

MARGENSER

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

Alcoholics Anonymous – A Movement, or an Institution?

Bob C., Area 29 Delegate

The Advisory Actions and Additional Considerations of the 63rd General Service Conference are concisely reported in an excellent article in this issue by one of our DCMs. I thank Don for taking care of that part of the job, which allows me to give the other part of the delegate’s report here.

According to *The A.A. Service Manual*, the purpose of that part is to convey to the membership, “What I heard, and saw, and felt.”

“What is the Future of AA – A Movement, or an Institution?” is the big concern I brought home from the Conference. This concern resulted from the sharing of one of the departing trustees at the final conference gathering. The speaker showed how movements start out as spontaneous, informal, dynamic “happenings” that are often social outliers in nature – but tend to evolve into institutions within 25 to 40 years, fully assimilated into society, with flat membership growth, codified procedures and a purpose geared toward protecting the status quo. This natural progression has been noted widely in religious denominations and social reform movements alike.

The question is, is this happening (or has it happened) to A.A.? Certainly modern day A.A. exhibits some characteristics that we see in mature “institutions.” Examples include

general acceptance of A.A. by professional communities, the passing of our first generation of members, the tendency to cite our Steps and Traditions as “rules” or to use them as qualifiers, and a flattened membership growth. And so, yes, I came home concerned.

Then I went to a meeting. At the end, a woman spoke up and said, “I’ve never been to a meeting before, and I’m not an alcoholic, but I have a friend who is. He keeps calling me up telling me he’s going to kill himself. I’m worried sick about him, and just don’t know what to do!” The chairperson responded, “Why don’t you wait around after the meeting, and some of the ladies will be happy to talk to you.” About five minutes later, during the closing prayer, I looked across the room to see *five women* huddled around this new person, completely cloaking her both physically and spiritually with pure love in action. One was talking animatedly, eye to eye with her, just as earnestly as one person can talk to another person. And the newcomer was totally immersed in what was going on!

That was when it dawned on me: *A.A. is still a movement after all! At the group level, A.A. is still face to face, informal, anonymous help, a living vestige of 1935 middle America,*

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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.

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(Alcoholics Anonymous...) continued from page 1... where neighbors help neighbors whether they know each other or not. At the group level, this is something you'd never get in a setting where you have to make an appointment, provide your personal information, prove your ability to pay, or see a professional.

Certainly, a part of A.A. – the business end – needs to be institutional in character. Certain "institutional" characteristics are actually healthy in our district committees, area assemblies, General Service Conference, Boards and corporate offices. To provide services that facilitate twelfth step work, and to produce and maintain the uniform literature that has kept our message from being distorted across the miles and years, a minimum amount of organization and structure is required. Excessive informality near the bottom of the inverted triangle would cause confusion about responsibility and authority, a loss of financial accountability, and the temptation to put personalities before principles. Legally, A.A.'s institutional component is duly sequestered from our groups, yet the two remain connected by lines of communication, so the groups can

maintain oversight and ultimate authority. And those "institutions" must always retain an awareness and practice of the spiritual nature of their mission, fostering the "movement" aspect of their need-based origin.

But in our groups, we must never lose our identity as a movement, and must always resist the temptation to behave institutionally, which can happen from time to time. We become institutional in our groups when we turn A.A. into a social club rather than a place to troll for new drunks to work the Steps with; when we talk about how another group "isn't real A.A.;" when we insist there's only one right way, and that way is ours. Fundamentalists live on both ends of the spectrum; to qualify as one, all I have to do is close my mind to the broader view.

It's healthy for our groups to have their own identities, resulting in a diversity of groups. It's ok to "do it this way here," but what's not ok is to condemn another group for doing it differently from how we think is right. I must admit this is scary for me, because I see some things going on in A.A. today that make me wonder if

A.A. can survive them. That's when Bill's response to a member in 1971 helps me out: "Your letter about the hippie problem, so-called, was mighty interesting to me. I doubt that we need to be alarmed about this situation, because there have been precedents out of the past.... Nearly all of these people, who happened to have an individual problem with alcohol, not only failed to change A.A., but, in the long run, A.A. changed them." Elsewhere in this letter, Bill addressed the question of the nonalcoholic addict in A.A. The bottom line is patience and acceptance. Faith is the antidote for fear. Faith is what I need when I fear for the future of A.A.

The challenge for A.A., as with any movement that has outlived its founders, codified its principles and become mainstreamed, is this: *What can we do to maintain the character of a movement, rather than becoming a dead institution?* How do we maintain the vim and vigor, the original spontaneity, the spiritual charisma and character of a young movement and a fellowship, and avoid the walking death of a staid institution?

Let's keep A.A., at the group level, a movement forever. ☸

General Service Matters

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

As we await the publication of the confidential Final Report from our 63rd Annual General Service Conference, we can be certain that our Conference actions affect every single member of Alcoholics Anonymous, both today and tomorrow.

The Conference addresses areas of policy and procedure, which cannot be handled by individual members, groups or local service bodies, and serves as the active voice and the effective conscience of our whole Fellowship. The General Service Conference is our week-long collective group conscience meeting acting in the best interests of Alcoholics Anonymous.

First, some of the proposed Agenda Item changes that did NOT happen:

- o No changes were made to the corporate structure of AA World Services or

the AA Grapevine.

- o The short form of Tradition Eleven needs no changes, for digital anonymity is implicit in its meaning.
- o AA cannot establish a presence on Facebook which would be consistent with AA Traditions.
- o No changes were made to the Big Book -- no index added and no edits to the dust jacket flap.
- o No changes will appear on the "Blue Card" statement about open meetings.
- o No subtitle will be added to the pamphlet "AA and the Armed Services."
- o The draft pamphlet "AA--Spiritual Not Religious" was sent back for further development and will come back to next year's Conference.
- o No changes were made to the format

of the Spanish-language Grapevine magazine, La Viña.

- o No nationwide online, searchable meeting list and locator service will be provided by GSO.
- o No change will be made to The AA Service Manual's description of an Area Assembly.
- o No changes will be made to any Public Service Announcement videos.

Next, some items of interest that DID result in Advisory Actions or Additional Considerations:

- o Conference-approved AA literature may be sold in digital form by online third-party vendors such as Barnes & Noble or Amazon.com.
- o A commemorative 75th anniversary

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- o edition of the Big Book's first edition, first printing will be published in April 2014.
- o Freely-accessible, anonymity-protected archival audio clips may be posted on the aa.org website by GSO.
- o Videos on the aa.org website will be made accessible to a wider variety of electronic devices.
- o The Grapevine may publish new compilations with the working titles "Making Amends" and "How I Found My Higher Power."
- o The theme for the 2014 Conference will be "Communicating Our Legacies - Vital in a Changing World."
- o The pamphlet "If You Are a Professional..." will clarify that group autonomy sets policy regarding signing court slips.
- o A revision of the pamphlet "A Message To Corrections Professionals" will be published this year.
- o "Gratitude expressed through contributions reaches the still-suffering alcoholic" may be added at some time in the future to the Self-Support Green Card (F-42).
- o AA members are encouraged to participate in corrections service even if they have never been incarcerated.
- o It was clarified that members do not have to be involved in General Service in order to attend a Regional Forum.
- o After the decision was made to not publish regional directories this year, needs of rural or remote members and frequent travelers will remain a concern.
- o Ways to stimulate interest in Cooperation with the Professional Community service work include suggestions such as encouraging groups to elect CPC chairs, mock CPC presentations at service workshops, and bringing AA members along on CPC presentations.
- o Special needs and accessibility concerns were discussed extensively.
- o The Area 29 proposal to add "Advisory Action" and "Additional Committee Consideration" to The AA Service Manual's Glossary of General Service Terms was viewed favorably and will appear on next year's Report & Charter Committee agenda.
- o Changes to The AA Service Manual's Glossary description of "Director (nontrustee)" will be considered.
- o New service material will be developed to assist area registrars, and draft text will be considered for Service Manual changes.
- o The Manual will be reviewed for consistency in its descriptions of Conference Committees and of services provided by GSO.
- o In December 2014, the deadline for submission of Conference Agenda Items will be changed from January 15 to December 15.

Finally, The AA Service Manual will add, on page S23, this statement on "The Principle of Rotation":

"Traditionally, rotation ensures that service positions, like nearly everything else in A.A., are passed around for all to share. Many positions have alternates who can step into the service positions if needed.

"To step out of an A.A. office we love can be hard. If we have been doing a good job, if we honestly don't see anyone else around willing, qualified, or with the time to do it, and if our friends agree, it's especially tough. But it can be a real step forward in growth--a step into the humility that is, for some people, the spiritual essence of anonymity.

"Among other things, anonymity in the Fellowship means that we forego personal prestige for any A.A. work we do to help alcoholics. And, in the spirit of Tradition Twelve, it ever reminds us 'to place principles before personalities.'

"Many outgoing service position holders find it rewarding to take time to share their experience with the incoming person. Rotation helps to bring us spiritual rewards far more enduring than any fame. With no A.A. 'status' at stake, we needn't compete for titles or praise--we have complete freedom to serve as we are needed."

The spirit of rotation is most definitely a principle that affects us all. ▲

Fall Convention 2013 Preview

By Pete S

Mark your calendar and register soon for the **29th Annual Area 29 Fall Convention, Thursday, October 24 through Sunday, October 27**, to be held at the Clarion Hotel and Conference Center, 901 Dual Highway, Hagerstown, MD 21740.

Flyers are available at all Area 29 assembly and committee meetings and may be downloaded by visiting www.marylandaa.org. Online registration begins July 1 at www.mgsconventions.org.

The Convention is hosted by Maryland General Service, Inc. with Al-Anon participation.

A diverse lineup of speakers and interactive workshops—both AA and Al-Anon—will be cornerstones of the convention. Alcathons are scheduled throughout the convention, and children's activities will be featured on Friday and Saturday.

Live entertainment, ice-cream socials, a Halloween dance, and a movie are also scheduled.

"Here's a chance to see Maryland General Service in action. You only get a chance to see the archives twice a year," says convention chair Bill H. "We have an extensive display of archives since AA was first established in Maryland at the

857 Club, in Baltimore. Here's a chance to find out where your money goes," Bill says. "Talk to the institutions chair, learn about what Maryland General Service does. Buy conference-approved AA literature. It's so much more than lively meetings and workshops; it's a chance to grow in AA, to see AAs you don't otherwise get a chance to see—to gather memories that last."

Says Don B, Area 29 liaison to the convention: "None of our speakers have ever spoken before at a Maryland convention. We also have AA and Al-Anon interactive workshops on Friday and Saturday,

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(Fall Convention Preview) continued from page 3... an impressive Alcathon schedule, lots of children's activities, and a very fun Saturday night entertainer on the program."

HISTORY OF THE AREA 29 FALL CONVENTION

Roots of the Area 29 Fall Convention go back to June, 1983, when eight young AAs climbed into two cars and drove to

Cincinnati, Ohio, to attend the International Convention of Young People in AA. [Information below includes excerpts from "Gleanings from Maryland's AA History—A Regional History of the Growth of Alcoholics Anonymous in Maryland," a pamphlet sold at Area 29 meetings.]

That trip provided the inspiration and motivation for holding the MCYPAA—Maryland Conference of Young People in AA—two years later, in Hagerstown,

MD, Oct. 28-30, 1985. From that firm foundation, MCYPAA grew to become an annual fall event, but whose name has been changed.

In 1987, it was felt that by calling the annual event the "young people's conference," traditions were being broken; in March 1988, by a decision by the Area Assembly, the name was changed to the Annual Fall Conference. In 2013, the word "conference" was changed to "convention." ▲

Elections Are Around the Corner

By Terry P, Margenser Committee

It seems amazing that we are already about to have elections again. It has been a quick cycle, one in which there has been a flurry of activity. The election assembly is still four months away, but that should give everyone a chance to think about their next jobs in Alcoholics Anonymous. My sponsor often tells me he's not sure what parts of A.A. keep him sober so he tries to do a little bit of everything. So, in October, we will elect a new Delegate, Alternate Delegate, Treasurer, Area Chair and Secretary, and not necessarily in that order. But I thought it would be important to highlight some of the things to think about if you are considering throwing your name in the hat. I will not repeat all the Duties and Qualifications here; you can find those listed in the A.A. Service Manual. There is also a list of Duties and

Responsibilities listed in the Maryland General Service Area Assembly Handbook. Some good advice I have been given is to talk to others. I think that is in the steps somewhere also. The current area officers may have some good insight for those seeking to be their replacement. I personally like to bounce things off my service sponsor and my spouse, and would do so especially if I were to think about seeking to become delegate or alternate delegate. They travel a lot. I've also seen that our current area officers come prepared. Elections at the assembly follow the third legacy procedure (P. 23 MGS Handbook, S21 Service Manual); after calling for nominations, potential candidates are afforded two minutes at the microphone to provide their qualifications. Prepared notes are effective to ensure you provide the most perti-

nent information that qualifies you to assume this duty. Upon filling each of the five Area Officer positions the new selectees can hurry up and wait until January 1, 2014 to assume their positions for the 2014-2015 cycle. I'm sure they will have plenty to do in the interim, though, as they prepare to take on these awesome responsibilities. This will be an exciting time leading up to and including the 2015 international convention in Atlanta. The incoming Delegate will attend the 64th and 65th General Service Conferences, along with a host of other conferences, conventions, meetings, assemblies and panels. Whew, I'm tired just writing about it. I hope they have time to get to a real meeting in there somewhere.

If taking on the responsibilities of an Area Officer may seem a bit much right now, remember, as we rotate out

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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

(Elections) continued from page 4...

of this cycle there will be a variety of opportunities to serve A.A. in the service committees for Area 29 Maryland General Service. From archives to literature, institutions and public information, not to mention audio and the Margenser for you creative types, quite a few jobs will need to be filled. That will be the job of the incoming Area Chair, so mosey up to them after they get elected. There are opportunities to serve as the chair or co-chair of each of the committees at the discretion of the

chair. Most committees always need as many people as they can get to help because there is a lot of work to do to help the still suffering Alcoholic. As the Responsibility Pledge states, "I want the hand of A.A. to always be there."

Finally, as we begin the last half of the year for this cycle it's a good opportunity for those of us in service positions to prepare for our eventual replacement. Our current Delegate Bob C. stated he learned a great deal for a pass-down book that Nancy B.

passed on to him, and I know Bob provided the same for David R. who assumed the treasurer position from him. We have a lot of legacies in A.A., and adding to the work of those who came before us is a tradition that keeps A.A. strong. I personally have been proud to work among all of the Area 29 servants and look forward to the next A.A. members who take service positions this fall. It feels good to be a part of something that is much more powerful than me. And maybe that's the part that keeps me sober. ▲

Big Book Secrets

By Ron M, Area 29 Alternate Delegate

Initially the reading and study of the "Big Book" of Alcoholics Anonymous would seem to be a description of a fairly simple program designed by a man who admitted to having a problem, and searching, found a personal solution, and solicited others to follow his path to sobriety. In so doing, he encouraged his new found friends and companions to put pen to paper and share their stories. The combination of his description of the program and the personal stories became known as the "BIG BOOK"

A recent New York press release (July 27,2012) from the Public Information Desk at the General Service Office of Alcoholics Anonymous announced that "A.A.'s Big Book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, named by the Library of Congress as one of the "Books That Shaped America". This announcement apparently was not sufficiently important to be publicized in every periodical around the country. It is further stated that "It's never been on the New York Times Best Seller List. Yet the "Big Book," A.A. members' fond name for the book

Alcoholics Anonymous, is now designated by the Library of Congress as one of the 88 "Books that Shaped America," and is included in the library's new exhibition.

While doing some research on the evolution of the "Big Book" I uncovered an interesting item pertaining to one of the stories in the First Edition, First Printing. It is commonly thought that stories used in the "Big Book" were written by A.A. members who had gotten sober by way of some personal contact by other members. There was, however, one exception. As details for publication approached, Bill W. and the New York contingent received a letter from a man who resided in California. Apparently, as the distribution of the manuscript made its way among the clergy and medical profession for comment, one of the doctors drafted an article in a medical journal that was noticed by a distraught mother whose son had a serious drinking problem. Although she resided in the Midwest, her son resided in California. She discussed her concern with the doctor who in

turn contacted A.A. in New York. Consequently, the folks in New York became intrigued and communication between the parties commenced and a copy of the pre-publication was forwarded to the son who apparently read it completely. He responded that because of this new program he was now sober and attributed his alcoholism "cure" to his reading of the yet to be published book. The folks in New York made the point that this was the first time that there was success without a face to face meeting, commonly known as twelve stepping. Excitement reigned over this new development and this new A.A. member was contacted and was asked if his story could be used in the new book about to be published. Permission was granted by way of a wire and the book went to press. After publication the decision was made to invite the newly recovered alcoholic to New York for a visit since he was the only member that had found recovery without a face to face twelve step intervention. Arrangements were made and he was sent funds for a bus

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(Big Book Secrets) continued from page 5...

ticket. On the day of arrival Bill W. and a few others from the New York office were at the bus station as a welcoming party. The bus arrived and the passengers started to disembark but there was no sign of the expected guest. The bus driver was queried and he replied that he did not know who it was, however there was a guy in the back of the bus who had been drunk most of the trip. It soon became obvious that the unknown drunk was the expected visitor whose name was Pat Cooper. He subsequently returned to California and the last known sighting reported that he had returned to the bottle. As a result of these events the story of Pat Cooper, "Lone Endeavor", was dropped from subsequent printings.

From time to time my interest in the origins of the "Big Book" leads me to some very interesting tidbits. While reading some material that I had acquired by way of friends in my home group, I found a letter and some notes that had been drafted by Ruth Hock wherein she casually stated that the "Big Book" would not have been written without Bill, and it would not have been published without Hank. And Hank wrote, except for the opening paragraph, the chapter "To Employers". I quickly got my "Big Book" and flipped to that chapter, and sure enough, there was the evidence that had gone unnoticed by me and numerous others for years. The opening paragraph is certainly drafted as an introduction by Bill and then the whole style changes and it is obvious

another person is narrating the remaining portion. It is to be noted that there is a key phrase present that indicates that Bill is allowing another to continue writing. That phrase is "But let him tell you". According to Ruth Hock that person was "Hank Parkhurst", AA#2 in New York.

Now the question appeared to be: "Are there other portions of the "Big Book" that had different authors? A page by page search revealed that there was indeed another section that had a similar phrase, page 40 "Let him tell you about it". The rest of the chapter is written in the first person and talks about a member called Fred. It turns out that Fred was actually "Harry Brick," and his story "A Different Slant" only appears in the first edition. ▲

Why Do I Do It?

By Tom R, As Bill Sees It Group, Berlin, MD

For many months, even up to a year and a half in early sobriety I struggled with the spiritual concept of recovery from alcoholism. Then being a black-and-white type of person and rapidly grasping only the tangible evidence of recovery, I could not see the spiritual for the simplicity of the Steps. After saying an earnest and simple prayer of, "God, tell me what to do" while driving on I-97 one day, a physical sense of a weight being lifted from me and an overwhelming sense of ease coming over me at that moment was a spiritual experience. There was a Power greater than myself that had been restoring me to sanity and on that day I began to put a name to the God of my understanding.

From the Appendix "Spiritual Experience" in "Alcoholics

Anonymous," "Most of us think this awareness of a Power greater than ourselves is the essence of spiritual experience." Little had I realized, until after the fact as with most personal experiences that the promise that my whole attitude and outlook on life would change, had happened and is happening. This I suspect a result of working the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous, and not drinking. As my sponsor has most simply put it, the most spiritual thing an alcoholic can do is not pick up a drink.

Seeing past the tangible and in the experience of being, the simple actions of how I stay sober has also defined, and defines my spiritual experience – talking to another alcoholic on a daily basis, carrying the message, attending meetings, and service work. The intrinsic

value of sharing with another alcoholic, greeting people at my home group, going to a business meeting, and participating in Alcoholics Anonymous is that I get to stay sober. These actions and simple reasons are summed up in "Dr. Bob's Nightmare:"

"I spend a great deal of time passing on what I learned to others who want and need it badly. I do it for four reasons:

1. Sense of duty.
2. It is a pleasure.
3. Because in doing so I am paying my debt to the man who took time to pass it on to me.
4. Because every time I do it I take out a little more insurance for myself against a possible slip."

p 180-181 Alcoholics Anonymous ▲

MARYLAND GENERAL SERVICE AREA 29 2013 CALENDAR

MD State Convention	June 13 – 16	Hagerstown, MD
Area Committee	July 13	District 36
Area Assembly	August 10	District 31
Area Committee	September 21	District 40
Area Assembly (Elections)	October 19	District 22
Fall Convention	Oct 24-27	Hagerstown, MD
Area Committee	November 16	District 32
Area Assembly	December 14	District 37

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 or mail to Maryland General Services, PO Box 20177, Baltimore, MD 21284-0177. The submission deadline for the next issue is September 23, 2013.

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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