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# OUR COMMON WELFARE

Fostering Unity and Carrying the A.A. Message in Area 29 Maryland General Service

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## *The* 76TH GENERAL SERVICE CONFERENCE

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By: Frank M, Newsletter Chair

**T**his summer, Area 29 has a story worth telling. Every year, our Area 29 Delegate walks into a room in Midtown Manhattan carrying the voices of Maryland's AA groups. The voices and opinions from every GSR report, every CARC discussion, every group conscience are represented amongst a group of people who help shape the future of Alcoholics Anonymous worldwide.

This issue is about that journey.

The 76th General Service Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous took place from April 26th to May 2nd, 2026. The theme was "Humility in Action."

Inside these pages, you'll find the 76th General Service Conference brought to life. Not policy summaries or procedural footnotes, but the human experience of trusted servants doing extraordinary work on behalf of ordinary alcoholics who still need what this program offers.

We begin with the words that explain why the Conference exists at all. From there, you'll travel alongside our

Delegate Lori as she arrives in New York, finds her footing in committee rooms, and stands at the microphone when it matters most. You'll learn what the Conference's decisions actually mean for your home group — in plain language, without the jargon.

Then we come home to Maryland. DCMs discovering they can do more than they imagined. Carroll County alcoholics cooking breakfast on a single stovetop. The 12 Concepts showing up, unexpectedly, in a preteen's bedroom. And Brigitte finding a meeting behind a big wooden door in Prague.

This issue is about the big picture and the small moments, and how, in AA, they turn out to be the same thing.

Welcome to Summer!

The Conference was for all of us.

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# WHY WE NEED A CONFERENCE

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## A MESSAGE FROM 1954

By: Bernard B.

*The late Bernard B. Smith, nonalcoholic, then chairperson of the board of trustees, and one of the architects of the Conference structure, answered that question superbly in his opening talk at the 1954 meeting:*

**W**e may not need a General Service Conference to ensure our own recovery. We do need it to ensure the recovery of the alcoholic who still stumbles in the darkness one short block from this room. We need it to ensure the recovery of a child being born tonight, destined for alcoholism. We need it to provide, in keeping with our Twelfth Step, a permanent haven for all alcoholics who, in the ages ahead, can find in A.A. that rebirth that brought us back to life.

We need it because we, more than all others, are conscious of the devastating effect of the human urge for power and prestige which we must ensure can never invade A.A. We need it to ensure A.A. against government, while insulating it against anarchy; we need it to protect A.A. against disintegration while preventing over-integration. We need it so that Alcoholics Anonymous, and Alcoholics Anonymous alone, is the ultimate repository of its Twelve Steps, its Twelve Traditions, and all of its services.

We need it to ensure that changes within A.A. come only as a response to the needs and the wants of all A.A., and not of any few. We need it to ensure that the doors of the halls of A.A. never have locks on them, so that all people for all time who have an alcoholic problem may enter these halls unasked and feel welcome. We need it to ensure that Alcoholics Anonymous never asks of anyone who needs us what his or her race is, what his or her creed is, what his or her social position is.



## BERNARD B. SMITH

Bernard B. Smith (1901–1970) was an international attorney and one of the most consequential non-alcoholic figures in AA's early history.

He joined the General Service Board in 1944 and served as its chairman from 1951 to 1956, during which time he was a principal architect of the first General Service Conference — the structure that gave AA members democratic voice in their own fellowship.

Queen Elizabeth II honored him as a Commander of the Order of the British Empire for his work in Anglo-American relations. He was, in Bill Wilson's words, proof that those who had never suffered from alcoholism could nonetheless understand it deeply — and serve it faithfully.



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# IMPORTANT DEFINITIONS

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## THE LINGO OF AA GENERAL SERVICE CONFERENCES

**T**he General Service Conference has its own vocabulary. If you've ever sat through a Delegate report wondering what exactly an Advisory Action is – or how it differs from a Floor Action – you're not alone. Here's a quick reference to keep in your back pocket.

### Advisory Action

An **Advisory Action** is a **formal decision of the General Service Conference**. It is the closest thing AA has to a “group conscience of the whole Fellowship.”

- It requires a **two-thirds vote** of the full Conference.
- It becomes **guidance** for AA World Services, the General Service Board, and the Fellowship.
- It carries **strong spiritual weight** because it reflects the collective conscience of AA.

### Committee Consideration

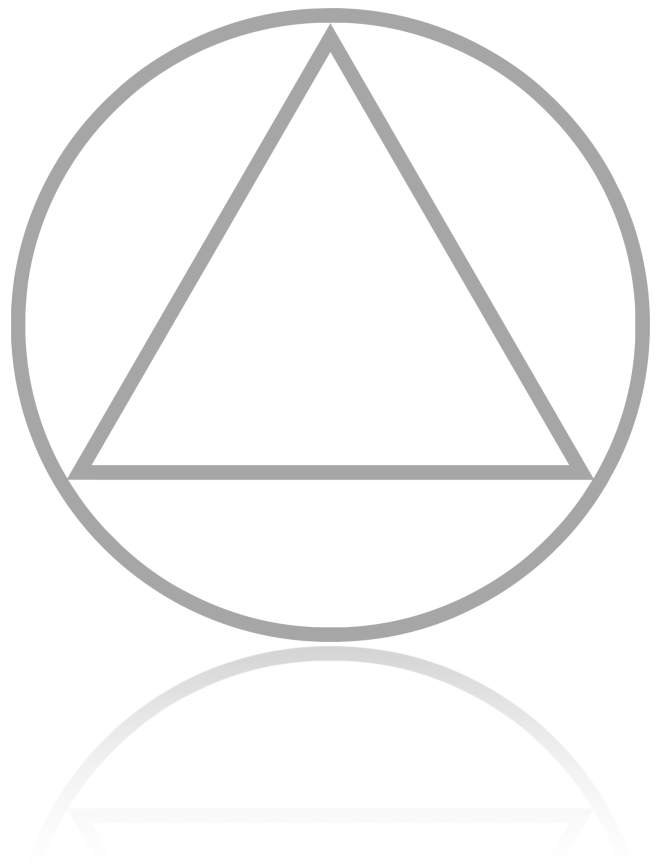
A **Committee Consideration** is a **statement, suggestion, or direction** from a Conference committee that does *not* require a full Conference vote.

- It reflects the committee's thinking or concerns.
- It often asks AAWS, the Board, or staff to **continue work, gather more information, or report back next year**.
- It does **not** change AA policy or literature on its own.

### Floor Action

A **Floor Action** is a motion made by a Conference member **during the full Conference session**, not through the committee process.

- It must be **new business**, not something already addressed by a committee.
- It requires a simple majority to be considered, then a two-thirds vote to become an Advisory Action.
- It is used sparingly – often for urgent or overlooked matters.



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# THE AREA 29 MINI-CONFERENCE

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## THE CONFERENCE BEFORE THE CONFERENCE

By: Joe R.

The Area 29 Mini Conference brings Maryland A.A. members together to share experience and shape an informed group conscience that guides our Delegate at the General Service Conference...and I had never planned one before. By custom, the role of Mini Conference Chair falls to the Alternate Delegate, and I was more than a little intimidated by the task of putting together an event I had attended and participated in many times throughout my sobriety and involvement in General Service. It was an event I had always thought of as something special, and I wanted to make sure it felt that way for everyone who showed up.

The Mini Conference, along with our five Conference Agenda Review Committee (CARC) meetings, is the culmination of our Area's pre-Conference agenda review process, bringing the Area's collective voice to the Conference. It's a process that I love, and I wanted there to be strong participation and open communication, knowing that they lead to unity.

The planning process started in late October 2025, right after I was elected Alternate Delegate, but before I had officially rotated into the position. At that time, I selected the date, location, and time for the event, while the actual agenda for the Mini Conference began to take shape as I traveled across the state from January through March, encouraging participation, and coordinating and attending the Conference Agenda Review Committee (CARC) meetings. I didn't want it to be a "Super-CARC", strictly speaking, but I knew I wanted to include several items from each CARC that had resonated across the Area, and that's exactly what

happened. We had presenters from each CARC, ten in all, reviewing twelve of the Final Conference Agenda items.

I thought it was important to start the day in a way that reminded us why we were there in the first place, so I chose to begin with an A.A. meeting and to include the story of someone involved in Maryland General Service. We spend hours together every month, but we don't always know how each of us got here. Our speaker was Tyler J., Area 29 Literature Chair, who shared his experience in both recovery and service.

I wanted to include a speaker from the General Service Board, to help connect our work in Area 29 to the broader Fellowship. And, honestly, I thought it would lend a bit of gravitas to the day. So, I was thrilled when Julie C., a non-trustee director of Alcoholics Anonymous World Services and Chair of the Self-Support Subcommittee on Finance, accepted our invitation and

agreed to join us virtually. Julie spoke about the importance of self-support in A.A., offering insight on how contributions from our groups sustain services, and

sharing an update on the current financial health of A.A. as a whole. Julie also shared parts of her personal story, reminding us that before many of us understand self-support, we benefit from it. Her experience helped connect the financial side of A.A. to the real lives it touches, members finding meetings, receiving literature, and realizing they are not alone

In another part of the day, we held a working session designed to give participants a Conference committee experience. Members stepped into the role of the Conference Finance Committee, reviewing the Self-Support packet and discussing how

*"If you want to be part of it,  
there's a seat waiting for you."*



In the end, the Mini Conference did what it was meant to do. It brought together the shared experience of Area 29 and helped shape an informed group conscience that our Delegate can carry to the General Service Conference.

Our Delegate will be visiting to give report-backs, sharing how the specific agenda items were discussed and acted upon at the General Service Conference. These reconvening meetings are an opportunity to close the loop, to hear what happened, to ask questions, and to stay connected to the process. They also give members a chance to learn about and take part in submitting Proposed Agenda Items for next year's Conference, keeping that cycle of participation and service going.

If you want to be part of it, there's a seat waiting for you.

Joe R. is Panel 76 Alternate Delegate

effectively it communicated A.A.'s message of self-support. Participants shared ideas in small groups, identified what worked and what did not, and reported back, giving a sense of the Conference process and how participation and communication come together to form an informed group conscience.

And we ate Pop Tarts for breakfast and pizza for lunch!

It was a good meeting in my head as I drove around the state thinking about it, but I still wondered how it would come together once we were all in the room.

By the end of the day, what stood out most to me wasn't any one presentation or discussion (or the pizza), but the spirit of participation and willingness in the room. With 55 members present and another 30 joining virtually, people showed up, shared honestly, listened to one another, and contributed to something greater than themselves. It reminded me that this is how A.A. works, not through any one person, but through all of us, coming together in service. The room just had a good sound and feel to it..

I'm especially grateful to the Mini Conference Committee, whose time, energy, and dedication made the day possible. From attending planning meetings to managing logistics, providing outreach, and arriving early to setup, their willingness to serve was evident in every part of the event.

## Mini Conference By The Numbers

***55 members present***

***30 joining virtually***

***10 presenters***

***12 agenda items reviewed***

***5 CARCs represented***

***1 really good pizza lunch***



# INSIDE THE 76TH GENERAL SERVICE CONFERENCE

## YOUR AREA 29 DELEGATE'S PERSPECTIVE

**An interview with Lori McP, Area 29 Panel 76 Delegate**

The 76th General Service Conference was more than a week of business sessions and agenda items — it was a living demonstration of AA's spiritual principles in action. This year, Area 29's Panel 76 Delegate, Lori McP, carried our voice into the heart of AA's decision-making process with clarity, courage, and deep humility. What follows is a behind-the-scenes look at her experience: the awe of arrival, the intensity of committee work, the emotional moments on the floor, and the spiritual unity that emerged as the Conference found its collective conscience. For many of us who have never seen the inside of the Conference, Lori's story offers a rare window into how AA continues to grow, adapt, and serve — one trusted servant at a time.

### **ARRIVAL, AWE & THE MOMENT IT BECAME REAL**

When Lori stepped off the train at Penn Station, nothing felt unusual. She'd been to New York plenty of times. But when she checked into her midtown hotel — a notable step up from her previous stays in Jersey City — something shifted.

She opened the door to her room on the 27th floor, walked to the window, and looked out over the Manhattan skyline.

"I looked out over midtown and thought: Oh my God... I made it."

That moment — quiet, private, and overwhelming — was the first time the weight of her responsibility as Area 29's Panel 76 Delegate truly landed.

### **A FELLOWSHIP-FILLED BEGINNING**

Before the business began, a Class B (alcoholic) trustee organized a full day of fellowship for any delegate who wanted to join:

- A tour of GSO
- A meeting at the office
- A trip to 182 Clinton Street
- Brooklyn AA history sites
- Dinner
- A meeting at the historic Greenwich Village Group
- Cannolis afterward

Lori was able to catch up with the tour group in Greenwich Village and shared a regular AA meeting with some Delegates and Trustees, as well as AA members who were still counting days. It was a gentle, human-sized welcome into what would become the most intense week of service in her life.

### **THE MEET & GREET & THE SHIFT INTO SERVICE MODE** **THE MEET & GREET: WHERE IT BECAME REAL**

Saturday night's Meet & Greet was where the responsibility hit like a wave.

The agenda simply said "Meet & Greet." No details. No hints.

Lori arrived "fashionably late" at 7:15 PM — only to find **200 people already jammed into a hallway.**

Delegates. Trustees. Staff. Everyone.

“I came down the stairs and just said, ‘Oh \* \* \* \*.’ That’s when it hit me: I’m at the Conference.”

There was even a **side room for introverts**, which instantly helped her find “her people.”

#### THE EMOTIONAL TEMPERATURE OF THE ROOM

The energy was electric – not chaotic, not overwhelming, but charged with purpose. Delegates from across the U.S. and Canada were meeting each other for the first time, exchanging pins, shaking hands, and beginning the week-long process of becoming a spiritual body.

#### THE WORK BEHIND THE WORK: COMMITTEES WHERE THE REAL WORK HAPPENS

One of Lori’s biggest surprises was how much of the Conference’s real work happens in committee.

Her committee – **Finance** – met for **nine hours** over the course of two days.

Every committee did the same.

These weren’t superficial discussions. These were deep, substantive, sometimes emotional conversations about the future of AA.

“These were real conversations. Real disagreements. Real group conscience.”

#### COMMITTEES AS SPIRITUAL ENTITIES

Lori watched something remarkable happen: each committee formed its own group conscience. Delegates who had never met before began to trust each other, challenge each other, and ultimately unite around shared principles.

#### THE CONFERENCE FINDS ITS FEET

By Thursday, Lori said, the entire Conference had become a spiritual entity.

“By Thursday, you could almost predict how the room would move – not politically, but spiritually.”

By Friday, everyone was crying.

#### A CONFERENCE THAT CHOSE KINDNESS A DIFFERENT TONE THAN EXPECTED

Lori had heard rumors that recent Conferences were tense, even toxic. She expected conflict.

Instead, she found unity.

- No censure motions
- No personal attacks
- No grandstanding
- No cruelty at the mic
- No attempts to “fire the board”
- No delegates using the mic to vent

The first day was devoted to spiritual grounding – how the delegates would treat each other. Lori’s “Type A brain” resisted at first, but it worked.

#### THE 75’S MODELED IT. THE 76’S LIVED IT.

The outgoing Panel 75 delegates modeled healthy behavior. The incoming Panel 76 delegates brought their own positive energy, creating a Conference grounded in spiritual principles across the board.

“People hugged it out at the end of the week. It felt optimistic for the future.”

The Conference was not just functional – it was spiritually aligned.

#### THE BIG BOOK MOMENT: COURAGE ON THE FLOOR THE FLASHPOINT EVERYONE EXPECTED

Lori reviewed the draft of the Fifth Edition Big Book, starting on Tuesday night of Conference week. The breadth and depth of the variety of A.A. members represented in the 26 new stories was remarkable. It was clear, though, that the demographics of some of the members might create some pushback.

And it did.

The very first Delegate onto the mic argued that certain stories from A.A. members who are transgender or gender nonconforming should be removed because they were “not representative.”

Earlier in the week, a transgender delegate had come out at the mic. Lori went to the mic and poured her heart out about how important these stories would be. Other delegates stood up to voice their support for all of the stories, all of the changes, and what this new edition of the Big Book would mean to the alcoholic who still hasn’t found the rooms.

The Stories Stayed

After a few hours of discussion, a vote was taken. The Fifth Edition of the Big Book was approved for publication. The full set of **26 stories** – including those from trans members, young people, people of color, immigrants, and online-sobriety AA members – will be included.

#### **THE UNEXPECTED EARTHQUAKE: REMOVING “ESKIMO” A RECOMMENDATION NO ONE SAW COMING**

In addition to recommending the approval of the Fifth Edition draft, the Conference Literature Committee recommended removing the word “**Eskimo**” from the first 164 pages.

Lori’s first reaction was the same as many AA members:

We don’t touch the first 164.

But then she listened.

#### **THE TESTIMONY THAT CHANGED MINDS**

A First Nations delegate from Ontario shared how painful that word is for Inuit members. Another Canadian delegate told the story of Ashley, a young First Nations woman who struggled to stay in AA because of it.

Lori’s mind changed in real time.

“I didn’t need to ask my area for permission to consider the humanity of my fellow AA members.”

The vote wasn’t close.

The Twelve and Twelve Too

In the course of the discussion, a Delegate went to the mic and advised the Conference that the word also appears in the *Twelve and Twelve*. In the end, a floor action was brought to remove the E-word from the 8<sup>th</sup> Tradition essay in the 12 & 12, and that passed, as well.

#### **FINANCE, TRANSPARENCY & WHAT AREA 29 SHOULD KNOW WHAT LORI FOUND IN FINANCE**

Lori entered the Finance Committee expecting to find mismanagement.

She found none.

- The Board has lowered expenses as income has dropped
- Projects have been postponed responsibly

- The CFO was present and answered the Committee’s questions the entire time
- Every question was answered transparently
- No hidden numbers
- No thumb on the scale

“The stewardship is solid. The transparency is real.”

#### **WHAT AREA 29 SHOULD KNOW**

Your voices mattered.

Lori used input from GSRs and members throughout the CARC process.

You are one degree of separation from the Conference. The lifeline only works when groups participate.

#### **HOW THE EXPERIENCE CHANGED HER A WEEK THAT TRANSFORMED HER**

Lori left the Conference exhausted – she fell asleep at Yankee Stadium afterward – but transformed.

“I am so in love with AA now. I’ve doubled and tripled down.”

She is ready for the year ahead, ready to serve as Conference Finance Chair, and ready to help the next generation of trusted servants.

#### **A FINAL WORD**

The 76th General Service Conference was not just a week of business. It was a week of spiritual awakening, emotional courage, and unity in action.

Lori carried Area 29’s voice with integrity, clarity, and heart – and she brought back a story worth telling.

As Lori returned home – exhausted, grateful, and transformed – she carried with her not only the outcomes of the Conference but the spirit of the week itself: a spirit of unity, courage, transparency, and love for Alcoholics Anonymous. Her experience reminds us that the Conference is not some distant body; it is an extension of our groups, our voices, and our shared responsibility to keep AA strong for the next suffering alcoholic. The work done in New York this year will echo across our meetings, our service structure, and our fellowship for years to come. And thanks to Lori’s dedication, Area 29 was fully present in that room where it happens. To see her report back to Area 29, you may find it at [www.marylandaa.org](http://www.marylandaa.org) in the delegate corner.



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# CLOSER THAN YOU THINK

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## WHAT THE 76TH GSC MEANS FOR YOUR HOME GROUP

By: Frank McF

### 1. DELEGATE EXPENSE SUPPORT INCREASED

The suggested area contribution for Delegate expenses rose from **\$2,200 to \$3,000**. **Why it matters:** Area 29 groups may see this reflected in future budget discussions. It reinforces the principle that *we* – not outside sources – fund our trusted servants.

### 2. FIFTH EDITION OF *ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS* APPROVED

A new edition of the Big Book is coming, with minor editorial updates.

**Why it matters:** Groups may want to prepare for literature changes, especially for newcomers and meeting formats that quote specific passages.

### 3. LANGUAGE UPDATES IN AA LITERATURE

The term “Eskimo” will be replaced with neutral language in both the *Big Book* and the *Twelve & Twelve*.

**Why it matters:** This reflects AA’s ongoing effort to ensure our literature is respectful and accessible to all. Groups using readings that quote these sections may eventually update scripts.

### 4. MEMBERSHIP SURVEY PILOT

A 2026 Membership Survey pilot was approved, exploring ways to include unlisted groups.

**Why it matters:** Maryland groups – especially online or special-focus groups – may be invited to participate. It’s a chance to help AA better understand who we are today.

### 5. SELF-SUPPORT PAMPHLET UPDATE

“Self-Support: Where Money and Spirituality Mix” will now clarify how groups can support **Grapevine/La Viña** through subscriptions and Carry the Message projects.

**Why it matters:** Groups can better understand how supporting AA’s “meeting in print” fits into the Seventh Tradition.

### 6. NEW SERVICE MANUAL FAQ

A new FAQ addresses what to do when a group doesn’t want to hear its GSR report.

**Why it matters:** This gives GSRs in Area 29 practical tools for sharing information while respecting group conscience and anonymity.

### 7. ANIMATED TWELVE STEPS VIDEO APPROVED

AAWS will produce an animated version of *The Twelve Steps Illustrated*.

**Why it matters:** This could become a helpful tool for treatment centers, newcomers, and accessibility-focused groups in Maryland.

### 8. DELEGATE REPORT PRINTING OPTION

AAWS may offer a printed Final Conference Report for purchase.

**Why it matters:** Groups that prefer physical copies – especially for archives or GSR binders – may want to order early, as printing may end after 2027.

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# BEING A DCM

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## OH, THE PLACES YOU WILL GO

By: Tiffany K.

When I first arrived in Alcoholics Anonymous, I only knew about my meeting which was 1.7 miles from my home. I quickly learned that A.A. goes far beyond that when my sponsor told me to show up to the district meeting. That was much further than 1.7 miles from my home and a far bigger concept than I could understand. It was also in North Carolina, which is where I lived for the first 30 years of my life. I got assigned a service job and off I went to fulfill my responsibilities to the program.

Fast forward a few years, I moved to Carroll County here in Maryland and got involved at the district level, just like my sponsor taught me. I began to see how the district operated as I attended the monthly meetings. For someone that got “Needs Improvement” on the section labeled “Works well with others” on every report card as a child, I felt like I really fit in there. Okay, okay, maybe not on the first day. I had to put myself out there. I had to introduce myself and learn how everything happened. I got involved. I learned how to do things I was uncomfortable with. Now, I call that growth.

As 2025 ended, I thought (MAYBE) I would want to be treasurer of the district. The DCM (District Committee Member) approached me to take on his position. I was absolutely floored. I thought I needed more experience. I thought that people that had been in A.A. or the district longer could do a better job. I thought someone that needed improvement working with others couldn't represent a district and attend the Area business meetings. In my panic, I took a breath. I prayed. I sought the opinions of my sponsor, my husband, and my service sponsor. I wrote up 10 questions to ask the DCM. After I asked him those questions over coffee, I had a thought that I could (MAYBE) do this.

I was elected DCM for District 9 Carroll County last November. Elected is a strong word, since no one else stood for the position. But there I was. Now, the work began. I was standing in a district meeting of 30 alcoholics looking at me as a trusted servant. I set off on a course of phone calls, meetings in person and virtually, and driving to Severna Park for monthly Area meetings. I made connections at the Area level and got involved there, too. As usual, I had no idea what I was doing. I asked questions. I introduced myself. I got uncomfortable and involved. Growth.

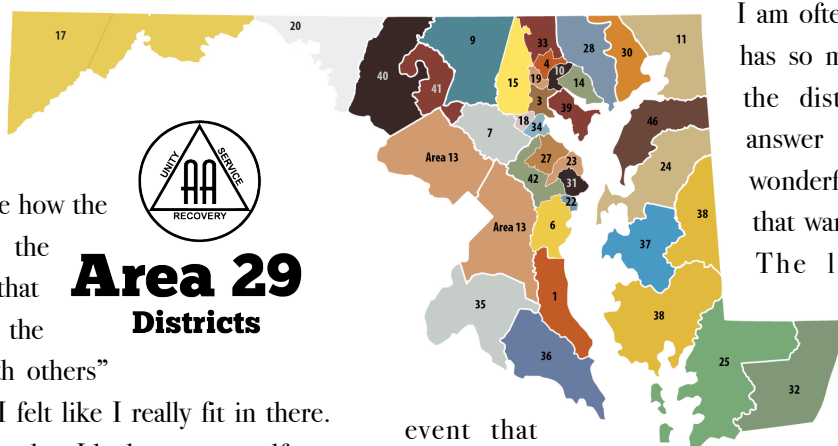
I am often asked how District 9 has so many people involved at the district level. The short answer is that I inherited a wonderful group of alcoholics that want to carry the message.

The long answer is the intergroups are not in our backyards. If we want an A.A. isn't 30-60 minutes one on ourselves. We just do it.

event that away, we have to put do it.

I started sponsoring a woman who had been sober for seven years and never attended a district meeting. I did exactly what my first sponsor told me. I told her to go to a district meeting. She was uncomfortable and unsure what was being discussed. Guess what happened? She learned. She grew. Now, she tells the women she sponsors to go to the district meeting. And so, the district grows.

There is a lot I've learned in Alcoholic Anonymous. Through being DCM, I've found that people will help me. I just need to ask.



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# SPIRITUAL FELLOWSHIP

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## WITH BACON!

By: Tiffany K.

In Alcoholics Anonymous meetings around the world, we gather in rooms with coffee for our daily relief from alcoholism. Once a year, in Carroll County (District 9), we gather together for coffee, hot breakfast, and a spiritual experience. It is a hot ticket and always sells out.

As we arrive at 6am to begin cooking, we discover the ovens are not working. We only have a stove top. As eight alcoholics gather around a gas stove with a lighter and a prayer, reality sets in. We have breakfast casseroles, bacon, and biscuits to cook. What are we going to do? We do exactly as we are

taught at the beginning of our A.A. journey. We call another alcoholic and asked for help. We load up the food, ask our helpers to preheat the oven, and we are on our way. All the food arrives back at 8:28am. Breakfast begins at 8:30am. We did it.

The room is full and loud. The fresh food aromas make my stomach growl. Before I can grab my plate, there are so many hugs to receive and give. I feel welcome. I feel at home. I am with my people.



I fill my plate with breakfast goodies. I have my 50/50 raffle tickets (spoiler alert: I did not win). I have spotted the speaker across the room. I enjoy the bustling room of full-bellied alcoholics. Once everyone has had their fill of the buffet line, the moment has arrived for the speaker to take us on a journey of what it was like, what happened, and what it's like now. With 36 years of sobriety, he is a success story that would not have

happened without one alcoholic reaching out their hand to him.

Our spiritual breakfast is about so much more than just the food. It's about spiritual nourishment for the mind and soul. By the end of the meeting, we have a sense of guidance, of peace, of direction, and of gratitude. Guidance for the next right action. Peace at the end of the day.

Direction in good and bad times. Gratitude that we didn't have to drink today.

Alcoholics come together for a purpose. Sometimes that purpose is to save a life. Sometimes that purpose is to give an unsuspecting alcoholic with a working oven the opportunity of service work at 7am. Whatever the reason, if you need a solution, ask an alcoholic for help.

It might just save both your lives.



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# WHAT'S MINE AND WHAT'S HERS

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## HOW THE 12 CONCEPTS BECAME MY PARENTING GUIDE

By: Holly S.

She grew inside me completely dependent on everything I had to give. When she arrived in the world she looked at me like I was all of it, her whole universe. My baby bear. Then came the toddler years, that first loud declaration of independence, which I will be honest I did not enjoy. But I survived them. What I was not prepared for was this: the preteen years, when the little girl who once reached for my hand started reaching for something I could not give her...Herself.

student government representative to a leadership conference, responsible for her own clothes, her own sleep schedule, her own hygiene, her own everything. She handled it. Mostly. There was a suitcase full of dirty laundry that sat unopened in her room for a week before I found it. But she got herself there and back, represented her school, and came home proud.

She is almost 12 years old. Some mornings she won't get out of bed. Won't get dressed. Won't press the start button on the treadmill.



It took the 12 Concepts of A.A. to help me understand that my job was never to hold on. It was always to let go, carefully, one piece at a time.

My daughter came home from Ocean City this past March, right before spring break, with her dignity intact. She had gone as a

I spent a long time trying to reconcile those two people. The emerging leader who travels independently and represents her school, and the stubborn child who has to be coaxed through every step of a 7am run. I kept looking for a parenting book that could explain the gap. It turns out I already had one.

## **A MODEL FOR PARENTING**

The 12 Concepts of A.A. were written to guide the structure of our fellowship, not to be gathering dust in the back of our literature. Most of us assume they belong to people who attend area assemblies and general service conferences. But lately I have found them to be the clearest guide I have for one of the hardest questions of raising a child into an adult: what's mine, and what's hers?

Below is my attempt to translate AA's 12 Traditions and Concepts into practical guides for parenting.

### **DELEGATING AUTHORITY AS SHE GROWS: CONCEPTS 3 AND 4**

Concept 3 establishes the Right of Decision, the idea that each part of the structure needs clearly defined authority to function well. Concept 4 establishes the Right of Participation, ensuring everyone has a voice proportional to their responsibility. Together they gave me a question I return to almost daily: is this mine to manage, or is this hers to own?

The running is a good example. She wants to be a runner. She does better in school on the days she runs. But I cannot make her want it at 7am. I cannot make her get out of bed, or get dressed, or press the start button on the treadmill. That part is hers. What is mine is the phone she uses while she runs. Those two things live in the same space, and that is not a punishment.

It is just the honest logic of how our household works. She owns the commitment. I own the conditions.

When she went to Ocean City, I handed her an entire list of things that used to be mine to manage. Her clothes. Her bedtime. Her phone. Her hygiene. And she carried all of it. Mostly. That wasn't luck. That was years of slowly moving the line, delegating a little more authority each time she showed she was ready for it.

The Concepts taught me that holding on too long isn't protection. It's interference.

### **THE RIGHT TO PUSH BACK: CONCEPT 5**

Concept 5 establishes the Right of Appeal, ensuring that minority opinion will be heard and that dissent has a legitimate place in any healthy structure.

There was a morning recently when my daughter decided she didn't want to go to a rehearsal for festival band, a group she had

worked hard to make. The reward at the end of the season is an overnight trip to perform at Busch Gardens and stay at Great Wolf Lodge. I felt the old pull to negotiate, to convince, to manage her across the finish line. Instead, I said something quieter: this is a commitment, and your director and teammates are counting on you. This one is yours.

She showed up 20 minutes late. Oboe in hand. Probably a little dramatic about it. But she went.

The 20 minutes was her appeal. Her protest. Her way of registering the minority opinion before honoring the commitment anyway. I used to take that personally. Now I understand it. She is learning that she can push back and still show up. That is not defiance. That is integrity in formation.

### **LEADING WITHOUT UNQUALIFIED AUTHORITY: CONCEPTS 9 AND 12**

Concept 9 tells us that good service leaders are indispensable, and that leadership must be assumed rather than simply inherited. Concept 12 reminds us that no one should ever be placed in a position of unqualified authority over others, and that all important decisions are reached through discussion and, whenever possible, substantial unanimity.

A preteen will find every trace of unqualified authority in a parent's approach and walk straight toward it. She used to think I had all the answers. She doesn't anymore, and she's right. My job was never to be the answer. It was always to help her find her own.

Some days I do that well. Some days I am still standing in the hallway watching a child who won't get out of bed, won't get dressed, won't press the start button, and I know I have wandered back across the line into her territory again.

But I have a framework now. A question I can return to in any hard moment.

*What's mine here, and what belongs to her?*

I spent a long time looking for a book that could guide me through these years. It turns out Bill W. already wrote it.

It's just filed under General Service.

By Holly S. District 31 DCM

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# FEELING AT HOME IN A.A.

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## AND AROUND THE WORLD

By: Bridgitte F.

My husband and I have always enjoyed traveling. Since getting sober a few 24 hours ago, I enjoy attending A.A. meetings in our destination cities and towns whenever possible. It's always a highlight, especially when these meetings are in different countries.

In early sobriety, I came home with wonderful memories of Ireland, especially the warm welcomes I received in A.A. meetings across that beautiful country. I will never forget how fast these meetings sped through the closing Lord's Prayer. It's no exaggeration to say that I was still in the "forgive those who trespass against us" section while the rest of the room was wrapping it up with a hearty Amen!

Several years ago, my mother and I went to London together. I slipped out for a few meetings and will never forget how beautiful the Ninth Step Promises sounded in a flawless British accent. The reader sounded just like Hugh Grant (no, it wasn't him!). Another meeting along Kings Road in Knightsbridge controlled overly long shares by the secretary holding up a piece of paper reading Two Minutes Remaining, then One Minute Remaining. Once that minute passed, the group loudly said "thank you" and moved on. Very polite, and effective.

This past April, my husband and I celebrated our 40th wedding anniversary with a Danube river cruise, followed by a three-day stay in Prague, the capital of the Czech Republic. I was eager to attend an A.A. meeting there and found a noon meeting near our hotel. I showed the address to the concierge, who gave me a city map, pointed out the street, and said somewhat cryptically, "Oh, that's near Café Imperial." This meant nothing to me at the time. It turned out to be an upscale café on Na Porici in Prague District 1. I found the café easily, and based on the



numbering, the A.A. meeting should have been across the street. I walked up and down, feeling a little frustrated.

I had walked quite a distance, wondering if the meeting was even there anymore, when I got the inspiration – or perhaps it was a God shot – to cross the street and look up. I burst out laughing at a large sign featuring the familiar blue circle with the A.A. triangle, and arrows pointing at a large wooden door. Not very anonymous! Once I found it, I couldn't believe I hadn't seen it sooner!

I rang the buzzer and pushed the heavy door open into a large courtyard, where a man called out that I was in the right place. Like every other meeting I've approached as a stranger, as I settled into a chair and looked up at the Steps and Traditions on



the walls — in both English and Czech — I relaxed and felt that feeling of being home that I've felt in every A.A. meeting I've ever entered.

The meeting was English speaking, and they read the Conference approved version of The A.A. Preamble. The secretary reminded everyone to restrict sharing to their problems with alcohol and mentioned a new meeting being planned for "older" members. I wish I had asked what age they

considered "older." She read a paragraph from the Big Book and we went around the room sharing for up to five minutes each. She invited me to read The Promises at the end. I know I didn't sound as melodic as that time in London. But my heart was happy, my spirit was calm, and I felt the amazing power of the connection that we all can experience if we stay long enough to let the miracles of A.A. happen for us.

Brigitte F. serves as Chair of the Intergroup Liaison Committee

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# RULE 62

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## AND THE JOY OF NOT KNOWING WHAT YOU'RE DOING

By: Holly S.

I came into service the way some of us do, with enthusiasm, opinions, and a quiet certainty that things would go better if I were just a little bit in charge. Not controlling, mind you. Helpful.

There's a difference. (There isn't.)

And then someone handed me Rule 62. You know the one. *Don't take yourself too damn seriously.* I was delighted. I mean, what other fellowship has a rule like that? I was proud to be part of something with the wisdom and the humor to put that in writing.

I promptly ignored it, of course.

Here's what nobody told me about service positions: I would spend most of my time figuring out what the job actually was,

*(Rule 62, Continued)*

and just when I'd got it figured out, it would be time to rotate on. I used to think that was a flaw in the system. Now I think that is the system working perfectly.

Our Traditions and Concepts, those sometimes dusty, often overlooked spiritual tools, have a lot to say about this. Tradition Nine reminds us that AA needs the least possible organization.

Concept Twelve talks about the balance between trust, accountability, and the loving spirit that ought to animate everything we do together. These aren't bureaucratic fine print. They're instructions for letting go. I just had to want to read them.

Because the secret I found hiding inside every service position was this: it was never really mine to control. The group conscience moves things. People show up. Someone I never expected steps forward and does something quietly brilliant. And when I stopped being so busy running things, I finally got to witness it.

The joy of service, the real joy, lives right there. In the collective. In the slightly chaotic, completely human, occasionally baffling process of trusted servants actually trusting each other.

I might find myself white-knuckling a service event, mentally rewriting everyone else's contributions in real time. Our lovely Rule 62 waits patiently on the other side of that, the way it tends to do.

It's got nowhere to be. It's not taking itself too seriously either.

Holly S. is DCM for District 31



# ADVISORY ACTIONS

## A PLAY BY PLAY

All items below were formally approved by the Conference and therefore became Advisory Actions.

### FLOOR ACTIONS

These were approved directly on the Conference floor.

- Increase the suggested area contribution for Delegate expenses from \$2,200 → \$3,000.
- AAWS may offer a **printed 2026 Final Conference Report** for purchase; if sales do not cover costs, printing will end after 2027.
- Remove the word “**Eskimo**” from the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* (Tradition Eight essay) and replace it with a neutral term.

### AGENDA COMMITTEE

Approved for the 2027 General Service Conference:

- Theme: “Honoring Our Past, Embracing Our Future.”
- Presentation topics:
  - The Spirit of Rotation: Cultivating Leadership
  - Anonymity, Our Spiritual Compass
  - Innovation Meets Tradition
  - Workshop topic: “Unexpected Spiritual Lessons.”

### CORRECTIONS

- Revise the pamphlet “**The A.A. Member – Medications and Other Drugs**” (P-11); a progress report or draft is due to the 2027 Conference.

### FINANCE

- Update “**Self-Support: Where Money and Spirituality Mix**” (F-3) with new language clarifying how groups may support AA Grapevine / La Viña through subscriptions, gift certificates, books, and Carry the Message projects.

### LITERATURE

- Approve **ongoing communication** between the Conference Literature Committee and the Trustees’ Literature Committee chairs.
- Approve the **Fifth Edition of Alcoholics Anonymous** with minor editorial changes.

### POLICY & ADMISSIONS

- Approve that the Equitable Distribution of Workload (EDW) process will end after the 78th GSC.

### PUBLIC INFORMATION (PI)

- Approve a **2026 pilot Membership Survey** (budget ≤ \$10,000) exploring inclusion of unlisted groups.
- Approve revised pamphlet title:
  - “Understanding Anonymity” → “Anonymity – Our Spiritual Foundation.”
  - “*What Happens if Our Group Decides Not to Hear My GSR Report?*” Includes alternate ways to share while protecting anonymity.
- Add a new “**Amendment**” section to the Twelve Concepts for World Service.

### TRUSTEES

- Create an **ad hoc committee** to develop processes for motions involving censure or reorganization, supporting Fellowship unity.
- Approve production of an **animated video** based on The Twelve Steps Illustrated and The Twelve Traditions Illustrated. Progress reports due in 2027.

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# FINDING MY OWN FAITH

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## HOW A COFFEE CONVERSATION CHANGED EVERYTHING

By: Robin P.

What I have found in the fellowship is something I'd never found anywhere else. It's difficult to describe it. It's spiritual to the extent that I let it be, it offers understanding without outward judgement, it promises kindness and promotes openness. If I find it lacking in some way, it teaches me where my program is weak.

When I came to the fellowship, I learned that my 'contempt prior to investigation' is what kept me out for several extra years. I had heard the Serenity Prayer probably from my brother who had died sober 8 years before I wanted to know about AA. I'd decided that because the word God was in it that AA would require me to become religious. What I have come to accept is that the word God is just a convenient way to shorten the phrase *The god of my understanding* (or misunderstanding). That phrase freed me - it meant I didn't have to believe someone else's version of God, only find my own.

In the middle of my fourth year, I was having coffee with another man in the fellowship. We were discussing several issues that I was having anxiety over, none of which I had control over. When he asked where my faith was, which would allow me to let go of these things, I discovered that my faith was lacking - to non-existent.

Like so many of us, I had closed myself off from the religion of my upbringing. Still not wanting that kind of religion, I leaned into what made me feel good: my meditation practice.

That brought serenity, but in order to grow my faith, I needed to take action. I started by just reading the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> step prayers daily. Then I started feeling a need to add a couple things, like my gratitude. I wrote my own prayer. Later, I picked a couple

paragraphs that are meaningful to me and added them to the daily routine.

When my sponsee reminded me of my promise to teach him meditation, I realized that sharing this practice could be my next step in service. I started planning a series of meetings for those interested. I found an outline of an 11<sup>th</sup> step meeting and generated recordings of four prayers from the program. The next thing I knew, I was creating a permanent 11<sup>th</sup> step meeting on the Eastern Shore and registering it with General Services. That made me a GSR for the group. Yet another surprise gift from the program.

After more than six years sober, I pray daily and firmly believe that practicing prayer—even without understanding God—acts as the vehicle to help me build and maintain faith. If nothing else, verbalizing selections from the Big Book that carry special meaning on a daily basis, and spending at least 30 minutes one day a week in meditation, keeps me mindful of the things that keep me sober and living the steps to the best of my abilities. Today I feel that the spirit does indeed dwell within me and will shine if I get out of the way and allow it to.

I was surprised and honored to be asked to write something for Our Common Welfare. I don't see what I have done as outstanding or remarkable in any way. I simply found something lacking in my sobriety and the fix, as usual, has been to be of service to others.

Robin P., GSR for the Conscious Contact group in Easton Maryland.



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# SPONSORSHIP AND BEYOND

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## No One Is Left Alone

By: Nancy A.

The Sponsorship and Beyond workshop was held in Centreville, MD, with a panel of three, to help us understand their experience in doing Step Work, Traditions Work and Service Work. It was an enlightening day for the 30 attendees.

“Getting a sponsor is the way to get grounded in A.A.,” Heather G., from Pasadena, MD confidently said as she began this workshop. “We can’t give away what we don’t have, so doing the work ourselves is key when sponsoring someone else.” When working with someone new, Heather meets them in a neutral place and asks: “Why are you in A.A.,” “What do you expect from a Sponsor?” and “Why do you want to work the Steps?” Then she begins a regular routine of reading the Big Book with sponsees, starting with the Preface. As they read the Steps from the book, her sponsee will write how she relates to each Step using pen and paper or technology, whichever suits her. Heather reviews her own Steps each time she works with someone and understands passages in the Big Book with a new perspective.

Heather’s sponsor calls her a “Freelancer.” She has her own conception of God, which is a valuable asset of her A.A. program. Heather stresses the spiritual aspect by asking if her sponsee is willing to live by A.A.’s spiritual principles as they talk about them. A.A. is about getting and staying sober and Heather’s role is to guide her sponsee through the program. By staying sober we can all heal from our past and trust in our Higher Power will take care of the rest.

Rob R. from Bel Air, MD spoke with conviction about how he sponsors with the Traditions. Rob started his own journey with the Traditions because one of his sponsees was hungry for more



A.A. and asked Rob to work the Traditions, so Rob and his sponsee learned together.

After reading the Traditions in the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions with a sponsee, he will use the *Traditions Checklist* from the Grapevine, which gives talking points to stimulate conversation about what the Traditions mean. Discussion of this type deepens each person’s understanding of the spiritual principle behind each Tradition. This is valuable when practicing the spiritual principles of the Traditions in all our affairs.

The Traditions were developed in the adolescence period of A.A. and are still very relevant today. In studying the Traditions, Rob learned the spiritual principle of all the Traditions is UNITY. His focus is about staying sober with emphasis on the common welfare of our society. The Traditions are the foundation of our society.

*Continued on page 21*

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# 52ND MARYLAND STATE CONVENTION

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## SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

By: Jeanine W.

**T**he 52nd Maryland State Convention offered *something for everyone*—whether you're a member of Alcoholics Anonymous, Al-Anon, or Alateen. Held at the Sheraton Baltimore North Hotel from Friday morning, June 21st, through noon on June 23rd, the weekend brought together approximately 570 attendees for fellowship, learning, and celebration.

### WORKSHOPS, SPEAKERS, AND LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

For those eager to deepen their recovery, the convention offered a rich variety of workshops and meetings:

- **Twelve Step Focus:** Joe & Charlie Step Workshops ran throughout the weekend, and five speakers shared their experience, strength, and hope at dedicated Step Speaker Meetings.
- **AA History:** Attendees explored topics such as Maryland's AA Pioneers, How AA Changed Treatment in the U.S., The Traditions from a Historical Perspective, Milestones in AA History, and Stepping Stones: Sobriety, Stability, Serenity. The Archives Display Room was also a popular stop.
- **AA Literature:** Workshops covered Special Interest Pamphlets and the Plain Language Big Book: *Contempt Prior to Investigation*.



- **Spiritual Growth:** Sessions included Spiritual Principles of the 12 Steps, 11th Step Prayer & Meditation, and Overcoming Resentment.

In total, **thirty-five workshops** were offered on various topics, including **three in Spanish** and **five Al-Anon workshops**.

### MEETINGS, FELLOWSHIP, AND FUN

Those seeking regular meetings found plenty to choose from, including an AA Alcolthon, Al-Anon meetings, and Alateen gatherings.

Fellowship was everywhere—snacks and conversation in the Hospitality Suite, reconnecting with old friends, meeting new ones, and enjoying **two Ice Cream Socials**. Entertainment included an AA play, a DJ dance, and a Song Circle.

The **Committee Display Hall** gave attendees a chance to learn about Maryland General Service committees and discover ways to get involved.

### SOBRIETY COUNTDOWN HIGHLIGHTS

A highlight of the weekend was the Saturday Night Sobriety Countdown. This year:

- **Billy P.** stood as the longest-sober member with **52 years**.
- **Jason** was the newest member with **27 days**.

*Continued on page 21*

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# 32 YEARS, AND STILL SHOWING UP

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## AN ANNIVERSARY OF THE WRATH OF GRAPES GROUP

By: James M.

**O**n March 16th, while Maryland was hunkering down under tornado watches, the Wrath of Grapes group in Anne Arundel County celebrated their 32nd group anniversary. Dave D. delivered a pinch-hit speaker meeting that was well received by the 20-plus attendees who ventured out to share fellowship, experience, strength, and hope. His words captured what he called the Trifecta of AA: "I need a sobriety date, a sponsor, and a home group."

Founded on December 6th, 1993, by Winslow and Barb S. and Linda and Pete B., this is a tenacious group that revels in showing up regardless of the weather or whatever else might keep others home.

That perseverance has been in the group's nature from the beginning. Wrath of Grapes grew out of Magothy 12 & 12, where as many as 100 people would crowd into the space at Magothy United Methodist Church in Pasadena. After the fire marshal warned the group to keep attendance to a safe capacity, they decided to split into three additional meetings: two other 12 & 12 groups – one in Glen Burnie and one in Brooklyn Park – and a speaker meeting at Harbor City Speakers. The other two meetings have since disbanded or evolved, including Bowie Speakers.

April D., who has been attending since the group's first anniversary

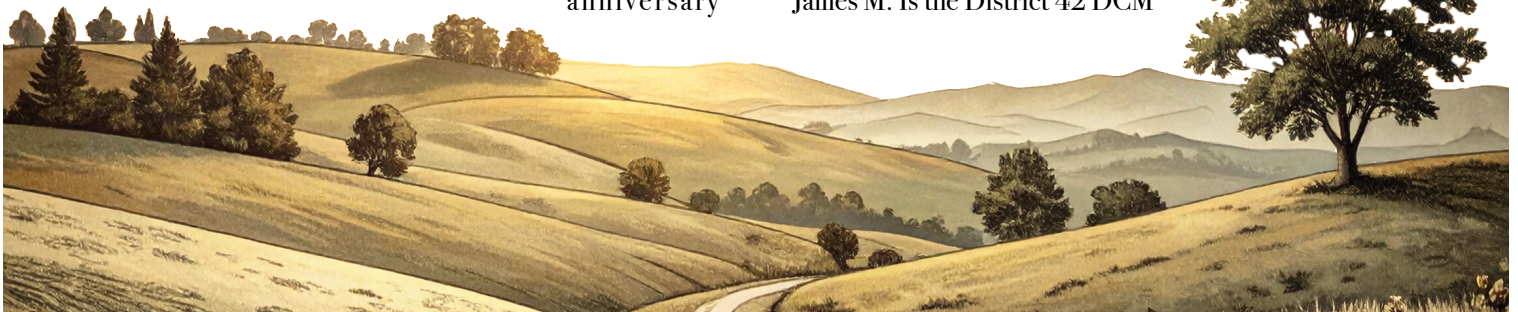
in December 1994, loves the format and especially the Monday night commitment. "Left to my own devices," April said. "Monday nights were the night of the week I was most likely to stay home. So, I knew if I had a commitment and a home group, that would give me a reason to get out. I wanted to stay sober, and I knew that Monday nights would be easiest to tell myself to just stay home and watch TV." She added, "To me, it definitely feels like my spiritual home. We used to have a home group member who said it felt like his living room – so comfortable. My home group is the place I am most authentic and real, and for me, this group has been that place."

Austin B., another home group member, spoke to his reason for staying: "I've always enjoyed the message here," Austin said. "I've been coming since 2022, and the people and the message keep me coming back."

Dave L. has been attending for 23 years. He lives in Columbia but his sponsor was at Wrath of Grapes. "You can't go too far astray when you are doing meetings based on the 12 & 12."

Traditionally, according to Erin L., the group celebrates its anniversary in January – but this year the church was closed due to snow, forcing the celebration to be postponed until March. The Wrath of Grapes group meets every Monday at 8pm at Rejoice Fellowship in Glen Burnie, MD.

James M. is the District 42 DCM





- And yes—there was even a very enthusiastic dog who barked proudly when “two days” was called.

Twenty-five attendees had celebrated **40+ years**, and twenty-seven had celebrated **five years or less**. The gratitude and excitement in the room were unmistakable.

#### THEME: THE ARCH TO FREEDOM

This year’s theme was **The Arch to Freedom**. The convention reflected the spirit of unity and service that makes the Maryland State Convention possible. It truly takes a village: more than fifty volunteers—and many additional helpers—worked behind the scenes to bring the event to life.

Special thanks go to **Don B., State Convention Chair**, for his dedication and leadership. From stuffing registration packets to greeting attendees, hosting workshops, and supporting the Hospitality Suite, there is always a place for anyone who wants to be of service.

Planning will be underway for the **53rd Maryland State Convention**, and volunteers are warmly welcomed. More info on volunteering will be upcoming!

Jeanine W. is the Area 29 Workshop Chairperson



#### *(Sponsorship And Beyond, Continued from page 18)*

Michelle T. from Albuquerque, NM started doing Service work when she was 31 years sober. With humor she clearly shared her message, “The only thing someone needs for Service work in A.A. is **WILLINGNESS**.” She began her Service journey by becoming a District Secretary and continued her Service work by following Olivia O. everywhere, who became her Service Sponsor. She grew her Service work by learning about the structure of A.A., attending area assemblies and state conventions, and accepting positions that were presented to her.

She became emotional when she spoke about an experience with Service work that touched her soul in a different way than anything else did in A.A. She had a moment when she realized that she was working for people who were staying sober and that she could not let them down. In that moment she came to

understand how important their sobriety is and what a huge responsibility it was for her. This was a spiritual experience for her and rejuvenated her A.A. program. Service has been the most rewarding thing she has ever done in A.A.

With Service you can have a voice in A.A. which can be heard from the Home group level to the General Service Conference. This is how A.A. will continue to thrive in years to come. Will you be that voice?

No one is left alone in A.A. Whether learning about the Steps, the Traditions or navigating a Service position, those who came before us will always walk with us to show us the path. That is how A.A. Sponsorship works.

Nancy A. is Vice Chair of Midshore Intergroup

# OUR COMMON WELFARE



## ABOUT OUR COMMON WELFARE

**“Our common welfare comes first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity.” (Tradition 1)**

*Our Common Welfare* is the newsletter for Area 29 Maryland General Service, published quarterly to foster unity and cultivate communication among A.A. members, groups, districts, and Intergroups within the MGS Area of Alcoholics Anonymous. *OCW* aims to encourage service and carry the A.A. message by publishing A.A.-related material, including personal stories of experience, strength and hope, and members’ encounters with service at every level.

Nothing published in *OCW* should be thought of as a statement of Area 29 or A.A. policy, and publication does not constitute endorsement by the newsletter, Area 29, Intergroup, Districts, local groups, or A.A. as a whole.

### Submission Guidelines

Submissions are welcome, including anonymity-protected photos, graphics, drawings, and articles. Written submissions can be up to 500 words – shorter is fine, too. All submissions will be reviewed by the Newsletter Committee chair and may be edited for length and clarity.

Send submissions and calendar items to [margenser@marylandaa.org](mailto:margenser@marylandaa.org).

**Feedback is welcome...**and encouraged. Let us know what you think. What else would you like to see in the newsletter?

## Area 29

### Maryland General Service

- 11** Intergroups
- 35** Districts
- 886** Active groups
- 19** Committees
- 4** Committee meetings /year
- 5** Assemblies /year

Members of A.A. and A.A. groups can send contributions to:

Maryland General Service  
PO Box 1834  
Frederick, MD 21702

Or online at:

[www.marylandaa.org](http://www.marylandaa.org)

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