all affected by a changing environment that challenges our ability to be self-supporting.

Rents are rising. Groups, areas and districts are meeting in hybrid formats, increasing costs. Many groups are now required to get liability insurance or move locations.

My home group’s treasurer tracks all group expenses and contributions, so we’re able to calculate what each member needs to contribute per meeting to keep us on track, financially and spiritually. We take the long form of the Seventh Tradition seriously: Groups should be fully supported by the voluntary contributions of their own members. Members covering costs out of their pockets, without submitting receipts, may disrupt efforts to track our actual costs and could mislead newcomers into thinking they need money to do A.A. service. We encourage these members to get reimbursed and then contribute what they like.

Given that many members no longer carry cash, groups should also consider offering digital options for Seventh Tradition contributions. We’ve found that telling people to hit an ATM before a meeting simply doesn’t work. Offering payment services like Venmo, PayPal or Cash App, with a QR code attached to the Seventh Tradition basket, makes digital contributions simple and convenient.

To help determine which service entities are most in need, GSRs request treasurer's reports from their districts, areas, intergroups, and the Board. Service entities should strive to use contributions locally and not override the groups' wishes to help serve alcoholics at the district, intergroup or area levels.

As Bill W. wrote in his June 1948 editorial on the Seventh Tradition, an A.A. member's monthly contribution to cover overhead expenses should never cost more than a bottle of good whiskey. He said, "We A.A.s were once a burden on everybody. We were 'takers.' Now that we are sober, and by the Grace of God have become responsible citizens of the world, why shouldn't we now about-face and become 'thankful givers'! Yes, it is high time we did."

Our Three Legacies

Kat Y., Area 37, Mississippi

Our three Legacies of Recovery, Unity and Service embody our Steps, Traditions and Concepts, our 36 Spiritual Principles.

Recovery! Our Twelve Steps.

Our triangle is balanced, but nothing comes without Recovery first. There is an emphasis on General Service this weekend. So, I didn't want to overlook how important ongoing Recovery is to Service. The idea of replacing Recovery with a Service position is certainly not a good idea for me. And I have seen it happen to others. They start dropping things like Sponsoring (part of my Recovery) and lose touch with the very thing that keeps them well and sober. Recovery is what allows me the ability to participate in the other two-thirds of our Legacy.

Unity! Our Twelve Traditions.

Learning how to play well with others in the sandbox:

- Singleness of purpose

- Group and A.A. cohesion

- Carrying the message

- Ego deflation

- Allowing our Higher Power to guide us to a Group Conscience.

Placing principles before personalities is an amazing way to interact with people — and a much better way to navigate a Service position.

Traditions guide me in my Service work.

Service! Our Twelve Concepts.

We are a society of Alcoholics in Action — empowered through Recovery and Unity — and guided by our Twelve Concepts. Concepts are some of the nuts and bolts of how we navigate.

As we continue this beautiful legacy, we bring hope and recovery to alcoholics everywhere. And there is great purpose in that.

###

WORKSHOP REPORTS

La Viña – Carrying the Message at the Group and Beyond

Moderator: Julio M., Delegate Area 77, Puerto Rico

Reporter: Pablo R., Area 77, Puerto Rico

Attendance: 12

Message from the delegate — La Viña was instrumental for him to get to an A.A. meeting.

La Viña is for carrying the message, a meeting in print. His translator at the GSC was the editor of La Viña at the time; the magazine led him to A.A.

Subscriptions to La Viña have grown.

I would have liked to read a story of a woman in recovery. La Viña makes this possible.

La Viña is tool for discussion at the group level.

A La Viña workshop every month.

How to take this magazine to the groups:

- a) Two La Viña products: a logbook to keep track of events
- b) *The Best of La Viña II*: stories of Hispanic people

La Viña digital: buy the application or La Viña *complete*.

How can we take it further?

Opinion: Make it accessible. Do a bilingual subscription, in two languages. Subscription in English and Spanish. Have more subscriptions available in the districts and areas. Talk to local committees. Georgia is an example.

Add a Hispanic member to the Conference committee.

We look for solutions to improve customer service and mail delivery.

How to Make Business Meetings and Service Positions More Attractive

Moderator/Reporter: Paul H., Delegate Area 73, West Virginia

Attractive

A) Serve Food — This always seems to help bring in more people.

B) Keep offering your help. Be an example to the new people.

C) Sponsorship — Take new members by the hand and show them about service work and how important it is both for them and for the Fellowship as a whole.

D) Make sure members are informed about expectations and responsibilities for each Service opportunity. Show your gratitude for the growth from your Service work.

- E) Have food/potluck at Service Workshops or informational meetings. Bring them in with free food. If you serve it, they will come!
- F) Alleviate their fear of failure. Use the meeting after the meeting to share your experience with the fear and how to handle it.
- G) Visit multiple home groups and pitch the Service opportunities. Show your gratitude for their time and interest.

Accessible

- A) Make sure money is not a deterrent to taking a Service position. Find money to help cover costs incurred for Service positions.
- B) Language barriers — Take time to explain acronyms, GSR, DCM, etc.
- C) Reverse negativity that is out there. Talk about how fun it is.
- D) Reach out to all the districts and offer to do Service Workshops.
- E) Follow through on commitments.
- F) Have committees communicate opportunities available to help.

Servant Leadership and Concept IX

Moderator: Jimmy W., Delegate Area 64, Tennessee

Reporter: Heather L., Alternate Delegate Panel 74 Area 64, Tennessee

Robert Greenleaf is credited with introducing the concept of servant leadership to the management and leadership communities in his 1970 essay “The Servant as Leader.” In the essay, Greenleaf drew inspiration from Hermann Hesse’s novel *The Journey to the East*, where a humble servant named Leo disappears, and the group realizes that he was actually their leader. Greenleaf used this story to illustrate his idea that a true leader should prioritize serving others over seeking power or status.

A few words come to mind when I think of “servant leadership” — selfless, humble, empathetic, caring, compassionate, even inconvenient and sacrificial. In the world of work, part of servant leadership is caring for both the personal and professional well-being of employees. They must feel like they matter, that the company cares about them and their family, and that their contribution impacts the company in a meaningful way. Engaging employees in a way that makes them feel valued and respected as a person (not just an employee) builds trust. Trust builds loyalty, and loyalty sticks around and does a good job. What does this look like in A.A.?

Bill starts Concept IX with the upper end of the triangle — G.S.R.’s and Area Committee Members — and goes on to describe them as “direct agents of the A.A. groups,” “indispensable linkage between our Fellowship and its world service,” and “primary representatives of A.A.’s group conscience.” He then cautions us to take “great care” when choosing these representatives and suggests “a degree of weakness tends to persist. The needed improvement seems to be a matter of increased care, responsibility and education.” Concerning Delegates, “an even greater degree of care and dedication will be required. 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.”

Authority and responsibility, transparency and accountability, vision and prudence, open-mindedness and stability, dedication and example...the list goes on. Am I the type of leader that people want to get behind and help? Am I transparent with and accountable to those I serve? Am I open-minded to listen to others' viewpoints, especially those with whom I disagree? Am I willing to change my point of view? Am I equally willing to stand on principle, especially when it isn't popular? In the end, our real purpose is to be of maximum service to God and the people about us. If I'm living up to that real purpose, then I'm being a good leader. If not, then I need some willingness, inventory, and action. It is simple — but often not easy.

Criticism is not easy to hear, even when it is constructive. Concept IX speaks also of destructive criticism. I have witnessed lots of criticism in A.A., from thoughtful and constructive to passive aggressive to downright nasty. We are often passionate people, myself included. There have been times when, believing I was standing on principle, my criticism was not constructive. Inventory and experience taught me that real servant leadership stands on principle in a respectful, tactful, and diplomatic way. Listening to destructive critics is the most challenging time. For me, a real barometer for "servant leadership" may be found in Bill's description of how we relate ourselves to those destructive critics. He says, "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. Or we can lay all the cards on the table and try to persuade them. Failing this, we can be sorry they are too sick to listen, and we can try to forget the whole business. There are few better means of self-survey and of developing genuine patience, than the workouts these usually well-meaning but erratic brother members afford us. This is always a large order and we shall sometimes fail to make good on it ourselves. But we must keep trying."

Servant leaders don't avoid conflict, they lean into it in the spirit of St. Francis, listening to understand rather than insisting upon being understood. Great examples of servant leadership show us that we can talk about even the most difficult and sensitive topics while maintaining a level of respect and collegiality that, for us drunks, indicates a real and continuing spiritual awakening has occurred.

Questions and comments from attendees:

1. How would you suggest navigating intense personalities and strong opinions in business meetings and not take it personally? How not to allow negativity to affect your response?
 - Our only reason for existence is to help drunks and not die of alcoholism. So, we can all be really passionate people and it's unfortunate sometimes the approach appears unhealthy. It's helpful to acknowledge the message not the delivery.
 - We all have sharp edges. Helpful to be open-minded. Be compassionate. Stay in a position of neutrality. Make sure people still feel valued and heard.
 - Stay involved with sponsor! Be grateful for the input, offer grace to difficult or mean people and strive to do better.

- It's my responsibility to be in a spiritually sound space, not judge how others move in their space. Try to remember, how can I be of love and service to this person?
 - Utilize the literature, conference actions, suggestions from GSO. What do we have in writing to address this without using personal opinion or belief?
 - Love and Tolerance. What we are supposed to do is treat others with love and tolerance, not focus on how people deal with me without love and tolerance.
 - Read an essay on leadership. We will have troublemakers, as yourself, what can I learn from it? Don't make a bigger mess by trying to fix someone.
 - Always remember to be with and accept the group conscience.
 - Use the sick man prayer: God this is a sick man. How can I be helpful to him? God, save me from being angry. Thy will be done.
 - Change home groups if it feels unhealthy. Get the angry involved.
2. Are there effective solutions to increase participation so we can elect the most qualified trusted servants?
- Reach out, and go to groups. Go tap on the shoulder, encourage, inspire invite and ask individuals to engage. Your enthusiasm will brighten and ignite others. Be a cheerleader. Make it exciting.
 - Getting people involved falls on current servants. Area officers can reach out, let people know they are seen, congratulate them for speaking out, encourage those involved. Support those that seek to be more involved, don't make roles seem too overwhelming or undesirable — make service look attractive. Commit to be positive.
 - Share about service opportunities. When rotating out, moving aside, help the next person transition. We didn't get sober alone, so don't do service alone. The most qualified person is the one that rotated out two months ago. Help the incoming. Willingness is most important. Push forward and bring 110%.

Communication: Transparent or TMI

Moderator: Lisa D., Delegate Area 15, S. Florida

Reporter: Donna W., Chairperson Area 15, S. Florida

What have I heard too much about or not enough about?

- Sometimes I want to consume a lot of information, but other times I think I receive too much information; it depends on what's going on in my life.
- I generally don't feel like I'm missing out on things. My delegate does a great job communicating.
- It might be helpful if I could receive a synopsis of the material, so I don't have to go through all of it to get the pertinent information.
- I don't want anyone filtering what they think is important to me. I like to have a lot of information.
- Different people have different needs. It's hard to come up with a method for communicating that will satisfy everybody.
- It's important to receive as much information as possible, but sometimes we have to trust our trusted servants and know information will come through the proper channels at the proper time.

- It's important to look at the big picture and share the right amount of information at the right time to create the least amount of chaos.
- I don't think it's right to censor information, but I can't jump the gun. I would rather be guilty of giving too much information than of not passing on the information.
- I feel I need to pass on information exactly as it's been given to me without forcing my personality on it; there have been times I've had a tone to my voice that could have influenced somebody.

How can I improve my communication with those up the triangle?

- I can create a repository on the area website so people only have to go to one place instead of searching through their emails.
- We can use the committee structure to disseminate information.
- I must understand the information before I pass it on, and I must remain available to answer questions after sending information.
- Realize not everyone reads emails. Consider exploring other ways to communicate, such as SMS notifications. Find out how people prefer to access communication.
- I have to make myself available and let people know I'm available.
- Make sure you communicate information in a way that's most effective.

2025 International Convention Q&A

Moderator/Reporter: Patrick C., 2025 International Convention Chair

Questions reviewed:

1. Will there be volunteer opportunities at the 2025 International Convention?
2. How are the registration numbers comparing from 2005, 2015 and 2020?
3. Can you help me understand how to choose a hotel or housing option? Are there travel agents that can help us book the 2025 International Convention?
4. An attendee asked and shared information about different types of passports and felt like it might be a good idea to have an FAQ about this topic.
5. An attendee asked if the IC Coordinator could explain how to get around the Convention Campus.
6. Can you share if we can bring backpacks into the event venues?
7. When are the convention activities over on Sunday, July 6, 2025?

The IC Coordinator asked for upfront questions to provide a beginning workshop agenda. The IC Coordinator answered the questions by reviewing the 2025 International Convention materials on the www.aa.org/internationalconvention website.

The IC Coordinator walked everyone through the registration process.

Grapevine/La Viña, More Than Just a Magazine

Moderator: Liz W., Delegate Area 16, Georgia

Reporter: Tracy M., Past Delegate Panel 72 Area 16, Georgia Panel 72

Grapevine More Than a Magazine, Books, Specialty Items, E Books, Audio Books, The App, Podcast, You Tube, Instagram

Questions:

1. How do you use everything that the Grapevine has to offer (magazine, YouTube, Podcast, app) to carry the message and enhance your own sobriety?
2. How can the Grapevine improve your efforts to carry the message and help improve the quality of your sobriety?
3. What would Grapevine have to change in order for you to want to support it?

Discussion:

- Home group has weekly Grapevine meeting using topics from the magazine
- Taking current and previous issues into correctional facilities
- Use the App for daily spiritual practice incorporating the audio while reading along
- Promoting the Grapevine App
- Home group purchases multiple subscriptions to give to members on their first anniversary
- Back Issue packs (including back issues in newcomer packets)
- Subscribe to La Viña to support it as a group
- Grapevine is a tool, and we need to find a way to support it (a tool to carry the message)
- Problems with the App; subscription errors. Work continues to address and improve service
- Moving into the future with the five-year plan to make the Grapevine self-supporting
- Podcast successful and current with the topics in A.A. today
- The Grapevine cannot accept contributions
- You can purchase and donate subscriptions through the “Carry the Message Project”
- The General Service Board receives contributions and provides services
- The Grapevine provides a service that actually produces revenue

General Service 101 — Three Legacies in Literature

Moderator: Lori P., Alternate Delegate Area 14

Reporters: Kate K. and Peter C., DCM

The moderator discussed the role of A.A. literature in strengthening the Three Legacies: Recovery, Unity, and Service. This interactive session encouraged attendees to share their favorite pieces of A.A. literature and discuss its impact on their service roles.

Key Insights:

Favorite Literature and Impact on Service

Participants highlighted a variety of A.A. resources:

- **A.A. Comes of Age** was frequently used in Step and Tradition meetings to provide historical and spiritual context.
- The **Big Book**, including its plain language edition, was described as foundational in sharing A.A.’s message across diverse settings, from study groups to detention centers.
- **Language of the Heart** and the **Twelve Traditions Checklist** offered guidance

- on Tradition-related questions and effective cooperation with outside entities.
- The **Service Manual** and leadership materials were recognized as essential tools for trusted servants, fostering understanding of A.A.'s structure and decision-making processes.

Encouraging Literature in Service

Suggestions for promoting literature usage included:

- Service orientations and workshops to familiarize incoming trusted servants with key resources.
- Service sponsors guiding protégés through foundational texts like the **Service Manual** and *Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers*, highlighting the origins of A.A.'s Traditions.
- Leading by example and sharing enthusiasm for service. Attendees noted that attraction and encouragement often inspire others to participate.

The session underscored the importance of literature in enriching personal recovery and fostering effective service leadership, ensuring that A.A.'s principles are preserved and shared.

Making Service Work Attractive

Moderator: Rick P., Area 62, South Carolina, Panel 74 Delegate

Reporter: Pat M. Area 62, South Carolina, Panel 74 Alternate Delegate

Question #1 — What attracted you to service? What made you come to SERF?

- Area 24, Group was contributing, but not active in-service structure. No GSR. Found his first District meeting unattractive and stepped back. Went back a year later, and with a new DCM who was welcoming and engaging, walked out as District secretary. DCM made it attractive, fun, and essential.
- DCM Area 27. The Meeting Guide App for his area was wrong; asked how to fix it and they told him to speak with GSR. They had none, and so he became the GSR. Went to the District, and DCM rotated off, and he was urged to stand as he had served in another state previously. He is here to relearn.
- Member - Came in as a young person, and it was scary. Once engaged in service, she realized we are the same and can have fun.
- DCM District 60 Knoxville. He believes it is first time anyone from his neck of the woods has attended Forum. They sent him to check and report back. He found out you say yes to A.A. after stepping back for a while and trashing his life sober.
- Member - Got sober at 20 and was exposed to general service through a YPAA convention bid. He went to Assembly to present and saw things he could bring back to his group. Became GSR and it began.
- Area 27 - At her home group she saw all the positions and her GSR spoke about service. Became secretary and started attending events and fell in love with the Fellowship and used service to connect more.

The overriding sense of the body was Service is not for everyone, but it must be tried. It gives a complete picture of A.A., expands fellowship, and knowledge. It can be exciting and impactful.

Question #2 — What do you do to make Service attractive to others?

Overwhelming response was lead by example, sponsor into service. Expose others to the joy of service work. Sponsoring and bringing them along with you, showing excitement, gratitude and sharing what you learn. Communicate about how it has deepened your gratitude, strengthened your sobriety, and enlarged your family.

Incoming GSR Orientation

Moderator: Tomy G., Delegate Area 1, Alabama/ N.W. Florida

Reporter: Lauren S., Literature Committee Alternate Chair Area 1

The two primary topics discussed were:

1. **What are my roles and responsibilities?** The Delegate mentioned the GSR pamphlet to offer generalized guidance around what a GSR can or may do. A few other contributions/suggestions: the GSR's primary function is to serve as a conduit of information between their groups and the District and Area; the GSR is also more than just a carrier of information, they are a vital part of the group conscience at the lower levels of service through their Right of Participation and familiarity of the Traditions; read the A.A. Group pamphlet, the Service Manual, and other forms of literature; register as a GSR to receive a new GSR kit; get a service sponsor; attend GSR orientations/workshops; ask for help; show up and participate at the events you are supposed to show up for.
2. **How do I get my home group to listen?** A few of the contributions/suggestions: Be organized in your presentation to your group and deliver it in a way that is enthusiastic and generates interest; be mindful of how you show up and speak about your service role to ensure that it is attractive to others; take very good notes everywhere you go so you can provide accurate information in your reports; stay positive and upbeat, even when you feel like people are not interested, because there are people who are listening; invite people to join you at other committee meetings; share the load with your alternate; use the language of the heart to speak about what is happening at various levels of service in A.A.; look for service opportunities to get other people involved and participating in Twelfth Step work.

The moderator ended the meeting with a reminder that we do not have to have all the answers — it is OK to go find out the information and bring it back to the person who asked and share with them where you found it. The meeting concluded at 8:30 p.m. with the Responsibility Statement.

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PAST TRUSTEES' SHARING

Mike L., West Central Regional Trustee, 2020–2024

Good morning, everybody. I'm Mike L. I'm an alcoholic currently serving as the coffee maker for the Friday Night Wild Bunch in Council Bluffs, Iowa. We meet at 7:30 p.m. If you're ever in the neighborhood, stop by and see us and have some horrible coffee.

I'm one of the most recently rotated Board members. Irma and I both rotated after the 74th General Service Conference in April and immediately went into exile to try to regenerate and recharge. I was recently paroled and allowed to go out amongst the Fellowship again. As soon as my wife gave me that release, my calendar started to fill up.

The first thing that I saw was this event, and I was really looking forward to coming here because I knew who would be here. I knew that I had the opportunity to see Tom before he rotates. Tom and I have been partners through the last three years since he rotated onto the Board. He has had my back all through the process. Building those relationships like that has been the true blessing of service for me. I also had the great opportunity to serve with some amazing delegates. A lot of them are in this room, not only the ones that are getting ready to rotate in a few weeks, but the ones who have already rotated and the ones that still have another year.

I would like to talk a little bit about the blessings that I've received. When I got to A.A., doing service like this was the furthest thing from my mind. When I came in, I was feral. I looked like Charles Manson. I've shown a few of you the pictures. And those are real. The thing is, I had pushed pretty much everybody out of my life. I was isolating and I didn't really know if I wanted to be around much longer.

Eventually what happened is I got around some alcoholics and I heard something that I could relate to. I connected with, and I immediately bonded with, these people. I thought that if they could stay sober, then maybe I could too. There was a crew that pulled me in and got me active.

I wasn't willing to do any recovery. I didn't want to do any Steps, because there was some God stuff there. But, I was willing to do some service work. And I didn't have very good social skills. I didn't have good models growing up, and I probably would have been better off if I'd been raised by wolves. In the family I came from, we didn't solve problems the way we solve problems in A.A.

I was sort of railroaded into service. At six months, I was the alternate GSR for the Friday night meeting that I went to. And when I was seven months sober, I was the GSR for the Saturday night meeting by that guy that railroaded me. I don't ever remember an election for either of those positions. I just remember one day he said, "You're the alternate GSR."

I said, "oh, okay." He took me to a district meeting, and on the way home, he said, "You're the new GSR." I had this DCM that was very enthusiastic, and she invited me to an event. I didn't know what it was because she spoke in acronyms, and I didn't know what any of that stuff was yet.

She challenged our district to go to the area service event where we were going to go over agenda items for the General Service Conference. I didn't know what any of that was, but everybody was raising their hand, so I said, "okay, I'll go too." And we had a meeting point where we were all going to meet. I showed up there and I was the only GSR that showed up. I spent the rest of the morning as we drove to this event really upset. I got there and I didn't know what anybody was talking about. So, if there's anybody new in the room that is kind of swimming a little bit, it's okay. Keep coming back if you hear something that sparks an interest.

These people were discussing some things that they were very passionate about. And what happened was one guy at the mic said something, another guy got up and responded and they started having this back-and-forth that was getting heated. And one of them eventually said, "You want to go out in the hall and talk about this?" And the other one said, "Yes." Where I come from, that means there's going to be a fight. So I got up to follow them out. When I got out there, these two guys ...it was really weird...because one of them stated his position. The other one stated his position. They went back and forth a couple of times. They reached an understanding. They hugged it out, and they went back in the room.

I stayed out in the hall trying to figure out what I just saw. It was the craziest thing, but it really sparked an interest. These guys found a way to resolve conflict without the methods that I was used to using. And I was intrigued. I started coming back, and gradually what happened is y'all wore my rough edges off.

I was at the point when I was three years sober that I wanted to die and someone suggested that I might want to try working the Steps, especially if I was having trouble with the Higher Power thing. And so I said, "Yeah, I'll do that." I asked this guy to help me because I knew he worked the Steps. I didn't particularly like him because he carried around this leather-bound Big Book and he was happy. He had all these guys that followed him around, and they were all happy, and they, too, all had these leather-bound Big Books. It was like a cult. But I knew that he worked the Steps. I asked him to help me, and he said, "Definitely." We started this process and gradually what happened — it wasn't really gradually, it was pretty quick — I started to develop an understanding of a Higher Power that works for me, and it saved my life. It connects me to every one of you. As a result of that, I've been given the most wonderful life that I could never have imagined. I've gotten to experience some amazing things.

For the last year, I've been kind of busy and had the opportunity to serve as the Interim Chair of the General Service Board. That experience has taught me a few things. It's reinforced the belief and the understanding that the people in Alcoholics Anonymous who

disagree with me love A.A. just as much as I do, at least that much. Their main objective, I believe, is to have their position heard. What I love is that the service structure has given us an opportunity to provide space to do that. Ninety-nine percent of my interactions in that role as Interim Chair were very positive of members expressing their love for Alcoholics Anonymous. We didn't always agree. But in just about every one of those interactions, we came to an understanding.

I had a very unique experience of not only participating in, but of co-chairing the General Service Conference. There were just a few baffling questions that I had. Number one, how the heck did I get in this position? The other was, as Bob and I were up on the dais, and I think Billy can probably relate to this too because we're all in the same age group, we followed the same service track. Bob and I used to be the youngest guys in the room, and we're standing up there and we're both sporting a little bit of silver. And I thought, what happened? We used to be the youngest guys here and now we're not. I couldn't have charted that path. All that happened was that I became willing. Actually, I became desperate to take some action. And as a result of that, I was introduced to people and introduced to more people.

Today I have a network of friends that span the globe. I came here, a hermit. I don't know how that process happens, but I absolutely know that it works. When I show up, I'm willing and I take action, good things happen. Not always the things that I want to have happen. But good things happen.

I never know what my Higher Power has planned for me. One of the things that my sponsor told me early on was don't limit what God's will is for you. Make yourself available and do what he's got in store for you. As a result of that, today I have a wonderful life. Thank you. Love you all.

Billy N., General Service Trustee, 2009-2017

Billy, alcoholic. Most importantly, past GSR for the Westside young people's group in New York City. Without that position, any of the other past positions I have don't matter. A couple of things to get out of the way.

First and most importantly, last week was Thanksgiving. Other holidays that some people serve are coming. I think it's most important that we address here before we sometimes get tempted to argue about semicolons and bylaws and guidelines and a bunch of other things...There's a lot of people who are getting up this morning and going to church because they haven't gone to church with their family in a long time. There's a lot of people who are going to take their kids to get pictures with Santa this afternoon at their local mall because they haven't done that in years. There's a lot of people who haven't participated in life at all. Because they've been ravaged by the progressive, fatal illness that we all suffer from. Sometimes I think we forget about that. Because you can look around this room and it looks like people are going back to pretty decent lives. There was a time when we did not have these lives. And that's the only reason that Alcoholics Anonymous exists.

Scott said, "What has it done for us?" Well, I don't know. I spent Thanksgiving with 2,700 people who don't have food for Thanksgiving on the street in Skid Row, Los Angeles. That's where I spent my Thanksgiving Day. And that's not because my DNA is wired to be like that. It's not because, as the Big Book says in Bill W.'s story, what does it say?... "Only through work and self-sacrifice." Well, those were not my nicknames when I came to Alcoholics Anonymous. That I learned here. So, I just want to get that out of the way, that whether you disagree or agree with what you've heard people say today, there is a point and Mike mentioned it. For me, it's the same thing.

Sometimes the institution can drive you crazy. And actually, I have a great therapist who helped me understand that sometimes people's love of an institution blinds them from being able to be honest about that institution. Sometimes, and you can just Google the world, but there are lots of organizations that have had lots of troubles, and when you dig down into them, you will see that there were people that knew those troubles were coming, but their love of the organization, and that's the problem with A.A., is we love it so much because it saved our life.

One thing I want to get out, because I know this is the first Regional Forum since two years ago. This is just my belief and take it for what you want, and you can just say, oh, Billy, he's a bully. He just likes to pick on people. Maybe I like the original version of the Serenity Prayer, courage to change the things that need to be changed. That's the original version. It's not courage to change the things I can. It's courage to change the things that need to be changed. And sometimes there are things that need to be changed. And those that have been preventing change are not going to like it. That's just a fact.

Two things that really affected me in my service travels were: number one, I did not wear a suit and tie today on purpose. Because I want to act, not only speak diversity and inclusion. I do not need to wear the dress clothes of some patriarchal society, Judeo Christian, white, that believes that only a suit and tie means that you have respect for the position you hold. That is not true. I'm glad that these two wore suits and ties, but I don't think we need to wear suits and ties all the time. Or that we need to force people. I do not believe that we should gather people at the General Service Conference any longer and force them to wear business attire every day. Or five out of the six days, anybody who lives in corporate America or a big organizational society knows when you gather people together to problem solve and to work with each other, you remove barriers. Barriers are things like suits and ties that make people feel like they are more important than others.

In 1999, leading up to the 2000 International Convention, I got a call from the office. I was a delegate. They said, "Billy, the host committee in Minneapolis can't find any Spanish-speaking people to form the host Spanish-Speaking Committee. Would the Chicago Spanish District like to do that?" I said, "Well, I haven't talked to them yet, but I know their answer is going to be yes." And when I went to that district meeting, it was a resounding yes. They couldn't wait to host the Spanish-speaking meetings at the International Convention in Minneapolis. The problem was that they became very proud of it. So, they went to a meeting not too many weeks after and announced from the rooftops that they

were hosting the Spanish-speaking meetings at the International Convention. That's when I got call number two, this time from the General Manager at GSO, who said, "Billy, you got to control those Spanish people in Chicago. They cannot be embarrassing the Spanish people on the host committee in Minneapolis, making it look like they don't know any Spanish-speaking people." And then I learned, it's more about making people look good than reaching people we're not reaching. Like we can take a good look around this room. There are segments of society we're not reaching. There are many walls that need to come down in Alcoholics Anonymous. There are things we can do better. I mentioned it the other day. I'm glad that three or four hundred of us could come here. But I know that if I want to fix my Harley-Davidson, if something goes wrong on it, I can go to YouTube. I can bring up what I'm looking at on my Harley-Davidson. Somebody else who's done it before has posted a video. It'll take me line by line into how to fix what I'm doing. I can't wait for the day a new GSR, when they get elected. (It's funny because I've heard, and please don't take this personal, because lots of people I like are using it. But now we've become like the outside society, where it's not the position you have until December 31. Everybody is now "something elect." And I just ask myself, "How many GSRs are out there right now saying they're the 'GSR elect' "? Are they screaming from the rooftops that they're the GSR elect like everyone else is something elect? I'm not sure about that.) What I want for the GSR is that I want them to be able to attend a Regional Forum 24 hours a day. I want anonymity-protected videos made of everybody that gives a presentation at a Regional Forum. I want them to be anonymized. And I want some new GSR to be able to go to that Regional Forum section of the A.A. website and say, "I want to hear the Trustee-at-Large presentation. I want to hear the presentation from the Class A. I want to hear what it's like to be a staff member." We have the technology to do that. The fact of the matter is that many groups can't afford to come to Regional Forums. I mean, if I had a question to ask everyone, I would ask, who in this room, please raise your hand if you were funded. I'm not asking that question. But the percentages of funded people to not-funded people at Regional Forums keeps going in the wrong direction. So the people who are not funded by an area or a district can't afford to be here. There's work we need to do. There definitely is.

The Cleveland Central Bulletin in 1944 advertised about the minstrel show and all the A.A. groups coming together to put on blackface plays. That did not help us make A.A. more diverse. Publishing an article in Box 459 that it is okay to keep a member out. To protect group unity if they're a different race. Yeah, that did not help us either. I think that at a certain point, whatever group of people who have not felt welcome in Alcoholics Anonymous...we have the mistake, even myself, of thinking that, wow, A.A. today is so open and welcoming. Whether you're atheist, or LBGT, or whatever race you are, whatever gender, whatever. But we can't compare the A.A. today. We know what A.A. today is. I believe it's above all welcoming and loving. But that does not mean that what we've done for 60 or 70 years didn't slow the progress of other groups of people thinking that they would be welcome here.

In the way that I look at Alcoholics Anonymous, we have a lot of work to do along those lines. Thank you.

CLOSING REMARKS

Tom H., Southeast Regional Trustee

There are some people I want to thank, so please bear with me. First and foremost is the local host committee that did such great work here. The staff member on the Regional Forums assignment and our support staff, METS, and all of our support staff, really, who never seem to get enough credit, but work so hard for us behind the scenes.

I have someone who I'm privileged to sponsor here. And his wife came up to me after my opening remarks and she reminded me that I missed a group of people to recognize. Anybody who has sponsored someone knows the importance of the relationship of the spouses and partners of our sponsees. You have to be in good with them because if not things can be rough on the sponsorship side of things. So, I wanted to make sure I got back in her good graces and recognize who I missed earlier: area officers, area chairs, anybody in the room that's still here with us, please stand and let us give you an applause. I did that because you deserve it. So thank you.

We have our final count for the forum: 377 with 222 first-timers.

As you've heard throughout the weekend, on December 31 there will be some rotation. I first wanted to recognize all of the delegates in the Southeast Region that are here. Please stand so we can recognize you as a group. Please stay standing for a second. We have some visitors from outside the region that are also current delegates, and I'd like them to stand and be recognized as well. Can the panel 73 delegates both within the region and outside of the region stay standing? These folks will rotate at the end of this year, and I want to thank you for your service to Alcoholics Anonymous during some rough waters, and for your principled leadership, so thank you guys for your service.

My closing thoughts may be simple, like my opening, and that is that in Alcoholics Anonymous, we walk side by side. It warmed my heart to hear people have that experience this weekend with people that sometimes get put up on a pedestal.

One of my favorite parts of the Regional Forum as well, is that I have never been so tall (referencing the height of the podium). So when people come up to talk to me I was taller than everybody this week, and it was awesome (laughter).

We walk side by side in Alcoholics Anonymous, not one in front of another. And I heard a lot of shares like that this weekend from your experience and that warmed my heart. Lastly, I just want to say, and I know I'm preaching to the choir, but maybe you can preach to your choir back home on this... Let's not be a thief in Alcoholics Anonymous. Let's not just come here and take and take and take and not give back. It's part of the reporting back process as well.

I don't care if you're a person who doesn't like the podium or general service. If you're the person that just likes sweeping the floor and making the coffee and being the greeter, you are awesome too. Just don't be a thief in Alcoholics Anonymous. And again, I thank you for attending this forum.

Bob W., General Manager, GSO

Thank you so much, Tom. Wow, what a wonderful forum. I just want to offer some thanks as well to Tom and Scott. I just want to speak for a moment about my relationship with Scott. And that I feel so fortunate that we've had the time to serve together in the past.

The importance of the role of the General Manager and the General Service Board Chair, whoever that is, is always vital. And I think that's something for all of us to understand. And it's vital for unity, for relationships within, between the office and our boards. And just for the good of Alcoholics Anonymous.

I appreciate Scott, you being my friend and my boss. So, thank you for that. It means a lot and to Carolyn too. Thank you. Sometimes the General Service Board Chair and the AAWS Board Chair fight over who is the boss of the General Manager. It doesn't really matter to me, so it doesn't necessarily feel like that, and I respect both of you and thank you and all the trustees, directors, and the staff from the General Service Office that are here and all that they had done.

Thank you to our interpreters and the AV vendor as well, but our interpreters are always here with us. It means so much with ensuring that our message be the same for all. Again, thank you all for your service and being here.

I think it's been raised some anyway and just based upon my experience, I'd like to acknowledge our family, friends and loved ones who are home and holding on to things and keeping them going when we're not there. I know there's mothers and fathers with kids who have events this weekend that they're not at because they're taking care of their sobriety and other responsibilities and finding that balance. So thanks to all of them.

I mentioned before about my socks and how you made my heart sing. I mean that my heart is singing, and these events I feel are just such a supercharge for all of our sobriety. What an experience we get to have when we just keep showing up here. This is a supercharged event for me and the deeper you go in A.A., there's more and more events like that, which are so helpful.

I hope that many of you who came here who didn't know much about general service might have learned a little bit about general service and how important it is.

One of the first communications I got when I sat at my desk at Riverside Drive was a letter from someone that said, "Mr. General Manager, change that preamble back right now."

And I thought, well, you see, there's kind of this thing called the General Service Conference and Concept I, and it leads into Concept II. And so where do you start? It's like with your child, like when a man loves...you don't know where to begin with that, you know? So, it's a process. We just need to keep on keeping on, and keep on doing it, and that's how we learned.

I felt like my head was going to pop at these events when I began coming to them. I hope that you feel like you've become more informed and that there are answers out there.

I have a couple of quotes. My favorite one is on the wall in my office, and they're for me to remember because I still fall into this.

The first one is from Herbert Spencer from the back of our Big Book, "There is a principle which is bar against all information, which is proof against all arguments, and which cannot fail to keep a man in everlasting ignorance — that is the principle of contempt prior to investigation." And this is where your investigation can happen.

In other places outside of here, I hope that you found some resources to be able to do that.

One thing just about service in general in my own experience, my recovery always had to come first, and it still has to come first, and I have to take care of that. The way that I behave is very important. It's not necessarily what we do, but it's how we do it and what that means to folks.

Many of us come from different backgrounds, where it is very difficult to be in situations where things get aggravated and there is frustration and anger. So, remember our co-founder, Dr. Bob, and how he spoke in his last message about how important that is.

I just want to sum up my comments with this non-conference approved lyric. I might've done this at the last forum in Louisiana. I'm not sure. But I find myself going to it more and more, and it resonates with me very much. So, these are lyrics to a song by the one and only Tim McGraw, from a song called "Humble and Kind."

"Don't take for granted the love this life gives you when you get where you're going, don't forget, turn back around and help the next one in line. Always stay humble and kind." Thank you all so very much for your service.

Scott H., General Service Board Chair

One thing I didn't discover at my first Regional Forum is that in my new role as chair of what some of us like to call the General Service Board of Canada and the U.S. structure...

is my favorite part of the job, is I get the last word at this event. And I've been married a while, so getting the last word is very, very cool.

I want to offer the same thanks to the same people that Tom and Bob offered. And just also emphasize the thanks to the people who serve on our boards, who've been volunteering their time here to be with you out of the love of Alcoholics Anonymous. I echo what Bob said...I hope for everyone who came looking for some information, you got some information, or you at least got a start on some information.

There's been a lot here, and I hope you'll come back, or you'll go seek out some of those places that people talked about as being a place that you can find that information. And I hope that you had a chance to meet those New York people, not all of whom are in fact from New York and find out that they're really just like you. They are people who love Alcoholics Anonymous and want to help people find this miraculous way of living our lives that we've found.

I want to thank all those people who took the time to come and say hello to me. I can still be one of those people who wonder why somebody's coming to talk to me. I'm not anybody. I so appreciate the people who've done that and the people who I've met before while serving in Alcoholics Anonymous who took a moment to reconnect with me.

I hope for those people for whom this was the first time you found out what Kevin was talking about last night, and that is that you have six new friends that you're going to look forward to seeing. On Friday night I was asked a question, and I said I was going to talk about it but not from the microphone. I've changed my mind. The question was whether it matters if the GSB Chair was a class A or a class B alcoholic and I'm going to say no. I maybe bring something slightly different with me. But the truth is I'm slightly different anyway. And I just kind of bring me with me. And that's always what Alcoholics Anonymous wants.

Some of you may be thinking about the role that you've taken on or a role you're about to take on. And you wonder, Am I the right person for the role? The answer is yes, because that's what Alcoholics Anonymous wants. Alcoholics Anonymous wants you. Somebody talked about wearing off some of the sharp edges. That's what happens in Alcoholics Anonymous. But we can't do that unless we get you. And we need you. It's our Higher Power that's active in, you know, finding a group of people who say yes when we stick up our hands and say, "Yeah, I'm willing to do that."

As people take on different service positions in Alcoholics Anonymous, it's only because they said, yes, I'm willing to try it. And sometimes A.A. says, yes, thank you right now. And sometimes A.A. says, maybe soon. And sometimes we know that we're in exactly the right spot. Bob touched on that for me.

Bob and I served together, and we find ourselves back in this place. And am I in the right spot at the right time? Yeah, my first Regional Forum was an hour's drive from my house in my area. There's not much that's an hour's drive from my house except the town I live in. It's the kind of place where you can drive 40 hours and not get from one end of our area to the other end of our area. And so, it's just miraculous.

The International Convention is a real short drive from my house too. And it tells me I'm in the right place at the right time. So, does it make a difference whether I'm a class A or a class B? No. Somebody asked me why they chose a class B trustee, and Tom said what I'm supposed to say, which is that they chose the person who the board needed at the time. That's the answer to the question, Are we in the right place?

On Friday night, I read a little bit of that George Bernard Shaw quote. The next line in it says, "I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community, and as long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can. I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work, the more I live." That's what Tom was just talking about here a moment ago. I said I'd been sober for 9,499 days, and it is now 9,501 days. I was supposed to be dead about that long ago. I had doctors tell me that I was going to be dead from alcoholism. That's a whole lot of bonus days. And for Alcoholics Anonymous to ask for a little bit of that time from me, that's nothing. As we serve in Alcoholics Anonymous, sometimes it seems like 25 hours a week is a lot. I mean, I guess it just means that I have never seen an episode of *Survivor*.

What has made my life richer? I suppose I will never know whether *Survivor* would have made my life richer than serving in Alcoholics Anonymous. I'm going to run over my time just by about 30 seconds. When I was rotating as a trustee in 2019, I was invited to give the World Service Meeting Report. Some of you may have observed that I can be quirky. So, there was a slide in my report that ended up on the back cover of the final conference report, thanks to Patrick. And it was a slide that said, "Hey girl, life is short."

That's what you all did this weekend. You came here in service of Alcoholics Anonymous. You recognize that life is short. That we want to be fully used up when we die. I don't want to go out thinking that there was something I could have done to help somebody, and I left it undone. I just want to thank you for the inspiration to do that.

I sat in the back of the room in my first forum thinking, I can't do what these people do. I'm not enough. And you people grabbed hold of me and said, Yes, you're exactly what Alcoholics Anonymous needs right now in this role.

I will close by saying to you, you are all exactly what Alcoholics Anonymous needs right now, right where you are. Whether that's just because you're stepping into a role, or whether you're just stepping out of a role. So, thank you for loving Alcoholics Anonymous. Thank you for the people that haven't found us yet, that your work is going to help us find.

I have a 2-year-old granddaughter, and maybe one day, she might need this. And, but for you, she might not find it. So, thank you. And, how we close this is we all stand up just where we are, and we'll finish with the Responsibility Statement, please.

I am responsible....

When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A. always to be there. And for that, I am responsible.

Thank you very much. Safe home.

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