

# MARGENSER

Fostering Unity and Carrying the A.A. Message in Area 29 MARYLAND GENERAL SERVICE

## How Would YOU Spend the Money in the Basket?

*How Area 29 Determines How the Money is Spent, by Jane G, Area 29 Finance Chair*

The role of the Finance Committee of Area 29 is to serve the fellowship by overseeing the process of producing a budget for the money sent to Area 29 directly from the groups it serves.

I would like put it out in the open: at my first A.A. meeting I noticed the whole “money in the basket” passing ritual and wasn’t convinced about why that basket went around. I mean, I knew that the basket is passed at church to fund the building and the minister’s salary, and the church secretary, and the soup kitchen, etc, etc. I couldn’t really figure what THIS basket was for, since we were meeting in a church but not part of the church. I really didn’t think too much about it because I really WAS willing to do anything at that point, having been brought to the bottom of my life.

So now I am 6 years a part of service in this fellowship and I am in the position to ask the question: WHAT DO YOU WANT DONE WITH THE MONEY YOU PUT IN THE BASKET?

Having been entrusted with overseeing the task of producing a budget I thought I would share what I have learned about money in Alcoholics Anonymous. Here are some assumptions I made early on that turned out to be false:

- Certainly, A.A. must accept donations: WRONG
- There must be some very successful people in A.A. who help fund the organization: WRONG (there are plenty of successful people, they just don’t fund the organization any more than anyone else).
- Perhaps A.A. gets government subsidies or grants: WRONG

- People probably leave large sums of money to A.A. in their wills when they die: WRONG

First and foremost, Bill Wilson had a vision of us really messing up on the money part. The early years of A.A. provided enough experience with money management gone wrong that the seventh tradition (Steps, Traditions, Concepts: if your new and only doing Steps you have fabulous adventures when you move into the Traditions and Concepts!) was introduced: “Every A.A. Group ought to be fully self supporting, declining outside contributions.”

In my second year of sobriety I got a service position as treasurer for a group. I found out that the role of the treasurer in a group was to serve the group’s decision about how the money in the basket is spent. Each group decides through the group conscience process how to spend the money in the basket. In order to be “self supporting” it is suggested that the group gather its money, then subtract: the rent it pays to use the space (church or club, etc.), the cost of coffee/refreshments, literature costs, and a “prudent” reserve (usually a few months rent). Then what is left over is sent in the following suggested contributions (or whatever the group decides – the point is the THE GROUP DECIDES BY GROUP CONSCIENCE): Intergroup 50% (keeps the phone hotline and publishes the meeting schedule); General Service Office 30% (headquartered in NYC—serves the fellowship by sharing information with groups about how to keep reaching out to fellow alcoholics ); District 10% (gathering of general service representatives called GSRs from local

*continued on page 2...*

### MARGENSER STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The Area 29 MARGENSER newsletter is published to foster unity and facilitate communication among AA members, groups, districts, and intergroups within the Maryland General Service Area. The MARGENSER aims to be instrumental in carrying the AA message. This quarterly newsletter seeks to publish AA-related material, including personal stories of experience, strength, and hope. Material will be reviewed by the MARGENSER committee chairperson or by a member of the committee. Nothing published in the MARGENSER should be thought of as a statement of Area 29 or AA policy. Finally, publication shall not constitute endorsement by the newsletter itself, Area 29, intergroups, districts, local groups, or AA as a whole.

### Table of Contents...

<i>How Would You Spend the Money in the Basket?</i>	...1	<i>Big Book Trivia</i>	...5
<i>Services Provided by MGS</i>	...2	<i>General Service Matters</i>	...6
<i>Fall Conference</i>	...3	<i>How to Conduct a Sharing Session</i>	...6
<i>Why I Would Quit My Home Group</i>	...4	<i>Maryland General Service 2012 Calendar</i>	...7
<i>Bridging the Gap</i>	...5	<i>Change of Address Form</i>	...8

groups), and the AREA 10% (generally a geographic area covering a state). As treasurer of the group it was my job to send the money to each of these entities based on what the group decided. So that's what I did. Sometimes I was sending a check for \$1.98 to represent 10% of the leftover funds for that group. Not a lot, but it was a contribution, and it counts because the group conscience said that's how the money was to be handled.

As a treasurer I really had no idea what each of those entities did with the money. In my third year, I became a GSR: a representative from my home group to the District (there are 16 meetings that belong in the District where my home group meets). As a GSR, I was part of deciding how to spend the money that came in from the groups (that \$1.98 from my own home group and the other contributions from the other 15 meetings – fortunately some much larger than \$1.98!). In our district we spent some of the money on putting together NEWCOMER PACKETS (a few pamphlets and a Grapevine and a local meeting list). We also put on several workshops. We also built a website. I think our District treasury had \$235 in it at its peak. We spent all of it on doing local work to reach out to alcoholics.

As a GSR from my home group to the District I got involved in starting a Special Needs Committee. This position put me in touch with a guy that was trying to do some of this service at the AREA (state) level.

The Special Needs Committee for Area 29 was given a budget: a sum of money with which to do this work. It was here that I found out that service work in A.A. is reimbursable for expenses. When we put on workshops we didn't have to put out the money for the copies we needed. We were allowed to request mileage reimbursement to attend meetings necessary to do the work. We used our budgeted money to put together a display board for the State Convention on how A.A. can try to welcome alcoholics with special needs.

And that brings me up to my current service position: Chair of the Finance Committee that makes the budget that decides how to spend the 10% of the leftover money sent from the home groups that actually send in their money.

There are lots of ways that Area 29 uses the money it receives: Area officers (there are 6) include our delegate who is sent to New York for a big delegates conference each year. There are 8 Standing (permanent) Committees including Public Information, Treatment Facilities, Corrections Facilities, Website, etc. There are 11 Ad-Hoc Committees (serving a permanent purpose to support the Area) including the committee that plans and puts on the State Convention. There is a committee called the Host Committee that coordinates providing lunch at the Area Meetings. These are just a few uses of your basket money that is sent to the Area level. If you are interested in a longer list of how money has been used, please see the list included.

So, you put your contribution in the basket and hopefully your group treasurer sent the money to the places your group decided. At Area 29 we receive your group's contribution with humility and provide services through the committees in return.

In July, the committees are asked to develop a preliminary budget and define what they will do with the money, in August they are collected and compiled, and then in September presented to the general assembly at the Area level for consideration. In October the budget is voted on and then finalized in November for the next year.

How do YOU have a voice in this process? Through your GSR (General Service Representative), a service position in your home group that represents your group at the Area and District levels. The GSR attends the area assembly and has a vote when the budget is voted on and discussed. All members of the fellowship are welcome to attend meetings at the Area level. The voting, however, is done by the committee chairs and the GSRs, so be sure your group has one and that he or she attends the meetings. Remember, your group can decide to reimburse the GSR for mileage or any other expense they might find appropriate to attend the meetings. You should not have to go broke to do service for Alcoholics Anonymous.

If you were the chair of the Finance Committee, how would YOU spend the money sent to the AREA? Please feel free to send comments to [financecommittee@marylandaa.org](mailto:financecommittee@marylandaa.org). 

## Services Provided by Maryland General Service (Area 29)

Area 29, which consists of the state of Maryland minus Prince Georges and Montgomery County, is served by Maryland General Service (MGS). The Committees of MGS are available to answer questions and help with District projects and events. A contact list is available at [www.marylandaa.org](http://www.marylandaa.org). As it says in our Preamble, ... "self supporting through our own contributions." Who are we self supporting? The first sentence gives us the who, the Fellowship and as it implies all of its entities.

Last year approximately one in every three groups supported A.A. as a whole. This includes the local Intergroup, the District, the Area, and the General Service Office. Each one of these entities provides a service so that 12th step work is possible. Not one of these entities is more important than the others; they each provide a service to the group and each needs group support. When your group passes the basket and quotes the Seventh Tradition, maybe pause and think about what the Seventh Tradition suggests. If your group is one

of the groups that supported us in the past, we thank you. If your group was unaware of the need, we look forward to your support in the future. We would rather see small contributions from many rather than large contributions from a few. Even the littlest contribution helps. Large contributions are nice but greater participation is even better. The following page lists some of the services provided by Area 29 (Maryland General Service). These services were possible because of the contributions

*continued on page 3...*

from participating groups. There is a lot more that Area 29 would like to do, but would need your group's support to make it possible. Should your group wish to contribute to MGS, the following address is valid through December 31, 2013.

**Maryland General Service, Inc.**  
**P.O. Box 20177**  
**Baltimore, MD 21284-0177**

### Here is a partial list of services and projects carried out by MGS in 2011.

- Archives – Maintain Area Archives; Displays at International Convention, Fall Conference, State Convention, and Soberfest 2011
- Audio – Record Area business meetings and Mini-Conference; Maintain and transport equipment
- Chairperson – Coordinate and conduct Area business and activities; Sharing sessions, including on Anonymity in the Digital Age; Outreach Committee to DCMs & GSRs; Set Area calendar; Facilitate Area Inventory
- Corrections – Coordinate carrying AA message to Corrections facilities (including Bridging the Gap & GSO coordination, BTG in Hagerstown working with local District, and Charles County Pre-Release Program); Forward 3 Pre-release contacts to Districts; Workshop in Baltimore
- CPC – Coordinate cooperation between AAs and the professional community (including Abilities Network & Healthy Families in Towson, National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives in Baltimore, and MD State Psychological Association); Develop Display; Respond to request from D11; D40 workshop
- Delegate – Represent Area 29 at General Service Conference; Inform Area Assemblies and Committees of GSO actions/activities; Reference letter for MGYPA; Facilitate election of NERT Candidate; Extensive travel within Area 29 for communication among groups, Area, GSO and Grapevine
- Alternate Delegate – Coordinate the Area Mini-Conference and Regional Panels; Area travel for communication with groups
- Fall Conference Committee – Plan, coordinate, and host the Fall Conference
- Finance – Present “Where the Money Goes” to groups; Flyers on Group Contributions, Pie Chart and Historical View of Expenses vs. \$1; Prepare and present Area budget; Support Area equipment purchases (with Treasurer); Audit of Area expenses and income
- Grapevine – Carry the AA message through Our Meeting in Print at Area Assemblies and Committees; Attend D40 workshop, new GV meeting in D40, D10 & D40 meetings, D41 picnic; Sharing session on future of Grapevine; Displays at State Convention, Fall Conference and Mini-Conference
- Host – Provide lunch for Area meetings; Interface with hosting District
- Intergroup Liaison – Visits to every Intergroup in A29; Foster cooperation among Intergroups, Districts and the Area
- International Convention Committee – Host hospitality suite for AA members
- Literature – Carry the AA message through our Conference-Approved Literature at Area Assemblies and Committees; Facilitate availability of Area Handbook; Displays at State Convention, Fall Conference and Mini-Conference
- Margenser – Publish Quarterly Area Newsletter; Maintain Area Handbook
- NERF 2012/3 Bid Committee – Prepare Area bid for 2013 North East Regional Forum
- Public Information – Participate in D9 PI/CPC committee meeting
- Registrar – Maintain Area contact list; Maintain attendance and voting body information at Area meetings; Input new and updated group information into Fellowship New Vision database
- Panel 60 Officers – Maintain regular contact to provide Area Committee and Assembly leadership; Implement action items raised at Area Inventory; Visits to help relight and communicate with Districts
- Secretary – Minutes of all Area proceedings and meetings
- Special Needs Committee – Carry the message to AAs with special needs; SN transportation at International Convention; Signing at meetings; West Central IG, D42 workshop, D36 workshop, workshop at August Area meeting, workshop at July Area meeting, nursing homes w/ special needs; Area Survey; Coordinate with local SNCs
- State Convention Committee – Plan, coordinate, and host the State Convention
- Treasurer – Account for all Area income (group contributions) and expenses; Oversee MGS tax filings; File for corporate charter renewal; Contribution acknowledgement letters; Visits to Districts to communicate “Where the Money Goes”
- Treatment Facilities – Carry the AA message to patients in treatment facilities; Contact w/ TF in Frederick, D40 workshop, D22 and AAIG workshops, Create portable display/presentation
- Webmaster & Website Committee – Maintain Area website; Website hosting and software issues
- Workshop – Provide workshops at request of various districts; Topics include: GSR/General Service Structure, Relationships, The Traditions, and Practicing Principles in All Our Affairs
- MGS, in Area Assembly and Committee meetings – Area Inventory; Learning opportunities about AA Service Structure, Traditions, Concepts, etc.; Agenda Items for General Service Conference ▲

## Fall Conference

*By Tammie F, Fall Conference Chair*

Hi, I am Tammie F., and I am your 2012 Fall Conference Chairperson. Thank you for allowing me to serve the Area. This year, the Fall Conference will be held in Hagerstown at the Clarion Hotel & Conference Center on October 25-28, 2012. A dedicated, yet small, committee is working to put on a great event for the Area. The theme for this year is “We Will Know Peace”.

Please don't let the word “CONFERENCE” fool you. This is not a service event, where we are expected to work, such as the Mini Conference. This is a sober convention for the entire family.

We have two great Al-Anon speakers and seven wonderful A.A. speakers signed up. We have a Children's Activities chair person that is planning events Thursday through Saturday for the kids. We will be having the Costume parade & Dance on Friday night and a regular dance on Saturday night. In addition to our normal workshops, we have added a “workshop” of A.A. Jeopardy, and a joint A.A./Al-Anon workshop. There will also be round the clock alcathons for those that are too full of sober enthusiasm to sleep.

Our little committee has faced a few challenges this year. Two Chairs have had to step down. Our Co-chair just stepped down due to other life commitments. Our committee has lost the experience of several long term members. But fear not, for we are the little committee that can. Please see the Area Chairperson if you have convention committee experience and would like to be co-chair. Please see me if you would like to join the committee. We meet the 3rd Saturday of the month in Severna Park.

Yes, the flyers have hit the streets. Please look for the serene blue flyers. If you have not found one in your travels, you may download one from the MARYLANDAA.org website. Please note, that the Friday buffet cost is different than the Saturday buffet cost. Our registration opens at noon on Thursday. The hotel will sell out before the convention sells out. There are plenty of other hotels in the Hagerstown area near the Convention Center.

Our committee invites you to join us. If you have never been to a convention, now is the time to get into action and try this one. Register today and join us! ▲

# Why I Would Quit My Home Group

By Bob C, Area 29 Delegate

I love my home group. It's the Antiques Group in New Market, Maryland. We hold a closed Step meeting on Wednesdays at 8 p.m., with a Tradition meeting the first week of every month. My fellow home group members aren't impressed with fast talk; they will call me on my stuff. We don't claim our home group is the best group in A.A., but we do give our best. We try to make everyone feel welcome, and we find sponsors for newcomers.

But my commitment to my home group has limits. *What could my home group do that would cause me to leave it and join another?*

To answer that question, let's ask this one first: What is a G.S.R.? "G.S.R." stands for General Service Representative. The G.S.R. has been called a string between two tin cans. One tin can is the A.A. group. The other is our world service structure, which provides "general services" beyond the resources of groups. Such services include Big Books, 12 & 12s, pamphlets and a monthly journal; CPC, PI, Treatment, and Corrections assistance to support twelfth step work; and responses to every e-mail from members, passing on experience from other groups. A.A.'s world service offices, the General Service Office (G.S.O) and the A.A. Grapevine, enable twelfth step work. They're the best "enablers" we could ever have.

In 1955, our groups, assembled at the Second International Convention in St. Louis, took ownership of those services by voting to create a General Service Conference, "the collective group

conscience of U.S./Canada A.A." To this day, G.S.R.s and area committees elect area delegates who comprise two-thirds of that Conference. Thus, general services belong to the groups, the ultimate authority; general service workers are only trusted servants. Our literature suggests the most important of these are G.S.R.s, who connect the groups to the Conference.

A.A.'s future depends on general services, as reflected in the Foreword to the Fourth Edition of the Big Book: "Our literature has preserved the integrity of the A.A. message." Providing and maintaining our uniform literature that keeps A.A. from morphing across the miles and across the years is one responsibility of the G.S.O. That's important to anyone whose children, nieces, nephews or grandchildren might ever need this life-saving program.

Now, to answer the original question: As much as I love the Antiques group, *I will quit it and get another one if it refuses to have a G.S.R.*, because the G.S.R. is the link between my home group and a member of the Conference. If my group has a G.S.R., we know what the Conference will consider and what it did, and we can give input to the delegate. From the Rio Grande to the North Pole, every A.A. member can influence the Conference agenda and decisions, taking responsibility for A.A.'s future – *but only through our G.S.R.s.*

Here are some issues from the 2012 Conference that illustrate why I care enough to quit my home group if it refuses to take part:

- When somebody wants to rewrite A.A.'s Twelve Traditions, my group needs a G.S.R. so we'll hear about that. Rewriting Tradition Eleven was an agenda item this year. It wasn't approved...but maybe next year?

- Suppose someone wanted A.A. to establish a Facebook page? Actually, that was proposed this year. Only if my group has a G.S.R. will we have a voice in that.
- This year, two changes to the Big Book were proposed. The last approved change happened only a few years ago. Sooner or later another change will be proposed. My group likely won't know about that unless we have a G.S.R.
- In 2011, only 72% of G.S.O.'s group services were covered by contributions and 28% by literature profits. Our trustees are asking how, in an era of declining print sales, A.A. can stop relying on literature income. With no G.S.R., my group would never hear of our Trustees' call for help.
- For the first time in many years, Grapevine subscriptions are increasing. Why? Because it's now available by electronic delivery making it convenient to read as a daily sobriety maintenance tool. Without a G.S.R., my group might never know about that opportunity.

Does any of this ring true with you? Does your group need a G.S.R. to connect it to A.A. as a whole? Your delegate or other area officer can help your group get a G.S.R. For the rest of this year, your delegate's main service job is to visit groups that want to learn about general service. If your local district already has G.S.R.s, we can get you in touch with them. Otherwise, we can hook your group in directly at the area level until a local district committee is formed. Please help keep A.A. strong "to ensure the recovery of a child being born tonight, destined for alcoholism" by contacting me directly at [delegate@marylandaa.org](mailto:delegate@marylandaa.org). ▲

## SEND YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS TO...

In accordance with the 7th Tradition and abiding by the group conscience of your home group, you may send contributions in support of Area 29 to:

Maryland General Service, Inc.  
PO Box 20177  
Baltimore, MD 21284-0177

# Bridging the Gap **Big Book Trivia**

By Luke D, MGS Treatment Facilities Committee

## Purpose of Bridging the Gap

Our Twelfth Step-carry the message- is the basic service that the A.A. Fellowship gives; this is our principal aim and the main reason for our existence!

Concerning any given A.A. service, we as A.A. pose but one simple question: "Is this service really needed?" According to A.A.'s Legacy of Service by Bill W., carrying the message is the basic service that the A.A. Fellowship gives; this is the principal aim and the main reason for our existence. Therefore we must carry the message, else we ourselves can wither and those who haven't been given the truth may die.

It is believed that A.A. as a whole can be of even better service to those leaving Treatment or Correction facilities. This is the sole purpose of *Bridging the Gap between Treatment & A.A through temporary contact programs*. Part of Bridging the Gap temporary contact program is designed to make that transition from one of the more "slippery" places in the journey of sobriety: leaving the safe confines of a treatment facility to their often first experience of an A.A group or meeting. In order to bridge the gap, A.A members are asked to volunteer to be temporary contacts and introduce newcomers to Alcoholics Anonymous. A temporary contact can be the essential link between "treatment" and "recovery"!

Please remember A.A. does not intend to provide housing, food, clothing, jobs, money or other welfare or social services, the Traditions should be followed. The purpose is to let the Hand of A.A. be there for those who reach out for help. Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety. Those who have service positions on the Bridging the Gap committee and other members of alcoholics anonymous believe that this form of service does just that. Is this service really needed? Yes.

If you can help, please register with the Maryland General Service (MGS) Treatment Facilities Committee. For more information visit the Treatment Facilities web page at [http://www.marylandaa.org/treatment\\_fac.htm](http://www.marylandaa.org/treatment_fac.htm) or send an e-mail message to [treatmentfacilities@marylandaa.org](mailto:treatmentfacilities@marylandaa.org)

By Ron M., Alternate Delegate, Panel 62

The original Big Book came into existence in Multilith™ manuscript form in early 1939. As part of the editing process, copies were sent to various AA members and other interested parties, including clergy and medical professionals, for possible correction and comment. Apparently, even before the manuscript was circulated, it was being discussed within the medical community. Most likely Dr. William D. Silkworth played a large role and advanced word of this new movement made its way into some medical journals, from which knowledge of AA spread to doctors and patients across the country.

One such person to read about the AA program during this early time was a frustrated mother whose son (Pat C. in Los Angeles) was habitually drunk. Upon learning its existence, she immediately sent a letter to the doctor who then forwarded it to AA in New York. Promptly, the New York office sent her a copy of the Multilith™ manuscript along with a promise to send her a final printed book when it was available. When a response from Pat's mother was not received for some time, New York again reached out to her, asking how her son was faring and how he reacted to the book. They pointed out that this was the first time an attempt had been made to help an alcoholic long distance.

From various sources it was reported that Pat had first stopped drinking in January 1939. On about February 27, 1939, six weeks after again leaving the hospital on January 15, 1939, he wrote a letter to the Alcoholic Foundation saying he had recovered. In part his letter stated:

"I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for your letter and for ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS. I have read this book (Multilith™) from cover to cover and it is really the first time I have read anything dealing with alcoholism that made sense and showing understanding of the problems of the alcoholic."

Up to this point, everyone in AA had been 12 stepped face-to-face. Someone getting sober without personal contact was a breakthrough that was not antici-

pated. The New York contingent was excited. Because of this recent development, some believe there was talk of an additional chapter being added to the final book, a possible Chapter 12 which would be devoted to long range efforts. It is no secret that Bill Wilson thought in groups of twelve; the 12 steps, 12 traditions and the 12 concepts, and yet there are only 11 chapters in the final book.

In any event, after discovering the original manuscript proved to be a successful tool in treating alcoholism, it was decided to add another personal story before the final book was printed. Since the print date was fast approaching a wire was sent to Pat C.:

"JUST RECEIVED LETTER. MAY WE HAVE YOUR PERMISSION TO USE LETTER ANONYMOUSLY IN BOOK AS FIRST EXAMPLE OF WHAT MIGHT BE ACCOMPLISHED WITHOUT PERSONAL CONTACT. IMPORTANT YOU WIRE THIS PERMISSION AS BOOK IS GOING TO PRINTER"

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

His wire arrived the next day:

"PERMISSION GRANTED WITH PLEASURE. LOTS OF LUCK"

With this permission received, the story "Lone Endeavor" was added to the First Edition, First Printing of our book Alcoholics Anonymous, telling the story of Pat C. from Los Angeles. The original stories in the existing manuscript were autobiographies, but due to logistical circumstances Pat C.'s story was ghost-written by Ruth Hock.

With this job seemingly completed and well done, Pat C. was thereafter invited to New York. He agreed, so a collection was taken and wired to Pat for a bus ticket. The big day arrived at the New York bus station, with a welcoming party on hand. After all passengers had exited the bus, the anxious group from AA asked the driver if anyone of Pat's description was on board. He responded "Yes" but he was drunk and sleeping it off under the back seat.

Pat C.'s story was removed from the second printing of the Big Book and never printed again.

It is reported that there is a letter dated 1944 in the California archives from a non-alcoholic named Kaye Miller to Bill Wilson, which states that Pat C. was again attending meetings and was sober about a year at that time. ♣

# General Service Matters

By Don B, Happy Risers Group, Ocean City, MD

When our Panel 62 Delegate to the General Service Conference reported back to our Area Assembly in early June, one of his statements which seemed most peculiar was an assertion that next year, he hoped no one at the Conference would move to end debate and call a question until everyone has had a chance to say everything they want to say. Our Delegate had just told us how some Conference work sessions had started early in the morning and had lasted until nearly midnight. He related how tired and cranky many of the participants had grown as the night wore on. Yet here our Delegate was, scarcely a month after the Conference's conclusion, to all appearances in full command of his wits, pronouncing his hope that there would be even more debate (and consequently even longer sessions) at next year's Conference. It didn't make sense. Was our Delegate suddenly unable to bring into his consciousness with sufficient force the memory of the suffering of even a month ago?

In its Short Form, Concept V states: "Throughout our structure, a traditional 'Right of Appeal' ought to prevail, so that minority opinion will be heard and personal grievances receive careful consideration." So this was what our Delegate was talking about: the need to consider all points of view before arriving at a decision. Well, that certainly sounds like an admirable ideal, but how could it possibly work?

Our annual General Service Conference is the active voice and the effective conscience of all of Alcoholics Anonymous, or at least all of the A.A. groups in the United States and Canada. It is the practical expression of a loving God speaking through the informed votes of our 93 Area Delegates, 8 Regional Trustees, 2 Trustees-at-Large, 4 General Service Trustees, 7 Class A (nonalcoholic) Trustees, and the A.A. staff members of A.A. World Services, Inc. and A.A. Grapevine, Inc. These individuals bear a huge responsibility; they

are accountable to every single member of Alcoholics Anonymous in the United States and Canada and the groups to which we belong.

Thus it is vital that every voice be heard, every concern be expressed, and every angle be examined and considered before decisions are reached which very well may affect millions of people for good or ill. We do not want to rush to judgment on anything. Our very lives—and the lives of those to come—hang in the balance.

That is not to suggest that we want to argue minor points just for the sake of argument; no, we want to use our time—God's time, in actual fact—economically and wisely. And this same sort of prudence, economy, and clarity of thought and intention should apply to our service-oriented decisions at all levels. All too often we have seen debate cut off in the interest of time, whether it is at a group conscience session or in a district, area, regional or intergroup service meeting. Sometimes the decision to end debate has been a wise, responsible choice. In other instances, though, practically every service body has experienced some hasty and ill-advised decisions which have had to be cleaned up later on.

While the inventory Steps, Four and Ten, are important spiritual tools for both individuals and groups at any level, it is invariably preferable to continue taking stock through repeated personal and group inventories—hence avoiding the pitfalls and messes—than it is to fix what we've broken in our haste. Over the next three years, our General Service Conference will be taking an inventory of how well it serves all those who suffer from alcoholism. At the Area Assembly level of service, we plan to do the same on October 20th of this year. Many districts and intergroups are following suit. What about your home group? When is the last time you took a group inventory?

As with any business which doesn't want to go broke, there is no wrong way to conduct an inventory. In the case of an A.A. group, though, there are a number of aids which are available to help keep the group on track in its stock-taking exercises. The pamphlet on The A.A. Group (P-16) is a good place to start. Many groups have employed service

material available for free from the [www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org) website, such as the Traditions Checklist, the Concepts Checklist, or the document Is Your Group Linked to A.A. as a Whole? as a means of guiding their self-examination. Also helpful are the free A.A. Guidelines on Finance (MG-15), which can be downloaded and printed straight from the GSO website. Intergroups might benefit from an inventory utilizing the A.A. Guidelines on Central or Intergroup Offices (MG-02).

On page 50 of Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, Bill W. notes that inventory-taking is a "lifetime practice." This principle applies not only to individuals, but also to groups, service boards, and our Fellowship as a whole. "Once this healthy practice has become grooved, it will be so interesting and profitable that the time it takes won't be missed." (12 & 12, p. 89) Let's bring our groups out of the dark and into the sunlight of the Spirit! Schedule a group inventory at your next business meeting! 

## How to Conduct a Sharing Session

A Sharing Session provides an open communication forum that encourages the widest level of sharing on an important issue. Its major goal is to ensure the right of participation for all attendees, not to reach a conclusion. Reprinted below is a memo provided free by the General Service Office; it can be accessed at [http://aa.org/en\\_pdfs/smf-111\\_en.pdf](http://aa.org/en_pdfs/smf-111_en.pdf) or visit [www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org) and type "How to Conduct a Sharing Session" in the search box. In a future issue, *The MarGenSer* will look at AA Workshops and how they differ from sharing sessions.

### How to Conduct a Sharing Session Service Material from the General Service Office Service Material from the General Service Office

The purpose of a Sharing Session is to fill a need for improved communica-

*continued on page 7...*

tion among Area committee, Districts, and Groups, thereby strengthening services in A.A. through cooperation. These sessions are called for a specific purpose requiring shared experience and ideas, in order to best serve Alcoholics Anonymous. Sharing Sessions are not designed to reach a conclusion as, say, at a regular A.A. business meeting. They are usually held where a problem has reached difficult proportions at the service level involved, and options to surmount the challenge need to be thought about.

The usual Sharing Session format provides for a "chairperson" who presents the problem to be discussed, and then asks for comments. Participants respond, usually going

around the room, speaking for no longer than a specific time agreed upon ahead of time by everyone present (perhaps 1 or 2 minutes), after which a bell is rung to indicate "time up." A participant may speak again on the same topic only after all others have shared once. He or she may then speak again, in turn. The sharing continues until all have said what they need to say on each go around the room. Remember, no one need ever be ashamed of his or her opinion.

While the sharing is taking place, a volunteer "secretary" takes down the essence of what is shared. This write-up should be both brief and informal. Since sharing on a specific topic may take an hour or more before it is exhausted, it is usually better to plan

on having only one topic per Sharing Session. Again, no individual should attempt to sum or draw conclusions at the end of a Sharing Session. Each participant will have received "food for thought." However, often it will be found that a group conscience has emerged.

To be effective, Sharing Sessions should include no more than 30 participants (larger groups can be broken into two sessions). These sessions may also be built into regular Area, District of Group meetings. Area Committees may find that Sharing Sessions foster greater interest and willingness on the part of G.S.R.s to participate. Districts and Groups may find Sharing Sessions a preferred way to discuss issues that are particularly sensitive or thorny. ▲

## MARYLAND GENERAL SERVICE, AREA 29 2012 CALENDAR

Area Committee	September 22	District 9
Area Assembly (Inventory)	October 20	_____
Fall Conference	October 25 – 28	Hagerstown, MD
Area Committee	November 17	District 28/29
Area Assembly	December 15	District 32
		St. Peter's Lutheran Church
		10301 Coastal Highway
		Ocean City, MD 21842

### THE MARGENSER IS YOUR NEWSLETTER

The Margenser Committee welcomes submissions. We are here to serve you. Submissions should be no more than 750 words and about service or recovery. Please include your first name, last initial and home group. Email all correspondence to [Margenser@marylandAA.org](mailto:Margenser@marylandAA.org) or mail to Maryland General Services, PO Box 20177, Baltimore, MD 21284-0177. The submission deadline for the next issue is October 5, 2012.

### REACHING OUT TO THE "DARK DISTRICTS"

Many of our neighbors do not actively participate in Area 29, nor are their voices heard within AA as a whole. We encourage you to reach out to those districts without active GSRs or DCMs, sharing your experience of service beyond the home group and carrying the message one-on-one. Area 29 welcomes your ideas on how we can best do this and offers our support.

# MARGENSER

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