

FINAL REPORT
NORTHEAST REGIONAL FORUM
JUNE 26-28, 2009
SOMERSET, NEW JERSEY

Dear A.A. Friends,

Please mark your calendar for the next Northeast Regional Forum, which will take place in Sturbridge, Massachusetts, at the Sturbridge Host Hotel and Conference Center, the weekend of May 20-22, 2011.

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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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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	4
WORKSHOP REPORTS	4
Full Forum Workshop – “Our Commitment to Carry A.A.’s Message— Enthusiasm and Gratitude in Action”	4
“The Importance of Holding District Level Workshops”	4
“The A.A. Grapevine”	5
“Unity” [Spanish Workshop: Unidad]	5
“Role of the G.S.R.”	5
“What Is the Purpose of Meetings and Why Do We Keep Going?”	5
“Twelfth Stepping”	5
“La Viña—The Voice of the Spanish-speaking Fellowship”	6
“A.A. and the Internet”	6
“Let’s Be Friendly with Our Friends”	6
“Raising the Awareness to People Who Know Nothing About General Service”	6
“Humility and Spirituality in Service”	7
“The A.A. Message and the 21st Century Alcoholic”	7
ASK-IT-BASKET QUESTIONS	7
PAST TRUSTEES SHARING	8
CLOSING REMARKS.....	11

INTRODUCTION

The 2009 Northeast Regional Forum was held June 26-28 in Somerset, New Jersey, and brought together 555 people. Simultaneous translation was provided in English and Spanish. There were presentations from Area Delegates, A.A.W.S. and Grapevine directors and trustees of the General Service Board. The video, *Markings on the Journey*, was shown in English and Spanish. Several members asked questions at the microphones during the General Sessions, and some placed questions in the Ask-It-Basket. Questions were responded to with the exception of a few that are included in this report. Workshops provided wonderful opportunities for sharing experience and sparked thoughtful discussions on the topics. On Sunday morning we heard from six past Trustees of the General Service Board. The Forum concluded with remarks from newly elected General Service Board Chair, Ward Ewing.

WORKSHOP REPORTS

Full Forum Workshop – “Our Commitment to Carry A.A.’s Message—Enthusiasm and Gratitude in Action”

(Moderator: Cathie F./Reporter: Al D.)

Among the topics discussed was the importance of connecting to newcomers to A.A., that our responsibility as members of the Fellowship includes welcoming others. One attendee at the workshop reported an increase in newcomers in his home group who had never been to a rehab or detox (lack of medical coverage being the main reason, according to this attendee). The result is that these new members require slightly more in the way of orientation in getting sober in A.A. There was much discussion about the value of encouraging others – especially newcomers – to become involved in service. One way of doing this, it was pointed out, was for members to show enthusiasm about their own service commitments.

“The Importance of Holding District Level Workshops”

(Moderator: Frank Z./Reporter: Carmella C.)

Publicizing the events and thereby attracting attendees was the first issue addressed. Among the suggestions were printing flyers, making announcements at meetings, including the event in area calendars, and spreading word of workshops person to person. To attract attendees, said those at the workshop, the district meetings should be made interesting and relevant. Some suggested having a movie night or a mock election. One person suggested calling the meeting something other than a workshop – such as a round-up or a festival – something that does not imply work. As for agendas, attendees said that depending on what was important to members in different areas, topics could include ‘How did you get into A.A.?’ , ‘Insurance coverage for meeting spaces’, or ‘Inclusiveness, what does it mean?’

“The A.A. Grapevine”**(Moderator: Robin B./Reporter: Hugh H.)**

With the executive editor of the magazine moderating, the discussion first focused on guidelines for writers, which are posted on the Grapevine Web site and also available by mail from the Grapevine office. The magazine looks for stories and essays relating to A.A. and recovery that the writer feels strongly about. Photos are also welcomed. Attendees talked about the new design of the magazine. It was noted that the redesign had been under consideration for years, and that its impetus had come from the Grapevine board, with implementation by the Grapevine staff. Attendees then spoke about the need to promote the magazine, with one person commenting that the Grapevine cannot help those who do not know about it.

“Unity” [Spanish Workshop: Unidad]**(Moderator: Jaime L.)**

The workshop attendees began their meeting by reading the Preamble, the Twelve Steps, the Twelve Traditions, and the Promises. Using translators, they conducted a discussion of the Traditions in English and Spanish. The meeting was deemed a success by the coordinator, who said he was happy to be a part of the event. Twenty A.A. members attended.

“Role of the G.S.R.”**(Moderator: Bonnie S./Reporter: Ed E.)**

The service structure of A.A. starts with the G.S.R.s, who are its most basic lines of communication. The consensus at the workshop was that the most important responsibility of G.S.R.s is attending district and area meetings and reporting back to their groups. There was discussion regarding the kind of information the G.S.R. should be bringing back from conventions, Forums, and area meetings. There was discussion on the use of the Internet for A.A. matters, and the risks -- such as anonymity breaks -- and rewards of that medium. Finally, attendees talked about the value of service sponsors.

“What Is the Purpose of Meetings and Why Do We Keep Going?”**(Moderator: Lowell L./Reporter: Nina B.)**

Attendees said they first went to A.A. meetings because there was no place else to go, that the meetings were a safe place away from alcohol and that it was in the meetings that they learned to stay sober. Those at the workshop said they keep going back to meetings to listen to others and learn how they practice the Twelve Steps and how to hear about acceptance. Some said they keep going to meetings because the meetings make them feel good, that it is in A.A. meetings that they see others like themselves working to get better. One attendee said he comes to A.A. meetings to listen to something besides what goes on in his head.

“Twelfth Stepping”**(Moderator: John H./Reporter: Jean M.)**

According to those at the workshop, Twelfth Step work keeps it green for us A.A. members. That is, working with those who are still drinking keeps us sober by placing us face to face with the reality of active alcoholism. It was pointed out that in doing this work we are responsible only for the effort, not the results. One attendee said that

nothing is more important than Twelfth Step work, that the essence of the A.A. program is carrying the message. Another attendee lamented the absence of wet drunks at meetings – though he added that he does not waste time on those who still want to drink. Finally, someone mentioned the advice against doing a Twelfth Step call alone.

“La Viña—The Voice of the Spanish-speaking Fellowship”

(Moderator: Patrick R./Reporter: Gladys H.)

Workshop attendees focused their discussion on the ways in which the magazine could be put to best use, that is, how to get it into the hands of those who would most benefit from reading it. One attendee suggested a La Viña campaign within districts and areas to boost awareness of the magazine as a resource. Another person at the workshop proposed sending the magazine to new groups in the district and to groups that send new G.S.R.s to the district meetings.

“A.A. and the Internet”

(Moderator: Sally S./Reporter: Tom G.)

The consensus among attendees was that we in the Fellowship must develop a vision of how to use the Internet. As regards protecting the anonymity of A.A. members in online information, those at the workshop said that with the use of discretion there was no need to fear online communication. Local discussion of ways to protect anonymity should be encouraged, it was agreed. The discussion turned to online meetings, which were seen as a valuable option for those too distant from meetings or for those curious about A.A. but timid about attending a meeting. Ultimately, said those at the workshop, we should look to the Traditions for guidance, but not let fear prevent us from using the Internet as a resource.

“Let’s Be Friendly with Our Friends”

(Moderator: Kathi D./Reporter: Mary N.)

It was noted that those in the court system should be informed about the value of Alcoholics Anonymous, and that one way of doing this is by providing those in that field with P.I. material. The newsletter *About A.A.* is a good source of information about the Fellowship for professionals and is appropriate for those in various fields. We can also work with treatment centers, while always keeping in mind that we cooperate but do not affiliate. An “adopt a doctor” approach was endorsed by one attendee, who explained that it meant supplying your doctor with information about Alcoholics Anonymous.

“Raising the Awareness to People Who Know Nothing About General Service”

(Moderator: Vada G./Reporter: Tom T.)

To change the perspective of someone who thinks general service is nothing more than politics, those in service should make sure their reports are interesting, and that they show enthusiasm. Other suggestions included keeping those in their home groups informed, and making themselves available as service sponsors. The consensus at the workshop was that showing that service can be fun is very important. One attendee noted that service, any service, is always a boost to sobriety. General service is another way of staying connected to the Fellowship and helping us live the program.

**“Humility and Spirituality in Service”
(Moderator: Joan R./Reporter: Stephanie L.)**

Workshop attendees first talked about the definition of spirituality, which they described as knowing the truth about yourself; being in harmony with a Higher Power; being wary of pride, and attempting to achieve a measure of humility. Letting go of self-centeredness and getting into service are both ways of moving in the direction of humility, said those at the workshop. Taking personal inventory on a regular basis is key to maintaining spirituality and humility.

**“The A.A. Message and the 21st Century Alcoholic”
(Moderator: Ken B./Reporter: George B.)**

The program of Alcoholics Anonymous has worked for seven decades in basically the same form, and there is every reason to believe that it will continue to be effective in the future, said those at the workshop. Technology in the form of the Internet brings up questions and possibilities, but does not change what the program does. Our singleness of purpose and our Traditions will continue to guide A.A. members and A.A. meetings, just as they always have. One alcoholic talking to another has worked to keep us sober since Bill W. spoke with Dr. Bob. That is how it continues to work in this new Century.

ASK-IT-BASKET QUESTIONS

Below are three Ask-It-Basket questions (and responses) for which there wasn't time to address at the Forum.

- Q.** Online contributions—what is the processing fees and is it saving enough to offset our current costs?
- R.** Processing fees may vary and will be in the 3% range. The simple act of e-mailing an acknowledgement costs nothing vs. printing. In addition to the expense of handling contributions, there would be a savings in postage costs to the office and member.
- Q.** Why did the A.A. Grapevine magazine change to the pocket size format?
- R.** The A.A. Grapevine editors put a survey question in the magazine asking readers if they would like the smaller 5X7 size. Readers voted in favor of it because they wanted a more portable magazine.
- Q.** Why is it that “not a Christian” always seems to be followed by “atheist, agnostic”?
- R.** There is no shared experience indicating that this is an expression widely used throughout the Fellowship. It is impossible to know why members make statements like this other than that is how they choose to express themselves based on their experience.

PAST TRUSTEES SHARING

George D. served as Pacific Regional Trustee from 1978 to 1982, and also served as general manager of the General Service Office from 1992-1999. George shared, “I had my last drink in 1961, but I’ve been a member of A.A. since 1955 — I just didn’t always show up sober.”

George related his experience on a trip he had taken to Spain several years ago. “At A.A. meetings, many members said, without embarrassment, that they were agnostic.” It struck him, he said, because that’s what meetings were like 30, 40, and 50 years ago. People would relate their doubt without embarrassment. Today, however, he said he doesn’t see that much of it, and he wondered why. Was everyone coming to A.A. more religious? Were they stronger believers? Or, he said, have we driven those who have doubts into the closet, or more disturbingly, out the door?

George said that the second thing he wanted to talk about was trust. “The idea that we trust our trusted servants is sort of a cliché, but A.A. doesn’t work without that. When I came to A.A. in 1955, I trusted the people in A.A. — what they told me, how they stayed sober, and then I came to trust my group. I trusted my sponsor that he would be honest, and without that trust I could not have achieved any sobriety. The trust also applies to general service. We have to trust each other or this thing just won’t work. Basically, I think we do. But trust also requires that we avoid secrecy.”

He continued, “If you are at the bottom of the triangle and you expect to be trusted, you have some responsibilities: to report what you’re doing openly and accurately — and, in regard to a controversial decision, to report how you reached that decision. To the fullest extent possible, avoid secrecy, confidential and closed meetings, and exclusive meetings unless absolutely required.”

Harold G. served as General Service Trustee 1989-1993. Harold remembered Dr. Jack Norris, at a hotel in New York, telling a story about how Regional Forums came into being. Harold recalled how Dr. Jack said that there was a “disconnect” between New York and the rest of the areas. Dr. Jack suggested that we take the office out into the field so that people could see what we actually did. And that was how Regional Forums began.

Harold noted that, judging from this Forum, A.A. is alive and well — and the more things change, the more they stay the same. He heard the same things at this Forum that he’d been hearing for years. “We are still dealing with alcoholics,” he said, “and they don’t change. But we are also still carrying the same message of recovery.”

Harold related an example that illustrated the importance of Regional Forums. At one Regional Forum, someone asked a question about the existence of A.A. literature in Swahili. As a result, we have the Big Book in Swahili. And, although there are a lot of details between the question and the resulting translation, it is as a result of a question posed at a Forum that the Big Book has been translated into Swahili.

In closing, Harold paraphrased the German philosopher Georg Hegel and said, "Everything that is, is not true." Harold said that while it is true that many of A.A.s trusted servants are not with us, it is not true that they are not here.

John K. has been serving as Northeast Regional Trustee since 2008. John said, "I am always impressed with how much attention we devote in A.A., not only to the individual, but to the process. It is only by the process — by listening to what the Fellowship is telling us — that we emphasize the importance of the individual."

John recalled his time serving as trustee, and listed some things that made an impression on him: Struggling with a new thing called the Internet, copyright issues, posthumous anonymity of the co-founders, and P.S.A.s that seemed okay to him, but were not when viewed through the eyes of some minority groups.

He shared his thoughts on the Twelve Concepts. He said, "They are not only guards, protecting us from ourselves, or sentinels telling us where to go, but they are also mirrors that ask us to reflect on ourselves — who we ought to be as a spiritual movement. Do we want to embrace corporate poverty and humility, democracy in thought and action, and thinking affirmatively?" He said, "These are the things that give us value and make our society unique."

He added that leadership is important, of course. He recalled an essay written to that effect by Bill W. "But," he said, "Perhaps what we need to do is listen to learn, to love and *then* to lead. If we don't do these first three things, especially listen, then we will never lead effectively."

John Q. served as a trustee-at-large/U.S. from 1989-1993. During his service, he witnessed the need for unity in A.A., and saw the Fellowship respond to this need.

At the 1998 World Service Meeting (WSM) in New Zealand, he witnessed the creation of the International Literature Fund. Delegates at that WSM were very concerned about the financial responsibility that the U.S./Canada General Service Board had assumed for translation of literature for alcoholics in countries with emerging A.A. structures. The delegates made a commitment on behalf of their own structures to send money to the U.S./Canada General Service Board to offset some of the costs of translating and publishing materials for international A.A. entities.

Arnold R. served as General Service Trustee from 2003-2007. Arnold shared briefly about how he got involved in service and some highlights of his service as a trustee. He recalled the Grapevine Digital Archive and the decision to make all our stories available to the Fellowship.

He continued, "While it's nice to see the light on people's faces and go to events like Regional Forums, I am mindful of the fact that what I'm really doing is making a Twelfth Step call on people I'll never see, so it's pretty important to communicate clearly, honestly, and openly so that the people at the Forum will have something in their spiritual toolkit to carry back when they share about what took place."

Finally, Arnold shared that the only difference between the Arnold R. of 27 years ago and the Arnold R. of today is that he can be effective in carrying the message of

Alcoholics Anonymous. And that, he said, is one of the main reasons for serving — so that he could move the ball of recovery just a little further down the field.

Tony T. was the Northeast Regional Trustee from 1999-2003. In 1978, he was among the last group to detox at High Watch Farm in Connecticut. Shortly thereafter, at lunch after a meeting, he learned about one alcoholic helping another. Someone next to him fed him peas — he could not pick up peas, hold them on a fork, and get them into his mouth. He was fed by someone next to him. After finding sobriety, Tony entered service and learned about trust and trusting the committee process. Tony noted that today it is still about one alcoholic helping another.

Trust and one alcoholic helping another were the theme of a brief anecdote: Tony shared about a fall that he had, how the EMTs arrived and had to administer a drug to help save his life. Protective of his sobriety, and concerned about the effects of the shot, Tony began to recite the Serenity Prayer. The EMT, he said, recited it right along with him, and then shared that he had been in recovery for ten years.

Greg T. served as General Service Trustee from 1999-2003. One highlight of his time serving as a General Service trustee was the privilege to see how the archives filmstrip became the video *Markings on the Journey*. It was, as he quoted another attendee at the Forum, “My story, our story, and the story of A.A.”

Greg pointed out the home group’s importance to the Forum and to our recovery. He related how he had stumbled into his home group on July 30, 1986. He named a few people at the Forum who were present at that A.A. meeting, and said, “They were all waiting for me.” He said that they knew he was in the right place, even if he didn’t. And later on, when he thought he hadn’t been *that* bad, they were there to remind him that he had. In addition, that home group sponsored him into service, as well as into recovery.

Greg closed with this thought: “We need these Forums and the people here today to maintain the unity that will ensure our personal recovery, our journeys in recovery, and the recovery for all those yet to come.”

Closing Remarks

Ward Ewing, Class A (nonalcoholic) Trustee, General Service Board Chairperson. Ward opened by remarking that we are all riding the shoulders of giants and that we must provide the shoulders for the next generation.

Ward spoke of how he got involved in A.A. Before he became head of a seminary, he was a parish priest. He discovered that some of his good friends were having more than a drink or two, and were beginning to get into trouble. Their spouses were coming to him, and he was trying to help — to fix things.

So, in order to get an education, Ward began going to A.A meetings. One day, a member of his congregation said, “Ward, you’re the spiritual expert, right?” Ward didn’t answer. “Well,” continued the member, “I’m out of touch with God, and the last time I was out of touch with God, I got drunk. If I drink again, I may die.” This member, named Willie, Ward shared, was sober for about seven years. And Willie needed someone to put him back in touch with God. Out of that conversation (and a few more that followed), Ward and Willie developed a small group of sober A.A. members to talk about spiritual issues in their lives. Ward related that this experience taught him much about the program of Alcoholics Anonymous and the Twelve Steps. Ward said, “It is the most important part of my spiritual life, without question. I have received so much from this Fellowship.”

He continued, “We are in an economic crisis in our society because many important and powerful people thought that making money and being busy was more important than spiritual growth. If — all of us — are not working on our own spiritual growth, we’re dying. We’re going to die. We had a lot of talk about money here. We talked about the need to increase the reserve because of some changes in pension laws, what it means to be truly self-supporting, issues about Grapevine and La Viña. And every time we talked about that, I kept thinking, ‘We’re rich! Why are we worrying about money?’

“I live and work in Manhattan, but my home is in Tennessee, near where Dolly Parton lives. One of her songs is “Coat of Many Colors” where she sings, “You’re only poor if you think you are.” Being rich is not about money. Being rich is about spiritual progress. It’s about helping one another; it’s about finding new life and hope, and having a meaning to live and sharing it with others. That’s what rich is, and we are a rich, rich community. The Third and Fifth Traditions are really the foundations of our wealth and what this organization is built on. If we stay focused on reaching out to the still-suffering alcoholic, anyone who wants to stop drinking will be welcome.

“Some people come up to me and thank me for my service. Sometimes they do it in a way that makes it sound like I’m more important than other people, and I want to say that the most important person in this Fellowship is the drunk coming through the door for the first time. And that’s how we stay rich, when we stay focused on reaching out to the still-suffering alcoholic, and when we realize that our fellowship and our conversations and debates are to prepare us to welcome and embrace that next person walking through the door. If we can keep that focus, and keep our unity, and keep our service, then we are going to continue to be the richest community I have ever known.”

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