

**FINAL REPORT**  
**PACIFIC “ADDITIONAL” REGIONAL FORUM**  
**AUGUST 19-21, 2011**  
**WOODLAND HILLS, CA**

Dear A.A. Friends,

Please mark your calendar for the next Pacific Regional Forum, which will take place in Fairbanks, Alaska at the Westmark Hotel Fairbanks the weekend of September 14-16, 2012.

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

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## INTRODUCTION

The 2011 Pacific “Additional” Regional Forum was held in Woodland Hills, CA. Registration for this Forum topped at 723. This included 373 members attending their very first Forum—several who were welcomed at the Forum Orientation on Friday evening.

### ASK-IT BASKET QUESTIONS

(NOT ANSWERED AT FORUM SITE)

#### ***Is there anything in print about safety in A.A. meetings or events?***

Although there are no written guidelines provided by the General Service Board or by G.S.O., in 2009 the subject of vulnerable members was discussed by a subcommittee of the General Service Board. Members of the Board agreed that in its position at the bottom of the A.A. service structure the General Service Board “would not have a role in setting any behavioral policy or guidelines for the A.A. groups or members in regards to protecting any vulnerable member including minors coming into A.A. The A.A. groups and A.A. service entities such as Areas and Districts are autonomous and direct and guide their own affairs. The General Service Board has no authority, legal or otherwise, to control or direct the behavior of A.A. members and groups.”

#### ***When can I buy A.A. eBooks for my Kindle? My Nook?***

Initially iPhone, iPod Touch, and iPad (in iPhone compatibility mode) and Android Smartphones will be available. During 2012 the General Service Office and A.A.W.S. Board will determine which additional devices will be supported. Please consult [www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org) for dates when eBooks become available on other systems.

#### ***What is meant by Additional Forums?***

In 2006 the General Service Board passed the following Board action: “That the General Service Board coordinate an Additional Regional Forum (ARF) every eight years in each region” thereby adding the possibility of one Additional Regional Forum per year to the regular Forum schedule (4 per year). Additional Regional Forums may be used to supplement the regular Regional Forum rotation schedule or to address concerns of geography, language or culture.

#### ***How often are General Service Office group records updated and are inactive groups included in group estimate reports?***

Only groups considered active are included in the group estimates and group contribution reports. G.S.O. group record numbers are not deleted. Area registrars or secretaries work with the General Service Office Record’s Department to update group information annually.

## WORKSHOP REPORTS

### **Group Inventory – Where’s Our Focus? (Moderator: Angela H./Reporter: Mike P.)**

Workshop attendees first turned their attention to the resources available to groups embarking on an inventory. Resources mentioned were: “The A.A. Group” pamphlet, the “Traditions Checklist” from the Grapevine, and the Grapevine article “Why I Am in Service.” To encourage interest among group members for an inventory – and thereby to boost attendance – workshop attendees said that groups should do such things as: create an ask-it basket and invite members to drop in questions or possible inventory topics; explain to the group why an inventory is important; show enthusiasm; and use the opportunity of a problem in the group as an opportunity for an inventory. Among topics for a group inventory are: anonymity at the group level; are we carrying the message; and inclusiveness.

### **District Inventory – How, When, and Why? (Moderator: Lisa P./Reporter: Cheryl G.)**

An inventory is a fact-finding exercise and for that reason is a productive undertaking, said those at the workshop. Specifically, a district inventory can be an opportunity to explore whether the district is serving the groups, and also to explore ways of generating enthusiasm for participation. As to when a district might consider an inventory, workshop attendees suggested that the best time would be when issues arise that warranted an inventory. As to how to conduct an inventory, the suggestions included: using the “A.A. Group” pamphlet, the “Traditions Checklist,” the *Twelve and Twelve*, and information from other districts. It was also suggested that the district turn for help to the area chair, the past delegate, or someone else with good working knowledge of this type of inventory.

### **Home Group – Maintaining a Welcoming and Safe Place (Moderator: Ann M./Reporter: Fred H.)**

The workshop turned its attention to several issues, the first being the protection of minors in A.A. To this end, it was suggested that women in A.A. meetings make it their business to offer guidance to younger female members, warning them about situations and relationships in A.A. that would not be in their best interests. Men could offer the same type of guidance to young men who come to Alcoholics Anonymous. Attendees also addressed what they termed “predators” in A.A., a class that might include sexual predators, but also might be members who take financial advantage of others in A.A. The workshop then discussed the problem of rigidity among old-timers that can create an unwelcoming atmosphere in a group. Attendees agreed that it is the responsibility of all group members to uphold the purpose of the meetings, which is to carry the message of recovery for all alcoholics who come in the door of a meeting.

### **Rotating Leadership (Moderator: Byron F./Reporter: Michele B.)**

A person should rotate out of a position when the time comes, even if there isn’t someone at the ready to fill that position, said attendees at the workshop. That position will be filled in God’s time, they said, and the fact that it may be vacant for a time is no reason to abandon the practice of rotation. The value of rotation is that it promotes diversity in A.A., opens the way for new ideas, and enables more members to get involved. Rotation, said attendees, is good for the Fellowship and for individual A.A. members. To attract more people to service positions, those already involved should show enthusiasm for the position. They can also make it a point to talk one-on-one with A.A. members they think might be open to doing service. It is attraction, rather than promotion.

**The Twelve Concepts (Moderator: Sharon G./Reporter: Cindy T.)** Those at the workshop ranged widely in their discussion of the Concepts, touching on such points as: we should allow G.S.R.s to change their vote in an assembly after hearing discussion because that is in keeping with Concept 3, the right of decision; that the delegate goes to the General Service Conference with the right of decision; that the 12 Concepts apply to all levels of service, not solely to world service; that even on the individual level, the Concepts help the A.A. member live a life of love and tolerance. For instance, said workshop attendees, trust is a spiritual concept – and the Concepts enable us to trust that our trusted servants will act for the good of the Fellowship. The Steps are to the individual, as the Traditions are to the group, as the Concepts are to the whole of Alcoholics Anonymous.

**A.A. Grapevine – Today (Moderator: Ami B./Reporter: Nancy H.)** To increase the number of A.A. members subscribing to the Grapevine, workshop attendees suggested the following: make groups aware of the number of subscriptions the Grapevine needs to be solvent and encourage groups to use subjects from the magazine as meeting topics. The workshop discussed the print version of the magazine versus the digital version. One question was how to make the Grapevine the voice of Alcoholics Anonymous. Why subscribe to the Grapevine? In response, attendees offered these reasons: stories are enjoyable and timeless; for use as a meeting at any time; because it's the right thing to do for A.A. Those at the workshop agreed that the Grapevine rep can play a key role in building support for the magazine at the group level.

**Area Inventory – How, When, and What Happens After? (Moderator: Jeff J./Reporter: Cheryl G.)** To get started on the process of an area inventory, the consensus was that the area contact the General Service Office in New York for shared experience. According to attendees, a good way to proceed is to form a committee of five or six to prepare for the inventory process, part of which would be to tap the expertise of the trustee or a past delegate. Talking to those in other areas who might have conducted an inventory is also a good idea. Finally, it's a good idea, according to those at the workshop, to give the inventory its own special time – that is, keep it separate from other area business. Also, hold an inventory regularly, perhaps on odd years. After an inventory is held, spread the word on its findings around the area, using email and reports. And, of course, follow up on the recommendations of the inventory.

**Twelve Traditions – Applying Principles to Local Matters (Moderator: Loren U./Reporter: Bruce D.)** To pass on the Traditions to newcomers, A.A. members with knowledge should take them through all 12, said those at the workshop. Another way of getting across the message of the Traditions is by holding Traditions meetings, and by making A.A. Conference-approved books like *Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers* available to members. On the Tradition of self-support, the literature can also be useful – in this case the pamphlet “Where Money and Spirituality Mix.” When it comes to money, it's also important to let members of the group know where their Seventh Tradition contributions are going, said attendees. Another suggestion from the workshop was to keep districts focused on the Traditions when personality issues arise.

**Anonymity in Digital Age (Moderator: Debbie A./Reporter: Trisha C.)** According to those at the workshop, we are all responsible for maintaining our personal anonymity, but we are not all aware of the ways that anonymity can be compromised in the world of the Internet. There are many online A.A. groups that serve a valuable purpose, such as bringing meetings to the homebound, said attendees. However, online A.A. groups and any A.A. member participating in online sites like Facebook must ask themselves if what they post about themselves conforms with what the Traditions have to say about anonymity. It's important to learn about the settings on such sites. Some basic precautions like password protection on these sites must be a first order of business, said one attendee. The consensus was that informing A.A. members who are taking advantage of opportunities in the digital sphere is going to be a process of education.

**Carrying the Message to the Elder Community (Moderator: Linda M./Reporter: Donna G.)** There are A.A. members living in elder care facilities, noted those at the workshop, and part of making A.A. available to them is by educating the staff at these places. A.A. meetings at such facilities are also a way of carrying the message to the elderly person who is not a member but who has a drinking problem. The "Hope" video can be a good tool for introducing those at elder care facilities – both staff and residents – with Alcoholics Anonymous. Making A.A. available to the elder community can be a topic for groups, and this is something the G.S.R.s can help with, said attendees. Two important – and highly practical – points to keep in mind when addressing groups of the elderly is to bring along large print literature and to speak up, said one attendee.

**Newsletters/Bulletins in A.A. (Moderator: Pat S./Reporter: Mary Ellen D.)** One way to spread the word about a newsletter or bulletin – while also producing content for the publication – is to get committee chairs to submit articles, said those at the workshop. It's also a good idea to encourage other members to participate. A.A. publications must always be mindful of protecting the anonymity of those who are writing and those who may be the subject of a story. As noted by workshop attendees, A.A. newsletters and bulletins have a lot of experience maintaining anonymity. As regards technical issues of printing and emailing publications, attendees agreed that simple is best, such as using a pdf format when emailing a newsletter.

**All About La Viña: (Moderator: Irene D./Reporter: Raymundo L.)** The discussion topics were: 1. Are subscriptions necessary [self-support]? Responses: The magazine is subsidized by the Reserve Fund and there is a \$100,000 deficit. La Viña is hoping to get 5,000 new subscriptions. It is not recommended that we talk about it in the groups; rather it will be better to discuss it gradually. These are La Viña's early years. The Grapevine has been around for 65 years. It's a different situation; however, the Grapevine also has its problems. The Grapevine is hoping to get 43 new subscriptions per area. For La Viña 54 more subscriptions per area is the goal, which in addition to the 8,000 current subscriptions will reach the target total of 13,000 subscriptions. It's important to raise awareness among the newcomers and all group members of their responsibility in this effort. It's important to renew subscriptions, to hold events and workshops, to give it as a gift to newcomers and sponsees, to hold raffles at anniversaries. Use it for Twelfth Step work and have a group LVR. 2. What are the guidelines for La Viña articles? Responses; Regularly on page 17 of La Viña there is information about submissions: How it was. What happened? And how it is now? There is more information in the calendar of ideas about forthcoming topics and other guidelines can be found at [aa.org](http://aa.org).

Send photos and experiences relating to the Steps and the Traditions. Establish guidelines for workshops. We will discuss in the future the concern expressed by one delegate about the use of the word “God”, Higher Power, as well as any other concerns. You can send the photos any way you like. You can also send photos of animals. 3. The 16<sup>th</sup> La Viña Anniversary in Washington. Publish more information and give more support to La Viña and move forward. Washington is expecting us on September 10<sup>th</sup> in Wasco, Area 93, to continue planning the event in order to achieve our objective. The area of Arizona will be host to the 17<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration. 4. Sales vs. subscriptions, encouraging subscriptions. For the magazine to function we have to pay for a quality publication and all the work required to put the magazine together and to see that it reaches all those who need it. Most important for the readers and for the RLVs is to communicate the content to others – it’s important to be well-informed, to know the material and then share the information, especially as described the the RLM handbook. Have the magazine available, to improve sales or subscriptions. 5. Fulfillment: The Grapevine outsources fulfillment to an outside company and recommends that subscribers call them directly: 1-800-644-8781.

## PRESENTATIONS

**“Special Needs—Identifying Current Challenges”** Suzette C., Delegate Panel 60, Area 03 Arizona:

Hi everybody. My name is Suzette C. and I am an alcoholic. I am currently serving as the Panel 60 delegate for Arizona. My homegroup is the Happy Valley Group, in Phoenix, AZ. We meet every Wednesday night at 7:00 pm. I am grateful, for my home group as a whole takes responsibility to be active and informed.

Thank you for allowing me to share on this topic, Special Needs-Identifying Current Challenges that Prompt Deep Change. Prior to November 2009, I was neither active nor informed on this subject.

My mother, who is a long-time member of A.A., had quintuple bypass surgery and experienced a stroke during the surgery. The stroke left her unable to verbally communicate and to care for herself. All of our lives changed that day. After four months of inpatient rehab therapy she was discharged from the hospital. Due to her healthcare needs, my husband and I made a choice to relocate us and her to the Phoenix area. We took on the role of caring for her 24 hours day. Obviously this was not part of her plan to have her life like this. She was a newly retired, very active member of AA up to the day of surgery. Our days were not easy; we all had to relearn how to interact with each other. The communication method had changed.

I knew how to respect her as an elder member of Alcoholics Anonymous, but I had no idea how to give her direction. I began by taking an inventory of myself. I needed to look at my own character defects. The outcome of that was that I was operating with some dishonest motives. I had areas that I was being selfish, self-centered, dishonest and full of fear. I got to see once again that fear was ruling my actions. The self-inventory was a very useful reminder of who I am. It clearly revealed that I was not perfect! I had tried to play God, her God. Once I got that cleaned up, and completed my inventory process, I was ready to move forward to help her.

We began by spending many hours a day reintroducing the program to her. We talked to her many hours. We talked to her about the hope she shared with us. We would say, "Mom, do you remember when you would talk to us about walking through the fear of something and that it took action to get to the other side?" I would share with her the things she shared with me. She talked about struggling with the concept of relying on someone or something else. That building a relationship with a higher power was always changing and that walking through fears allowed her relationship with God to become different. She not only talked to me about walking through tough times, she talked about how she had to change her thinking and had to practice doing things she did not exactly want to do, or did not know what the outcome was going to be. She talked about being afraid. She told me that for her it took lots of practice to do anything different. She talked to me about being disciplined and not letting obstacles deter my journey. She talked to me about taking care of myself and not letting life get so full that I forget about my own needs. She talked about her experience with learning to take care of herself in order to be able to help others. She talked to me about making time for not only the newcomer, but for any alcoholic who suffered.

As we continued the process, she began to remember things and she worked hard at finding the words that she wanted to share. She no longer could share, as she used to, about the A.A. program of recovery. Over a period of time, I realized that her journey was now looking different and that I was going to need to continue to find ways to help carry the message of recovery to this suffering alcoholic.

I was going to inventory the recovery tools available to those with Special Needs. I reached out to my local committee whose mission was to explore, develop and implement ways of carrying the A.A. message to alcoholics with added challenges: allowing participation in A.A.'s solution to alcoholism and providing Hope for recovery from the disease of alcoholism.

The local committee offered to pick her up for a meeting and/or bring a meeting to her. Sometimes it was a difficult decision to decide what was going to be best for either alcoholic. She refused either one of these options. After thoughtful consideration of how I might feel if I was in her position, I realized that we were in a new town, with new people who didn't know her or us. It was quite possible that she was feeling some of the same things I was feeling in stepping into the new A.A. community. Not to mention she just spent four months in a rehabilitation hospital relearning some of the simple things I took for granted. Because of this, I began to take her to meetings with me. We went to the same types of meetings she did before she had the stroke. Big Book studies, women's meetings and open discussion ticket meetings. We went to meetings where she would not be in the position to be hurt, where they did not tag, because she could not speak the words. "I am an alcoholic". I had to learn to not rescue her in situations that appeared they might be uncomfortable for her. I had to allow her to be uncomfortable and not fix her. I believe that by being with her it allowed her to walk through some of the fear.

While we continued to go to meetings together, our family was blessed to have our higher power send an A.A. member to our home as her daily living support person. This was her employment and she was an A.A. member. As part of the daily living support, we began to reintroduce some of her daily activities, which included daily readings. The A.A. member read *Daily Reflections* and a non-A.A. approved meditation book, *God Calling* to her on a daily

basis. When she was done reading them, the two of them would do their best to communicate with each other their feelings on what they read. This was so spiritual, to stand in the hallway and listen to the voice of recovery, to feel the spirit of her recovery, without her being able to clearly speak the words. The tears flowed down my face as I was blessed to witness this “language of the heart.” As she became more comfortable and I became more trusting, we began to design a meeting plan for her. The plan included her attending meetings with people and places she was familiar with and slowly integrating meetings with people and places she wasn’t familiar with. Each one of these steps would bring out new obstacles or fears that we needed to work through, sometimes together and sometimes separately.

Then there came a time when she was ready to start to reread the Big Book and other A.A. literature. Up until this point, the focus was on going to meetings and becoming familiar with that. Hours of discussion and thought with other A.A. members helped us to come up with a literature plan. Her mental capacity had improved to a point that she could look at the large-print *Daily Reflections* and the Big Book and begin to read the words. She could not read the words aloud, but because she had read the Big Book for 26 years, the words were familiar to her. Words she had written in her own script were there for her to reflect on. We are very grateful for the Audio Big Book. With perseverance and a set of ear phones, on some days she can listen to the words and follow along. It has taken many hours to read a chapter, but she is reading it. We have also used the audio Grapevine. She can put on her earphones and listen to the magazine of the month. This also helps her to feel connected to the program and other members.

I continue to be amazed by the courage she shows me everyday. She has had a life-changing experience and she could have chosen to give up on her recovery, but instead I get to come home and find her either in front of her computer learning to verbalize new words or sitting with headphones on listening to A.A. literature. She is an example of those things she taught me.

Through this experience I have learned to look at our meetings, our members and our literature with a new pair of glasses. As a sighted, hearing, verbally, communicating A.A. member, I have gotten to take someone else’s experience and learned about carrying the message in a different forum than I am used to, about asking for help when I do not know how to do something, about truly considering the feelings of someone else in how I am “helping” them. I learned that the definition of commitment for me took on a whole new meaning. When I commit today, I am committing to be there for that person, to help carry the message to the alcoholic that has added challenges. I make the commitment to not only myself but to do my best to carry the message in a language they can understand who appear different than me. I have learned to focus on their needs before mine. I have learned that with fear comes understanding and with trust comes love. I have learned *The Language of the Heart*.

**“Right of Decision & Appeal—Concepts Three & Five:** Marcus F., Delegate Panel 61, Area 05 Southern California

Let’s cut to the chase: what are these rights?

Each of us has the right to decide when we will take action based on our conscience, and when we will instead ask the next highest service entity for its input. Balancing this Right of Decision is our Right of Appeal to challenge decisions that have been made by an entity that

serves us. In its most common form our Right of Appeal is expressed in the minority opinion that is taken after every vote in General Service. More formal petitions or appeals are rare -- for example if a G.S.O. staff member were to appeal the decision of the General Service Board of Trustees. That appeal would be made in writing and be decided by the Conference at its annual meeting as defined in the new policy just approved by the 61st Conference.

So that's the mechanics of these central rights. But what is the spiritual basis for Concepts III & V?

At the core these Concepts are about leadership.

When I became delegate last fall just after serving as area chair, I felt some regret regarding lost opportunities. I wondered about service versus leadership.

Had I been enough of a leader, or had I served by doing only what was asked of me? As delegate, was I supposed to be a dutiful servant following the will of my GSRs and committee members? Or was I supposed to be a transformational leader, proposing and leading the implementation of bold new practices for the best interest of our area and A.A. as a whole, not the least of which the alcoholic just walking in the door?

As in all my affairs, I asked others about their experience; I prayed and meditated on it; and I re-read our literature.

The last sentence of the short form of Tradition Two states: "Our leaders are but trusted servants, they do not govern." That little word "but" confused me. It sounds like we are but servants, not leaders. Breaking the sentence down we find it actually says that: Our *leaders* do not govern; and our *leaders* are trusted servants. Tradition Two is all about leadership. How to be a good A.A. leader, and how to be a good A.A. follower. The membership needs to trust the leaders it elects, and our elected leaders need to always serve the interests of the group and A.A. as a whole, not their own self-interest.

It's now clear to me that it is my responsibility - and the responsibility of all of us in General Service - to lead: to lead by example, to lead by action, and to always inform those I serve of my actions. And it is your responsibility to lovingly challenge me when you think I may have erred.

The short form of Concept III begins with: "To insure effective leadership."

That is the goal of Concept III, if not the goal of all 12 Concepts. To insure the future of A.A. for the still-suffering alcoholic, we in General Service must be strong leaders. No, not rulers. We do not govern A.A. We must be servant leaders. I say must, not should. As individual A.A. members we "should" take certain steps if we wish to recover. Though I put it to you that there is a higher standard for us in General Service. We servant leaders "must" understand and follow our 12 Traditions and 12 Concepts for the good of A.A. as a whole. The Fellowship deserves no less.

Not every A.A. member needs to get involved in General Service; for example, fewer than 3,000 of the millions of us have ever been a delegate. Those of us who have received the trust

of our fellow members must strive to practice our Traditions and Concepts with perfection. Of course, we will fall far short. Thankfully, our code of love and tolerance still applies. That's a good thing since I'm sure I've already made several mistakes in this little talk alone.

For some service positions the standards of performance are necessarily quite high. Some of us take on legal responsibility for our separately incorporated service entities, for example as a Director of the AA Grapevine Inc. or as a Corporate Officer of a Delegate Area that is organized as a non-profit corporation.

We cannot tolerate a servant leader who threatens the continued existence of any of our A.A. service entities due to their illegal acts or incompetent inaction. This we cannot tolerate, yet must handle with Love. Love for the erring servant and Love for A.A. as a whole. Never personally punitive, always forgiving, but never forgetting.

I was born with some degree of God-given leadership ability and quickly rose towards leadership of each organization I belonged to. But Marcus the alcoholic was very good at undermining himself and I would eventually hand my head on a platter to my detractors. In A.A. I was taught to practice contrary action and found that A.A. is a safe place to practice what I'm not very good at. I spent the first ten years of my sobriety learning to be a good follower... and that taught me how to be a better leader.

For years I had arrogantly declared our general service structure one big Tradition (9) violation. I now realize that staying out of General Service was the best thing I could have done for A.A. as a whole - that is until I learned how to be a good follower, and to let others lead when it is their responsibility. *That* for me is the essence of Concept III.

Within the scope of their defined responsibilities, every A.A. trusted servant has the right to decide when they will act wholly on their own and when they will refer their problem to the next higher authority. We ought to trust our responsible leaders to decide, within the understood framework of their duties, how they will interpret and apply their own authority and responsibility to each problem or situation as it arises.

The group secretary gets to pick the speaker. The General Service Rep gets to vote for the area committee member he or she thinks best qualified to be delegate.

So when things get off the beam, how do we balance the right relation between the ultimate authority of the groups and responsibility delegated to our leaders?

A.A. principles protect us against both the tyrannical rule of the majority as well as the tyrannical rule of an oppressive minority.

We need never fear either tyranny, as long as even one person has the courage to express their right to respectfully ask for reconsideration of decisions that just might affect others or may not be in the best interest of A.A. as a whole.

This is the spiritual balance of Concepts III & V which insures our future and the future of all who wish to recover.

**“Why Not Be Self-Supporting Through Voluntary Contributions?”** Ken M., Delegate Panel 61, Area 06 Northern Coastal California

I attended my first Pacific Regional Forum in Tucson, Arizona, nine years ago as a new G.S.R. with only a few months of on-the-job training. I'd been feeling my way along in general service, but it was at that Forum that things really started changing for me. I met people who had what I considered very attractive sobriety. I had always heard: “If you want what we have, then do what we do!”, and that's what I've been trying to do ever since.

When I recently re-read the report I had presented to my group about my experience at that Forum, the thing that stuck me most was the financial presentation given by the general manager of the G.S.O. of the time. That's where I first learned about some of those amazing numbers that most A.A. members never get to hear, numbers like A.A. could be fully self-supporting through contributions if each member contributed \$6.29 per year, or each group contributed \$137.45 per year. These numbers seemed so low to me, I thought surely with a small amount of effort informing the Fellowship we could quickly turn things around. I also learned that less than 50% of all registered groups contribute to the General Service Board. This fact blew my mind. More than half the groups give nothing? Those are the two numbers that I would like to address here today.

While attending the 61<sup>st</sup> General Service Conference, I heard someone say: “A.A. might not have any dues or fees, but it is ***not*** free!”

(Using figures from the 2010 General Service Conference Report) The first number: \$6.46 per member per year seems fairly small. The overall average of per capita contributions from all Areas in the U.S. and Canada is \$4.50, which amounts to a shortfall of around \$2. There are currently 16 Areas within our service structure that contribute above the \$6.46, and 49 Areas that contribute less than the \$4.50 average contribution. Do you know how well your Area does? My Area, CNCA 06, per capita contribution is \$5.04, which is well short of the \$6.46 figure of services provided. The question then becomes, how do we make the Fellowship aware of this shortfall? I realize that most of us here are already somewhat aware of these numbers, so I'm preaching to the choir, so to speak. If that is the case, how can we, the GS choir, sing about these truths to the rest of the Fellowship?

I'm sure we all have our own personal contribution plan, whether we realize it or not. For me that means putting \$3 to \$5 in the basket at your meeting, and a larger amount in the basket at my home group. I contribute to my Area when I attend ACM's and Assemblies. I contribute to the GSB via the Birthday Plan every year on my A.A. birthday, \$1 for every year sober. I also recently made an online contribution just to try it. It was easy! Now this is just how *I* do it. Thanks to Alcoholics Anonymous, I am in a fairly good financial position, where I can afford to be somewhat generous. That may not always be the case, but if things change I can change my personal contribution plan. I don't think A.A. is in any danger of having too much money, but again, if that changes in the future I can change my personal contribution plan. Also, in my home group I pay attention to the treasurer's report to make sure we make regular contributions to all the service entities. My group currently averages over \$300 to the GSB

annually, which is enough to cover our group and one other groups cost of expenses delivered.

The other number I wanted to address here today is the percent of groups that contribute to the GSB. That number has been on a steady decline for decades. When I checked into the old records of the percent of groups contributing, I found that the high mark of 88% in 1954 was down to about 56% in 1974, 47% in 1994, and 43% today. One factor, I believe, is we have more groups, many of which are really just meetings and not groups. Groups have a solid core of members who show up and participate in the business of the group and A.A. as a whole. Many of these meetings barely have enough money to pay the rent and other expenses, let alone make contributions to the service entities. So the question here is how do we, the GS choir, get to those 55% of groups missing out on the spiritual connection that comes with contributing? Even the most financially challenged groups could reach a group conscience to contribute as little as \$1 per year and make that spiritual connection. One thing that has always helped me better communicate about self-support is making it clear where the contributed money goes, what services are being provided. There are a few helpful tools: The "Self-Support: Where Money and Spirituality Mix" pamphlet, where, on page 11, there is a dollar breakdown by percent of services provided. Also, the service piece SMF-176 provides a detailed list of provided services.

In general service we close a lot of our meetings with the Responsibility Statement. "I am responsible"! As I have grown up in this Fellowship, and truly sought out the emotional sobriety that Bill writes about, I've learned that is indeed up to me, no one is going to do it for me! My A.A. membership equals ownership. I am a stockholder in Alcoholics Anonymous, and this is my deal! So, when I am able, I must contribute. Now it's up to us, the GS Choir, to go out and sing the good news to those who haven't yet heard. The news about dollar amounts per member and group per year to be fully self-supporting, the news about the spiritual connection that comes with contributing, the news about having a personal contribution plan, and the news about services provided to help the still-suffering alcoholic as a result of all of our contributions.

**"A.A. History—Boring or incredible spiritual journey?"** Keith M., Delegate Panel 61, Area 69 Utah

"Utah alkies who dried up in A.A. and struck uranium in the process"

In early sobriety I would sit in meetings with the same home group member sharing the same, or at least very similar, stories of recovery night after night and week after week. Occasionally, I would look around our local clubhouse, the Triangle House in downtown Moab, Utah, and my mind would wander. Gazing on the west wall, I would read the raised-relief Serenity Prayer and think about the autographed portraits of Bill W. and Dr. Bob. Were these photos simply mailed to our Moab group or was there a connection between our founders and our little group?

During my first reading of *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, I was amused by the throwaway line on page 26: "... the Utah alkies who dried up in A.A. and struck uranium in the process...." My schooling as an anthropologist specializing in archaeology, along with working in southern Utah, suggested the Utah alkies were most likely either from Kanab or Moab.

Wow, what was the chance my home group would be mentioned in *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*?

Well, years later, after being elected as the panel 61 delegate for Area 69 Utah and reading *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age* again, the Utah alkies line jumped out at me. I am probably not the first newly elected delegate to become very emotional during a reading of this beautiful history book. Simply put, I cried my way through our amazing past. After nearly two decades of carrying our message of recovery to alcoholics, I felt a connection to all the pioneers and truly identified with the early struggles to form and follow our principles.

Back to the Utah alkies. My sponsor's sponsor gave me a series of correspondence between Clyde G., a panel one delegate from Area 69 Utah, and Bill W., who needed information on the Utah alkies. The following is from Bill's letter dated April 13, 1954:

As I remember it, this was the essence of the yarn. That a drunk in the Utah desert wrote the Foundation for an A.A. book. Getting sober, he thought of the town drunk, his friend at Moab. He proceeded there and the town drunk sobered up. So did some others. The public-spirited town drunk went out and took some pictures of canyon walls, and scenery in general, around Moab in order to impress one of the railroads, which contemplated building a spur through that country with the desirability of passing through Moab on account of its scenery. Some of the film, on being developed, showed white flecks and marking. The drunk sent for a Geiger Counter. The result was a uranium strike in which the drunk cashed in and which revived the defunct mining town. Now rich and influential, the alcoholics took the place over, one becoming Mayor, another Chief of Police, etc. Such was the yarn that I had picked up somewhere. Bill W.

Clyde replied with a letter dated April 29, 1954, which seemed to satisfy Bill's primary goal of fact finding about the story. Clyde wrote:

...These facts I do know are true. One or two of the ex-drunks, or AAs, did play a major role in the finding of uranium at Moab. The first drunk to get well through the AA program has been a mayor of the town for the past six years, and is still mayor. Another owns the newspaper, two or three own uranium mines — in fact, the positions held in that community by AAs are such that it would appear if you wanted to be of high position in the community you must first qualify and then become a member of Alcoholics Anonymous. No doubt, too, you have noted from newspaper accounts that the largest and richest uranium strike made in the world as yet is that recently made at Moab.

These letters predated the publishing of the *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age* in 1957 and show a real and very direct connection between my home group and our history. I am still trying to determine if Bill W. ever visited Moab, but I know Clyde G. was a regular at the Spring Rally held numerous times through the 1960s in Moab, since both Clyde and his wife signed the Moab Group diary many times. On a personal note, I served on the City of Moab Board of Adjustments for 10 years after getting sober in the Moab A.A. Group. Apparently, I am following my Moab Home Group tradition of public service. However, I have no plans to run for mayor.

**“The Changing Culture of Alcoholics Anonymous”** Jamie S., Delegate Panel 60, Area 92 Eastern Washington

Aldous Huxley said: "Experience is not what happens to a man; it is what a man does with what happens to him."

In order to briefly look at the changing culture of A.A., I had to understand the meaning of culture and of change.

Interestingly, culture has many meanings, but the ones that struck me are: 1) the quality in a person or society that arises from a concern for what is regarded as excellent; 2) the behaviors and beliefs characteristic of a particular social group; 3) the sum total of ways of living built up by a group of human beings and transmitted from one generation to another; and, the biological definition: the product of growth resulting from cultivation, to grow in a controlled environment.

Change: to make the form, nature, content, or future course different from what it is or from what it would be if left alone; to transform; to pass from one phase to another.

I think that no one who sits in this room would argue that A.A. has not changed since 1935, but has the culture of A.A. changed to the extent that it appears to be?

If we define A.A.'s culture as that quality that arises from our concern for excellence, what is it that is excellent in A.A.: certainly, our program of recovery. It has been copied and used in hundreds of other programs that treat human illness and disease. As George Vaillant, a Class A trustee, said in 2002: "...mental health workers admire the success and geographic availability of Alcoholics Anonymous, they understandably wish to broaden its membership to include other substance abusers." (*About A.A.* Fall/Winter 2002). The cultural change that affects the excellence that is our program of recovery is precisely that pressure to weaken our Fifth Tradition and let anyone with any ailment share their stories at our meetings. The stories that heal us and bind us to each other's recovery can only be those of one alcoholic talking to another alcoholic. That is what makes us excellent.

The experience of the Washingtonians and the Oxford Group continues to show us the danger of giving in to outside influence. For us, the continued adherence of our Fifth Tradition is a matter of life and death. We must never forget that alcohol is one of the leading causes of death in North America and the world: 100,000 deaths each year in the United States and over 2.5 million deaths worldwide. Drug abuse claims only about 280,000 deaths in the world each year. This is a cultural change that we dare not allow.

If our culture is defined as the behaviors and beliefs characteristic of a particular social group, what are those behaviors and beliefs? Certainly our belief in a spiritual life, service to others, taking responsibility for the injury we have caused others, love and tolerance in our relationships with our fellow sufferers and the rest of the world. Is this a culture that is changing? Somewhat!

We have begun an important journey to become more accepting of all of the spiritual paths that our members walk. The General Service Conference has now twice approved literature to

help reach out to the alcoholic who is Buddhist, Shinto, Hindu, Muslim, atheist or agnostic. This is literature that will give those who consider us a religious organization a truer picture of what our tradition of a spiritual life means.

We continue to expand our service to those places and people who need Alcoholics Anonymous by the translation of our materials into many more languages. We have also taken steps to reach those who want to connect with us in the digital world. The Conference's approval of the Grapevine's request to develop a digital application and use more digital channels for distributing the Grapevine and the books published by the Grapevine will hopefully widen our ability to reach the alcoholic who uses their computer or smart phone to interact with the world. All of which allows us to be of service in ways not envisioned in 1935, to maintain our characteristic behaviors and beliefs with a different face.

If our A.A. culture is the sum total of ways of living built up by us and transmitted from one generation to another, what is it that is changing?

Our shared experience that we give from one generation to another encompasses our whole society: our program of recovery, our Traditions and the way we interact with each other, even the way we are "not organized."

When a new person comes to A.A., we offer them our most precious gift: our story, our experience, strength and hope. If the new person stays, it is because he or she is able to identify with our suffering and imperfection. It is our ability to show the newcomer that one can be healed by that shared suffering and shared hope that has made us so attractive to all who wish to be healed, not just the alcoholic.

However, if we don't pass on the shared experience of service in A.A., our culture will surely die. I frequently hear people say that they don't want to be involved in service because it is just politics. It saddens me that we will lose what that person has to offer A.A. Maybe they had a bad experience at a home group or district meeting, or maybe they have never been to either. Whatever the cause of the comment, our society, our culture needs the next generation committed to service in A.A. That I believe is the most dangerous cultural change that I see. Too few people do most of the work. Old-timers refuse to rotate for fear the young person will bring in new ideas. Without a new generation to whom we can pass on our way of life, the existence of A.A. will be seen only in the shadows of other societies that use our recovery program and traditions.

In 1977, Robert H., past G.S.O. general manager, warned us that if this Fellowship ever falters, it won't be because outside issues or members with "other" problems. "It will be because we can't control our own egos, nor get along well enough with each other...to hold A.A. together."

Lao Tzu said: "Knowing others is intelligence; knowing yourself is true wisdom."

If our society is to survive the forces from outside and within for cultural change, we must know ourselves well. We must be able to adapt to the good changes in our culture, yet have faith in and be faithful to our primary purpose while we find new ways to reach the still-suffering alcoholic.

**“Varieties of Spiritual Experience”** Linda C., Delegate Panel 60, Area 09 Mid-Southern California

My earliest spiritual experience happened on a beautiful sunny day in 1943. I was six years old and walking home from school alone (yes, six-year-old girls did walk home alone from school in those days). I looked up at the mountainous cumulus clouds spread over half the sky and from behind the clouds came spectacular rays of light, beaming golden streaks of light, luminous, fabulous. It was stunningly beautiful and I was beside myself with delight.

A little background here: my parents were non-religious skeptics. They were both intellectually curious, voracious readers, each creative in their own ways, loving of their only daughter perhaps to a fault and of each other. Although some of my friends talked of God and who He was, it was not a topic of discussion, pro or con, in our home.

When I arrived home that afternoon, I ran up the 72 steps to our Hollywood Hills home and I breathlessly informed my startled mother, *“I just saw where God lives!!”* When I had finished describing what I had seen, she gently but firmly informed me that the rays were from the sun and they were created for me by the position of the clouds between the sun and me.

One might think that I would have been disappointed or deflated, but I was not. In fact, I was thrilled to know that such spectacular beauty did not depend on a mysterious source.

Through the years I have had a few other deeply moving experiences that I would definitely describe as spiritual -- connecting with something within myself that transcends the rational, touches the mystical or mysterious.

Two or three of those experiences occurred while I was enjoying what many of us in A.A. refer to as “outside issues.” The experiences, nevertheless, were profound and, at the time, enlightening, to say the least. Others occurred in meditation and one by observation of a mysterious (to me) light in the night.

When I was about 15 months sober (in 1981) and, coincidentally, about halfway through my Ninth Step, I took a business trip to New York City. I was there alone and, although I had been to the city many times before I got sober, it seemed to have changed significantly since my last visit.

The day after I arrived I got up early and took a walk up Lexington Avenue. The spring morning sparkled; tulips were blooming everywhere; I walked along the sidewalk, pacing myself with the crowd of people going to work or wherever they were going, and marveled at the beauty of the morning. I was at about 52<sup>nd</sup> Street when I felt a peculiar kind of rhythm within myself -- a sort of pulse that seemed in tuned with the other people on the street. Noting with some bemusement that it was a beautiful moment, I took one more step and walked into another world. It was suddenly blindingly clear to me that I was (and am) part of the universe, one with it all, intrinsically belonging to a Oneness.

Poet Arlene Harder describes this type of experience well: *“a long-held belief that you are separate from everyone else is replaced with a deep sense of connection with [everything] everywhere.*

Her next statement, however, was not my next thought. She says: *“Nevertheless, you give this source of truth a name: God, Allah, Great Spirit, Universal Consciousness, or Source of All Life.”*

I was very familiar with the writings in the Big Book and had been grappling with my own intellectual and theological interpretations. I wanted, above all else, to stay sober. It was obvious to me that many if not most people in A.A. who were successfully sober believed implicitly in “The God” and most in the Christian version in one form or another. I had been struggling to find a god “as I understood Him” and while sometimes I seemed to be succeeding, most of the time I felt that I failed miserably. God “as I understand him” is still God. And “god” as defined by the dictionary, and in my understanding of monotheistic religions, meant an all-powerful, all knowing creator of the universe, worshiped as the only god.

Dr. Bob discouragingly stated that if I thought I was an atheist, an agnostic, a skeptic, or had any other form of intellectual pride, he felt sorry for me. Bill challenged me to ask, “Who are *you* to say there is no God?” and added that “deep down in every man, woman, and child, is the fundamental idea of God.”

When I had this transcendent New York City experience, I stepped into a world of acknowledged mystery. I prefer to keep it in the realm of mystery. I prefer not to “*understand*” it. I prefer not to attribute coincidence or beauty or calamity to an all pervading, all knowing being who is looking over me and caring for me. I prefer not to have answers for the mysteries that I experience. That is my spiritual choice.

Of course, it’s always good to quote Bill Wilson at least once in a talk at an A.A. event, so here’s mine from the Appendix entitled Spiritual Experience: *“The terms ‘spiritual experience’ and ‘spiritual awakening’ are used many times in this book which, upon careful reading, shows that the personality change sufficient to bring about recovery from alcoholism has manifested itself among us in many different forms.”*

So far, so good. He goes on to say, however, *“With few exceptions our members find that they have tapped an unsuspected inner resource which they presently identify with their own conception of a Power greater than themselves.”*

I guess I’m one of the few exceptions, because I don’t find it necessary to attribute my experience of being part of the universe to a Power greater than myself. I believe I am part of the mystery.

Recently a member of our area asked the rhetorical question from the microphone, “How could it be possible for someone to be spiritual without believing in God?” There were nods of agreement throughout the room; a sort of tacit accord that ipso facto one follows the other.

I believe that I have had a “personality change sufficient to bring about recovery from alcoholism” and that it was precipitated by not drinking and participating in the program of Alcoholics Anonymous. I do not, however, believe in a Higher Power by any name.

I have not found one word I can embrace to describe what my particular variety of spiritual experience is, but a description that comes close is the following: I am not a human being having a spiritual experience; I am a spiritual being having a human experience.

## **PAST TRUSTEES SHARING**

**Paul C.**, *General Service trustee, 2005-2009*

Our co-founder, Bill W., was a seeker; and he sought help in a variety of different ways. He was blessed with a tremendous spiritual experience, but that alone could not have kept him sober. He needed to pursue action — just like the rest of us. He explored psychoanalysis, spiritualism, Catholicism, Eastern religions, vitamins, and LSD. As time went on, he noted that we in A.A. are fortunate to have found a way to recover – not *the* way to recover. But this doesn't make us any better than anyone else who is laboring in the field of alcoholism treatment.

When my son was five, we went to his preschool graduation. He wore a little cap and mortar on his head and he held a diploma. He said, “Look Daddy, I have a diploma.” I asked him what a diploma was. He thought and said, “A diploma is something you don't hit your neighbor over the head with.” We might say the same for our recovery, for our Big Book, for our Concepts, for our Grapevine, for all of our copywrited material. We are fortunate — we have found a way to recover. There are some empty seats here that could be filled by people who live just a few blocks from this hotel, but they have never heard of A.A., or what's worse, what they've heard about A.A. makes them not want to join. I think we have a lot of work to do in telling the public and our friends in the professional field what A.A. really is. There are high court decisions suggesting that Alcoholics Anonymous is a religion. I think that too often in A.A. we get caught up in the trappings of “religiosity.” And I think that that doesn't look particularly welcoming to some new people.

**Jim C.** *Pacific Regional Trustee, 1998—2002*

From the time I've come into A.A., I've been fascinated by the Traditions. I was a typical newcomer and didn't know the difference between traditions with a capital T and the local customs (little t). I remember thinking if I broke or violated a tradition, I'd get drunk or thrown out of the program. Little by little, I discovered that the Twelve Traditions were not laws and had many interpretations. When I was two years sober I volunteered to be a GSR for my group and no one objected. That was when the Traditions took on more practical meaning. One of the Traditions I found meaningful (and difficult) was the Second Tradition — our leaders are but trusted servants. In the beginning, I thought the way to be a trusted servant was to be dynamic leader with lots of great ideas and persuasive speaking skills; able to convince people I was right. Eventually, I learned that being a trusted servant means being open to ideas other

than my own; providing an environment where all sides can be heard; and being transparent and trusting the process.

Our Conference theme (Anonymity, Our Spiritual Responsibility in a Digital Age) will address issues our Fellowship faces. The Internet expands opportunities to reveal membership in A.A. at a public level. This is complicated in part by the misunderstanding of the public component of Social Networking sites, along with ignorance of the Traditions. The medium is public: Facebook has 750 million active users — and this is just one of the many social networking sites. So the Eleventh Tradition as it pertains to A.A. has become more complicated, to my mind, and it is still as relevant as ever. Bill W. refused to have his picture on the cover of Time Magazine; will we make the same decision with Facebook? Which brings us to the spiritual responsibility component of the theme, which I relate to the Twelfth Tradition. When I think of anonymity and spirituality I am led to humility, which I believe is the essence of both anonymity and spirituality. I certainly believe in attraction, but where does that line get drawn? So, are anonymity, spirituality, and humility still relevant in the digital age? I am sure this coming year will bring many interesting conversations.

**Greg M.** *Pacific Regional Trustee, 1990—1994*

One of my favorite passages in the Service Manual reminds us that A.A. exists only for the Twelfth Step. That's the only reason we are here any time: To facilitate carrying the message to a fellow sufferer. My delegate gave me something to think about this morning, he reminded me to think about my personal contribution plan. I need to do some work in that area. I celebrate Bill's birthday and put a buck in the basket for however old he would be and I do the same for Bob and myself. I do something similar for my district and my area and my home group. What else am I doing to further the mission and the vision of Alcoholics Anonymous?

I was struck by the discussion of anonymity and the digital age, there were a couple of members who shared that they didn't believe they should be anonymous on their web page — that they have the right to disclose membership. The loving way the audience responded was amazing. I grew because of that experience. I went to my hotel room and pulled up my Facebook page and checked to see that I didn't break someone else's anonymity by the association of my friends.

**Larry N.** *Trustee-at-Large/U.S., 1993—1997*

I'm sober today by the grace of God and Alcoholics Anonymous. I had no reason to be here. I was a dead man walking. It was thought I'd be put away in a locked place, but I came to Alcoholics Anonymous and I found sobriety and people who spoke with sincerity and truth. Even my closed mind opened to what they were saying. People said that the most important thing in their life was A.A. They didn't say their sobriety; they said "A.A." Something happened to me in those meetings. I thought, "What had these people done?" I wondered if I could do it, too. I keep coming back. There is nobody in A.A. more important than the newcomer. But there is nobody more important, anyway. We all have a need for sobriety and we are here for the alcoholic who still suffers.

In 1993, I was elected to serve as U.S./trustee-at-large, about the greatest surprise of my life. It was the beginning of one of the most precious experiences in my life. In 1994, I went to my first World Service Meeting in Columbia. I felt love, unity, and gratitude like I'd never felt before. All those people were tremendously grateful for A.A. I also went to Russia. They wanted to publish a translation of the Big Book in Russian, but they had no means to do so. In 1988, there was a translation initiated here in the U.S. and it got done without having them pay for it. Through A.A.'s generosity and our Twelfth Step, those books were printed and paid for so that many thousands could be distributed in Russia – this is a seed that reaches into the future.

**Julian R.,** *Pacific regional trustee, 1994—1998*

I was at a meeting recently where a topic was taken from Daily Reflections. The topic was laughter. It was one of the best meetings I've ever been to, and laughter is the reason I am here in front of you today. I had been struggling in Alcoholics Anonymous for about four or five years. I had been in and out, in and out, and each time was worse. I looked across the room and I could see that these people were happy. They did not tell me, I could see by the laughter in eyes and their voice. They were happy; they had what I wanted. And someone told me, "Well, if you do what they did, maybe you can have what they have." And it has become a reality.

I went for a long time without realizing the value of literature. It's important to me because it gives me a better understanding of the Fellowship that saved my life and it helps me to apply the background of A.A. history to my present situation — the principles are the same. We have a treasure of history and the value of these things is going to increase significantly with the inclusion of the digital process. There are quite a few examples of how this Fellowship almost didn't make it. For instance: Bill at the Mayflower Hotel, the development of the Traditions, the evolution of the General Service structure. There are so many changes throughout the years, changes in custom, language . . . a while back I was explaining to a newcomer the first drink in terms of being run over by a train — I told him that it's not the caboose that does the damage. I was waiting for his glowing enlightenment and he said, "What's a caboose?" We have a lot of changes coming, but any way you have it, it's going to be one drunk talking to another drunk sharing our program of recovery.

**George D.,** *Pacific regional trustee, 1978—1982*

In the late '90s, I went to Spain at the invitation of the General Service Board of Spain as their guest. We went to a few meetings and I was impressed at how many people in the groups talked about their agnosticism — and how comfortable and how easy it was for them. A speaker this weekend talked about her agnosticism, and I heard a few people talked about her courage in doing so. Well, why on earth does it take courage to talk about your own belief or your lack of belief inside Alcoholics Anonymous? I will tell you that that was not true 30-40-50 years ago. In Spain, I thought, "Wow. This is what meetings used to be like." In my original area in California, people used to be able to talk about their belief – or lack of it – without becoming scared, defiant, embarrassed, or defensive. It was just a natural thing to do. And I think it's very important.

In our literature, Bill talks about a man who was having trouble sobering up drunks; he was very dogmatic in his approach. And Bill said that we can go broke on spiritual pride. I am very well aware that I can go broke on spiritual pride; you and everybody else have the right to practice A.A. as you wish, that is spiritual freedom. When I am working with my sponsees, I am naturally bossy but I try to control my nature and get them to reach their own understanding, and not mine. I've got a lot of experience but I am more than aware that I know only a little.

## CLOSING REMARKS

**Ward Ewing**, Class A (nonalcoholic) General Service Board chair: The most central concern I've heard during this forum is about the lack of growth in our Fellowship over the last 10 to 15 years. So I've organized these closing remarks around that concern. I've organized them around three things: First, what is the picture regarding membership growth? Second, what are some of the possible reasons for the lack of growth? Third, what can we do to reach out more effectively to the still suffering alcoholic? Which, of course, is how we increase our membership.

What is the picture regarding membership growth? Getting accurate numbers is difficult. In a Fellowship where anonymity is our spiritual foundation, counting members is challenging. While we may be modestly pleased that over the past three years we have added approximately 60,000 members to this Fellowship, that represents a growth of only 4.5% over three years. So, what are some of the possible reasons for the lack of growth? The number of alcoholics is not declining – it's growing with the population. I've heard some new ideas, such as there are a lot of other Twelve Step groups today – someone said 250. In A.A.'s time of rapid growth, A.A. was basically the only option. In the 70s and 80s, we became comfortable with a pattern of intervention, rehab, and referral to A.A. This is no longer working as it did, part of the reason involves changes in insurance coverage. We also have a problem in how people perceive us. Doctors, lawyers, and other professionals may not be referring people to us because they may perceive it as a religious sect. CPC and PI folks, actually all of us, have some work to do to clarify who we are and what we do to those who may be able to refer some alcoholics to us.

Another factor affecting growth is the challenge of being truly inclusive. Since the very beginning, A.A. was more inclusive than any organization I am aware of or have been a part of, and A.A. continues to reach out to all alcoholics. There is only one requirement for membership and that is a desire to stop drinking. But I wonder, in some subtle ways, if we may be excluding some people. Are we overly rigid about not allowing alcoholics who also have drug addiction to mention their drug addiction? Are we unwelcoming of those who don't share our spiritual beliefs? Even walking into a meeting where you are the minority can feel excluding.

Lastly, what can we do to reach out to the still-suffering alcoholic? We would do well to remember that technology, like the phone that Bill used, is just another tool to communicate to another alcoholic. The conversations about the Grapevine began from the perspective that it's an important tool we have to carry the message of Alcoholics Anonymous. We need to allow it to grow and change and become a more effective means of carry the message to a new generation.

What I learned, as a parish priest, was that I couldn't intervene effectively without you. Hope comes when one alcoholic hears his or her story from another alcoholic. I used to have a pattern. I'd get a crisis call. Maybe it was an arrest, a family fight that had gotten violent, maybe a DWI, maybe it was all night in a bar and not arriving home. I'd get the phone call and then call another friend, a parishioner who was in A.A., and we'd go out. The alcoholic would talk to the alcoholic and I would talk to the family. It proved to be a very effective way of intervening at that point in that crisis. What I learned was that I could not do it on my own. We, who are professionals, need your help in understanding A.A. and how it works.

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