

# **g.s.r.**

General  
Service  
Representative

May be the  
most important  
job in A.A.

## **G.S.R. SCHOOL WORKBOOK**

OREGON AREA OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS - GENERAL

By choosing its most qualified man or woman as G.S.R., a group helps secure its own future - and the future of A.A. as a whole.

**Revised September 2017**

**This document is also available on line at [www.aa-oregon.org](http://www.aa-oregon.org)**

# A Declaration of Unity

This we owe to A.A.'s future; to place our common welfare first; to keep our fellowship united.

For on A.A. unity depend our lives, and the lives of those to come.

This workbook is meant to be a guide only.

Most of the information contained herein may be found, in greater detail, in the *A.A. Service Manual*, the *Oregon Area Guidelines*, and the other referenced literature.

In no manner whatsoever is this workbook intended to supersede the above mentioned references or any A.A. General Service Conference approved literature.

Many thanks to the California Northern Interior and Mid-Southern California Areas of Alcoholics Anonymous from which this manual was adapted.

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# SECTION I

## WELCOME TO ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS GENERAL SERVICE!

As an elected General Service Representative (GSR) you now represent the voice of your A.A. Group's Conscience to the A.A. General Service Conference held in New York each April. Through your elected District Committee Member (DCM) and the Oregon Area Delegate, you will become the two-way link between your group and the world of A.A. as a whole. As such, you and your fellow GSRs all over the world have become the key to the unity of A.A.

You are your A.A. group's link with Oregon Area General Service, the General Service Office (GSO), and the General Service Conference. As such you have an active part in building a strong service structure. You will learn more about General Service, which is based on:

### THE THREE LEGACIES

1. **RECOVERY**, as outlined in the Twelve Steps,
2. **UNITY**, as outlined in the Twelve Traditions, and
3. **SERVICE**, as outlined in the *A.A. Service Manual Combined With Twelve Concepts For World Service*.

Please take care to protect the rights of individual A.A. members to have their voice acknowledged and heard no matter how much in the minority they may be.

You will, unless you direct otherwise, have your name and telephone number listed in the Western United States A.A. Directory as the official contact for your group.

By your active presence in General Service you will be helping to insure that A.A. will still be here for future generations of suffering alcoholics.

**You are now engaged in one of the finest forms of Twelfth Step work.**

### ABOUT THIS MANUAL

Here, we will cover some aspects of the General Service structure and your new position as GSR.

- The geographic division of the U.S. and Canada into service regions.
- The broad structure of General Service.
- Service Structure of the Oregon Area.
- Area Officers and their qualifications.
- Things you can do as a General Service Representative.
- Some ideas on how to carry out the duties of a General Service Representative more effectively.

## INVOLVEMENT IN GENERAL SERVICE

Regarding the relationship of the GSR to General Service, *The A.A. Service Manual* states:

“general services grew to fill a need beyond the reach of the individual, Group and Intergroup. Today, the term general services is applied to all kinds of activities within the conference structure, carried on by area committees, delegates, trustees, and GSO staff. Usually the services affect the Fellowship as a whole. Almost always, they are part of A.A.'s distinctive unity, which allows the movement to function so well.”

Also, "originally, the services performed by A.A.'s General Service Office (GSO). Today it means the work of anyone in the general service structure - GSR, committee member, delegate, etc.”

## SECTION II

### A.A. WORLDWIDE

Alcoholics Anonymous is a worldwide organization. There are General Service Offices in many countries, each of which is autonomous. Our General Service Office for the United States and Canada is located in New York City. No attempt is made to have this office be the world capital of A.A. Rather; the New York office is available to share experience, strength and hope with offices in other countries, mainly because it has been in existence a much longer period of time.

Every two years a World Service Conference is held with one Trustee At Large each from the United States and Canada attending as our delegates. This Conference serves as the way that Alcoholics Anonymous establishes and maintains its worldwide communication links. The meeting location rotates between New York and another country which has submitted a bid to hold the meeting; much as a district or two or more districts combine to submit bids to host Oregon Area Assemblies.

### THE REGIONS

The map in *The A.A. Service Manual*, Chapter IX, shows the U.S. and Canada divided into eight regions:

Two in Canada:

- Eastern Canada
- Western Canada including the Yukon Territory.

Six in the United States:

- Northeast
- Southeast
- East Central
- West Central

- Southwest
- Pacific Region: which consists of Alaska, Arizona, California, Hawaii, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, and Washington.

Thus, our Oregon Area is part of the Pacific Region.

## **REGIONAL TRUSTEES**

Each region has its own trustee, called a regional trustee, who serves a four year term on the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous. Each region nominates a slate of qualified candidates, one from each area, from which a regional trustee is elected during the General Service Conference. The terms of these trustees are staggered so that two regional trustees are elected each year. This provides both continuity and a smooth flow of rotation. There are twenty-one non-paid trustees on the General Service Board all of whom perform tremendous amounts of service for Alcoholics Anonymous. These trustees are elected or approved by the General Service Conference. Seven are non-alcoholic, called Class A trustees, and 14 are alcoholic, called Class B trustees. Eight of these fourteen Class B trustees are the regional trustees.

## **THE AREAS**

Most General Service Areas follow the broad geographical division of a state or province. Due to the size and/or population of some states, they are divided into two or more areas. California is divided into six. Our Pacific Region has nine states with fifteen areas.

But, areas do not have to follow strict state lines. Our Oregon Area includes a part of Klickitat County, Washington and the Idaho Area includes a large portion of Eastern Oregon. This allows groups to serve closest to population centers regardless of state lines. Our Oregon Area is known as Area 58.

## **THE AREA DELEGATE**

Each General Service Area elects a delegate to represent them at the annual General Service Conference in New York where the broad issues of A.A. as a whole are addressed. There are a total of 93 delegates, one for each area, throughout the U.S. and Canada. The delegates are elected for a two year term with about one-half elected each year to provide both continuity and rotation as with the trustees. *The A.A. Service Manual* has an election schedule for delegates. Remember that the General Service Conference only deals in issues affecting A.A. in the U.S. and Canada.

## **THE GENERAL SERVICE CONFERENCE**

The culmination of much of this activity, (group, district, area and regional meetings), occurs in April of each year when the delegate we elect to represent our area attends the week long General Service Conference in New York. The 134 voting members of the Conference are comprised of: (Also see *The A.A. Service Manual*, Chapter VI.)

- The 93 Area Delegates,
- The 21 Trustees of the General Service Board,
- The staffs of the General Service Office and Grapevine,
- The Directors of A.A. World Services, Inc. and
- The Directors of The A.A. Grapevine, Inc.

Note that the 93 area delegates constitute more than two thirds of the voting members at the Conference. The policy of A.A. is decided at this meeting. As voting members of the Conference, delegates bring to its deliberations the experiences and viewpoints of their own areas. Yet they are not representatives of their area in the usual political sense; after hearing all points of view and becoming fully informed during Conference discussion, they vote in the best interests of A.A. as a whole.

## **SECTION III**

### **AREA ASSEMBLIES**

Any meeting of area GSRs and the area committee is an assembly.

In Oregon, Quarterly Assemblies are held on the third weekends of May and November. February is the 4th weekend

The annual General Assembly where the election of our delegate, alternate delegate, area officers and their alternates occurs, is held the third weekend of September.

At Assemblies we conduct such business as may affect the entire area, including:

- Informing the delegate of the sense or conscience of the area.
- Receiving from the delegate the sense or conscience of and report from the Conference.
- Discussing issues that may be introduced and/or voted upon during the Area Assembly Business Meeting.
- Conducting workshops and roundtables on all aspects of general service work.
- Receiving reports from all our area officers, area service committee chairpersons and DCMs regarding their activities and concerns.
- Presenting training or orientation sessions for new GSRs, and short workshops on the Twelve Traditions of Unity and the Twelve Concepts of Service.



- Sharing sessions for GSRs and DCMs.
- Taking an Area Inventory.
- Reviewing area budgetary matters.

Most, but not all, of these activities are offered at every Assembly.

Area assemblies have preset agendas and are usually too large for specific group problems to be efficiently addressed except at the GSR sharing sessions. However, there are always plenty of GSRs and other servants around to talk with.

## **ATTENDING AREA ASSEMBLIES**

By attending area assemblies we become familiar with things happening in the larger world of A.A. through the reports given by our delegate, area officers, their alternates, area service committee chairs (usually given on Sunday morning) and the DCM's reports (usually given on Saturday morning).

It is quite likely that you will hear some ideas that can be used to better your own district or group. With more than a couple of hundred GSRs, DCMs, area officers, area service committee members, the delegate and past delegates present, you will always be able to find someone to discuss your concerns with.

Copies of the minutes of each area assembly are sent to your DCM for distribution to the GSR of every registered group in your district; area assembly minutes are also posted on the Oregon Area Website ([www.aa-oregon.org](http://www.aa-oregon.org)). Assembly agendas are available on the website 30 days prior to each assembly; and you can find sample agendas of our Oregon Area Quarterly and General Assemblies there as well.

By serving on different committees at all levels of A.A., one can learn a great deal about the workings of our fellowship.

## **AREA BUSINESS; WHO VOTES**

In the Oregon Area, while all members are encouraged to attend and become familiar with the issues discussed at the area assemblies, only the GSRs, DCMs, area service committee chairs, the treasurer and secretary, their alternates, the area chairperson and alternate, and our delegate and alternate, are voting members. As has been mentioned, the main activities at the assemblies center around the delegate, the Conference, and area business. Service committee workshops and roundtables, GSR and DCM sharing sessions, and various training sessions are also offered. As mentioned earlier, the Oregon Area holds four assemblies each year.

With one exception, proxy votes are not allowed at our area assemblies. Your group must have a representative present to vote. The exception to this rule is for groups that are located inside correctional facilities (prisons). Those groups, if registered, may appoint a proxy to carry their vote.

## OREGON AREA VOTING PROCEDURES

A motion is made:

If it does not receive a second, it dies. After a second, debate is opened.

If a registered voter calls for the question, a second will be required, or debate resumes.

A Question must be called in turn at the mike.

If the question is seconded a 2/3 majority will end the debate, or debate resumes.

If the question is not called, debate will go on until there is no one at the mike.

Once debate ends, a sense of the group will be taken by simple majority, to vote or table.

A motion is voted on:

If it involves expenditure of area funds, the finance committee will be asked to report.

It requires a 2/3 majority to pass.

The losing side will be asked if they wish to speak to their position.

The winning side will be asked if there is a motion to re-vote, and requires a second.

A simple majority is required to revote.

A motion is reconsidered:

Full debate, pro and con is resumed (please limit discussion to only new considerations).

The question may again be called, seconded, and requires a 2/3 majority to end debate.

A sense of the group may be taken by simple majority, to vote or table.

If voted on, the motion must have a 2/3 majority to pass.

**Debate has ended.**

Debate on a tabled motion will be resumed under old business at the next assembly, and the voting process will be the same as above.

## MAKEUP OF THE OREGON AREA COMMITTEE AND ELECTION SCHEDULES

The voting membership of the Oregon Area Committee is comprised of the delegate and alternate, the area chairperson and alternate, the secretary, registrar, treasurer and alternate, all the area service committee chairs and the district committee members. All area officers are elected during the General Assembly in September. They take office during the following November assembly. The area officers, with their duties briefly described, are comprised as follows:

**Area Delegate:** Selected by our area to represent A.A. as a whole at the General Service Conference each April. The delegate is mainly concerned with maintaining the two-way communication between our area and the General Service Office (G.S.O.). May hold pre-conference discussions concerning agenda items for the General Service Conference and reports to the Area the results of that Conference, both at the May quarterly assembly, and generally to all Oregon Area Districts.

**Alternate Area Delegate:** Stands ready to assume the duties of the delegate. Assists, and may travel with, the delegate as necessary. Facilitates GSR Schools and other workshops at area assemblies and as requested by districts between assemblies. Coordinates the annual Area Orientation for incoming area servants. Facilitates the area service committee transition session at the November assembly.

## **OREGON AREA COMMITTEE AND ELECTION SCHEDULES (Cont.)**

**Area Chair:** Has overall responsibility for the operations of the area, including: Facilitating the business meetings; appointing service committee members; setting the agenda for business meetings; updating Area Guidelines; attending certain regional functions; awarding assemblies to bidding districts; helping service committees as needed; attending district meetings when possible; appointing ad hoc committees to address specific issues as needed.

**Alternate Area Chair:** Stands ready to assume the duties of the area chair. Assists districts in bidding for and hosting assemblies. Responsible along with district host committees for the agenda of area assemblies. Attends certain regional functions. Assists area chair as needed.

All the above are **elected**, in **odd** numbered years, by the entire body for a two year term.

**Know your Area Committee:** These are your current Area Officers elected in 2017.

Delegate: Vera F.

Alt.Delegate: Jim F.

Chair: Ron W.

Alt.Chair: Penny H.

**Area Secretary:** Prepares full and abbreviated forms of the minutes of all area assemblies. Distributes (mails) copies of those minutes as directed.

**Area Registrar:** Assists secretary as needed. Area registrar also keeps track of all registered groups and their respective contacts. Publishes Area Roster of trusted servants.

**Area Treasurer:** Records and reports all group contributions and other sources of revenue to the Area as well as all disbursements of funds. Participates heavily in preparation of the annual budget for the Area.

**Alternate Area Treasurer:** Assists area treasurer as needed.

The above are elected, in **even** numbered years, by the entire body for a two year term.

**Know your Area Committee:** These are your current Area Officers elected in 2016.

Treasurer: John A.

Alt. Treasurer: Lisa W.

Secretary: SJ.

Registrar: Bob C.

## AREA SERVICE COMMITTEES

Service committees are sometimes referred to as “standing committees”. Members of the Area Service Committees are appointed by the area chair. They take office at the beginning of new business during the November Quarterly Assembly. Only the senior chairpersons of our area service committees are voting members of the area committee.

Oregon Area Service Committees include:

- Accessibility
- Archives
- Cooperation With The Professional Community (CPC)
- Treatment Facilities (TF)
- Correctional Facilities (CF)
- Finance
- Grapevine
- Hospitals
- Newsletter
- Public Information (PI)
- Translation / Interpretation
- Website

These service committees usually have one or two additional **Non-Voting** members known as co-chairs and/or alternate chairs. Each November the committee chair rotates off the committee and the next senior member becomes the chairperson. A new person is appointed to fill out the committee. Appointments to service committees that have two or more members are usually made so that those committees have members from both the North and South portions of our area. This facilitates easier serving of our entire area, or state.

Our practice is to appoint the immediate past delegate to the position of Area Grapevine Chair.

The Archives Chair and Archives Assistant both serve an 8 year, non rotating term.

All district committee members (DCMs) are voting members at the area assembly. If a DCM is not present at the assembly, the Alternate DCM carries the vote. If both the DCM and Alternate DCM are absent, the GSRs of that district usually elect one of themselves to act as the DCM for the duration of the assembly.

## **THE GSR'S VOICE AND VOTE AT AREA ASSEMBLIES**

At the assemblies the GSRs are both voting members and collectively form a **majority** of all the voting members. As such, they should make every effort to attend every assembly. All area matters that either have an effect on the area's finances, the conduct of area business, or a direct impact on all the groups are presented and ratified, rejected or revised by the assembly.

We become informed about what is going on by attending area assemblies and discussing issues with others who are in a good position to have experience and information to share on most issues.

In this way the assemblies meet their purpose of strengthening A.A. as a whole by carrying our message in the best way possible for our area. Again, participation by the GSR is the key link in this vital chain of necessary two-way communication between the members of their group and the larger structure of A.A.

## **OREGON AREA GUIDELINES**

The *Oregon Area Guidelines* are printed in odd numbered years and updated when necessary between printings. It contains a wealth of current and historical information on how our area conducts business, references to and some suggested qualifications to hold area office, as well as references to other A.A. literature which contain more complete descriptions of area officers, qualifications and duties, It is strongly suggested that each GSR obtain a copy of the Guidelines, as well as a copy of *The A.A. Service Manual Combined With Twelve Concepts for World Service*.

## **SECTION IV**

### **THE DISTRICTS**

The Area is further divided into districts, which are ideally comprised of from six to twenty groups. Larger districts may form Sub-Districts. Our Oregon Area is currently divided into thirty-six districts.

A district is usually a small geographic part of the area. In Oregon, we have two Districts At Large, or Linguistic Districts – Districts 34 and 35. Hispanic groups may choose to participate in one of the Linguistic Districts regardless of where their particular group is located, or they may participate in a geographic district.

## **DISTRICT MEETINGS**

As has been mentioned, a district is usually composed of from six to twenty A.A. groups. Each group's GSR represents their group at the district meetings, usually held once a month. Although the format for the conduct of business is determined autonomously by each district, a typical meeting includes:

- Reports to the GSRs from the District Committee Member. (DCM)
- Reports from the groups via the GSR
- Discussion of group problems.
- Discussion of the business of the previous or upcoming area assembly.
- Discussions of special events such as a workshop that the district may be organizing for the general fellowship.
- Perhaps a presentation on some aspect of service.

## **THE DISTRICT COMMITTEE MEMBER**

Each district elects a District Committee Member (DCM) who conducts the district meetings, represents the conscience of the district as a voting member at the area assembly and is a member of the area committee.

The primary purpose of the DCM is to facilitate district meetings, and stimulate as many groups as possible to be an active part of A.A. as a whole, through representation and participation. Also, they assist the efforts of the GSRs. Many districts assign additional duties to their DCM and his or her alternate. Please see *The A.A. Service Manual*, Chapter III, for a more complete description of DCM's role and their duties.

DCMs are elected, by the GSRs in a district, for a two year term with about one-half elected each year. Many districts elect their DCM in the fall of the year. The new DCM takes office at, or just before, the November Area Assembly.

## **OTHER ENTITIES SERVING AA.**

No group can really exist in total isolation in their communities and usually has some sort of contact with the larger surrounding community of A.A. that contributes to the overall maintenance of the group. This contact, or cooperation, may be with the local Intergroup or Central Office or other service entities such as the district, the district's and area's service committees, as well as at area assemblies. Thus a GSR is needed to carry the group's conscience to the larger structure and likewise to take issues back to the group such as those pending before the upcoming Oregon Area Assemblies and the General Service Conference held each year in April in New York.

# SECTION V

## THE GROUP

The fundamental unit in Alcoholics Anonymous is the group; and the groups are at the top of the A.A. structure chart. We will work our way down from there. See *The A.A. Service Manual*, Chapter II for charts of the group and general service structures; and the *Oregon Area Guidelines* for a chart of the service structure of the Oregon Area. Note that A.A. is loosely organized almost directly in reverse of the normal corporate or department chart we are used to seeing. Hopefully, internal matters within any group are resolved at the business meeting of that group by:

- Involving as many members of the group as possible.
- Expressing the widest range of points of view on the subject.
- Allowing enough time for the members to take all the information into consideration before any final decision is made on an issue.
- Thus resulting in an informed group conscience.

## YOUR HOME GROUP

The relationship of the GSRs with their groups is probably the most important and, hopefully, a most fluid and open one. The best way to start to become effective is to attend the meetings of your Home Group on a regular basis. This gets you acquainted with the members of the group and their ideas, and also gives you some credibility when you make suggestions and reports. Only by attending group meetings regularly can we stay informed of our group's affairs. People in general service - particularly the GSRs - are generally known as the **Guardians of our Traditions**.

If your group has a **Steering Committee**, the GSR should be an active part of it, giving regular reports to their group on service activities and important issues discussed at the district and area meetings.

Just as a personal inventory helps us to maintain a healthy sobriety by revealing our strengths and weaknesses, so an annual **Group Inventory** can flag areas that may need some focused group attention. A good starting format for this inventory may be found in the pamphlet *The A.A. Group*.

The General Service Office has a publication, *Box 4-5-9*, which is produced bimonthly and contains many articles of general interest to the entire fellowship. Since the GSR is listed at GSO as the mail contact for their group, they automatically receive a copy which should be read and then shared with your group. For the nominal cost of \$6.00 per year, a group may receive a bulk subscription of ten copies of each issue. Often just a simple exposure to the availability of this newfound hidden resource is enough to get a group interested in subscribing. *Box 4-5-9* is a valuable resource for discussion and could also be tied into the GSR's report.

Other areas in which the GSR can be of service to the group include the group's finances. It is suggested that a group retain a **Prudent Reserve** of money to cover any potential extraordinary cost that may be incurred, as well as one to three months regular expenses. This reserve is retained after the group's expenses have been paid. These expenses may, and probably should, include supporting the GSR in his/her duties directly related to the position. Current experience indicates that many groups provide financial support for their GSR to attend area assemblies and other service functions.

## DUTIES OF THE GSR

Now, let's focus on the duties of a GSR in a bit more detail. The GSR has the job of:

- Linking their group with A.A. as a whole.
- Representing the voice of their group's conscience.
- Reporting it to the DCM and the delegate, who pass this on to the Conference and the rest of A.A.
- Bringing the problems and remedies that affect A.A. unity, health and growth back to their group.

Only when a GSR keeps the group informed, and communicates the group conscience, can the Conference truly act for AA as a whole.

In general there are three areas in which the GSRs have their major responsibilities, each of which involves a two way relationship with:

- the group
- the district
- the general service area

Read *The A.A. Service Manual*, Chapter II, and the Pamphlet *GSR: Perhaps the Most Important Job in A.A.* for further information on your job and duties.

## REPORTS TO THOSE YOU SERVE

When giving reports at your group or district, it's probably best to be brief. **Things you might present to the district are:**

- Any new group officers or other service position holders.
- Who your Alternate GSR is.
- What the average attendance is at group meetings.
- How your group divides its funds for contributions.
- Any problems the group may be facing such as having to move, court referrals, dual diagnosis members, (alcoholism coupled with a mental illness), non-alcoholic addicts, lack of interest in service, etc.)
- Announce any upcoming events and any group activities.



**And, things you might report to your Group include:**

- News of any events or workshops you learned about at the district meeting.
- New district officers and other service people.
- Report on things that you think the group can relate to, is interested or involved in.
- If there is an issue coming up that will require your vote, try to explain it as simply, fully, and fairly as possible so that your group can arrive at an informed group conscience.
- With a bit of practice, you can probably work in a piece of information that will provoke a question and get the discussion started.

You may not personally agree with your group's conscience, but if you have done your job correctly and discussed it enough, you will have no problem in abiding by it; and can rightly feel good about it, too.

Probably the most important thing that you can do as a GSR is to become informed. This serves both us personally and A.A. as a whole. The more you know, the more you can share from personal experience and the more credible your voice will become.

## **ATTENDING DISTRICT MEETINGS**

There are really very few completely new and original problems that develop in groups, so our continuity of experience is extremely valuable to the new GSR. The GSRs may share with their fellow GSRs and the DCM at the district meetings how they dealt with such matters and with what success. Their experience may be helpful to another group.

Also at the district meetings, agenda items that require action at the next area assembly can be discussed. This is a kind of middle ground where such discussion makes us better informed and able to take back to our group any business where a group conscience is needed. We can then take this conscience back to the assembly and make our voice heard.

## **ROTATION**

In most groups, the GSR is elected to a two year term. DCMs and area officers likewise serve two years. Since **rotation** is an essential part of service, it is important to have an Alternate GSR to learn something about the job before they assume the responsibility that goes with it. Having someone in the wings who is prepared will give you the freedom to go into and experience other levels of service without feeling that your job is unfinished because there is no one to take your place.

If you have been elected GSR without any training, do not despair. Ask the former GSR, or your DCM, for copies of past district meeting and area assembly minutes; read the previous reports, if any, from your group to the district, and learn what is being discussed at the area level. It is an adage in A.A. that by the time you have fully learned how to do your current job - it is time to rotate out of it. Remember, we strive for progress, not perfection.

And if we hold any job beyond its usual term, we are denying someone else the opportunity to learn and grow as we have. It will seem frustrating at times because you may think that nobody in the group is listening or cares about what you have to say. Then, sometime you will find yourself amazed by being asked a question relating to something you thought was dead and buried months ago. Or your group asks you to deal with a question in terms of how it relates to the A.A. Traditions. Those times are part of what makes it all rewarding in the end. So keep coming back and ask questions until you feel you have, or know how to get, an answer.

## **A WORD ABOUT COMMITMENT**

Commitment in terms of recovery, means recovering some of those basic principles which all of us were taught as children, but which we lost somewhere in pursuit of self.

As members of the General Service Structure, those principles that we must now demonstrate as a trusted servant include willingness, self-sacrifice, honesty, consideration of others, thoughtfulness, love, tolerance and, most of all, basic etiquette.

- Do we show up when we say we will?
- Are we on time?
- Do we mark our A.A. commitments on the calender and then work around them, or do we attend only if it doesn't interfere with our own pleasure?
- When we are unable to make an event in which our group should be represented, do we arrange for our alternate to be there?
- Do we keep our alternates well-informed and involved?
- Do we attend as many service activities as possible in order to become better informed, or do we do the least possible required?
- Do we tend to our responsibilities cheerfully, or portray them as a drag?
- Are we able to offer criticism lovingly and based on the application of our three legacies, or do we let personalities get in the way?

All of these things are important to being committed to service in A.A., but the bottom line is: are we giving in proportion to what has been given to us? Gratitude is an action word. It is something we show, not just something we talk about. If we give only a tenth of what has been given to us, we should all be shining examples of service and commitment in A.A.

## THE INFORMED GROUP CONSCIENCE

Taken from Workshop One from the thirty-fourth General Service Conference

### The Second Tradition

For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority... A loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants ... they do not govern.

and

**Concept XII, Warrenty Four:** "That all important decisions should be reached by discussion, vote, and whenever possible, by substantial unanimity."

"Here on the one hand we erect a safeguard against any hasty or overbearing authority of a simple majority; and, on the other hand, it takes notice of the rights and the frequent wisdom of minorities, however small. This principle further guarantees that all matters of importance, time permitting, will be extensively debated, and that such debates will continue until a really heavy majority can support every critical decision....."

**What is the group conscience?**

**How does the group conscience differ from a group opinion or a majority vote?**

The group conscience strives for unanimity through enlightenment, spirituality, and the practice of our principles in all our affairs. To be fully informed requires a willingness to listen to minority opinions through full discussion. On sensitive issues, the group works slowly, discouraging formal motions until the group has a clear sense of its views. Placing principles before personalities, the group is wary of dominate opinions. The group conscience is the aggregate of experience a group develops after applying the Traditions and Concepts to a question.

The difference between a group conscience and a majority vote or group opinion is that one or more of the elements described above are missing.

**How does "A Loving God" express Himself through the group conscience?**

Groups find their way past ignorance, prejudice and self-will on an individual basis by practicing the Twelve Steps which enable us to practice humility, patience, tolerance, kindness and love - emphasizing principles before personalities. Through the Steps, we learn to overcome self-will and open the way to a group conscience. When tempers flare, an informed chairperson postpones discussion until those tempers cool, allowing time for prayer and meditation. (One workshop mentioned the Serenity Prayer.)

## **THE INFORMED GROUP CONSCIENCE (Cont.)**

A knowledge of A.A. history and willingness to listen to experience were also cited as important factors. We can listen for a quiet minority voice which may be the true expression of a loving God by allowing time for all to share and, especially, the minority to be heard. The importance of the minority view was stressed in most workshop sessions.

### **How is discussion prior to a group conscience handled in your area?**

In most areas, members are informed, in advance, that a group conscience will be sought; and all agreed that advance notice should be given - with two weeks suggested, if possible, to acquire necessary information. Most agreed that members are encouraged to participate in discussion; but several suggested more encouragement is needed, and this could be the GSR's responsibility. It was mentioned that a know-it-all in the group can be annoying, but that the group gains strength by tolerating him or her.

There was general agreement that, in most instances, not enough time is allowed for discussion in order to hear both sides of an issue.

Most workshops indicated that a lack of unanimity does not mean a lack of group conscience. Lack of unanimity is also a group conscience to do nothing. Sometimes the group conscience is that we do not agree. If a group cannot find the voice of conscience, a **group inventory** maybe needed. If a group conscience cannot be developed, the group eventually dies.

### **In what ways can we stimulate a better understanding and application of the Steps, Traditions, and Concepts?**

By personally applying and relating the Steps, Traditions, and Concepts to our own sobriety, we can stimulate an interest by example. As trusted servants, we can include experience with the Steps, Traditions, and Concepts in sharing our stories. Sponsorship and a home group need emphasis. A sponsor has the responsibility to encourage reading Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions and other Conference approved literature.

Workshops and panel discussions on the Steps, Traditions and Concepts stimulate discussion. And, it was suggested that these be held at Regional Forums as well as area and district meetings.

Groups especially need stimulation in this effort. And, it is helpful to cite examples to the Traditions and Concepts pertinent to group experiences. It was also suggested that groups read the Steps at the beginning of their meetings to explain How It Works and, also read the Traditions to share Why it Works. The Concepts may be used as a reference: find the one that fits the question.

### **How can we help the groups understand that the conference has the responsibility of acting as the collective group conscience for the entire fellowship?**

One workshop suggested that what takes place at the Conference does not become a group conscience until the delegates take the experience back to the groups.

## **THE INFORMED GROUP CONSCIENCE (Cont.)**

Full reports relating what was accomplished to area needs are helpful. The membership feels part of the Conference through the delegates' sharing of the activities.

Charts are helpful - especially the Structure Of The Fellowship chart in Chapter I of *The A.A. Service Manual* showing the relation between the A.A. groups and the Conference. Information regarding matters coming before the Conference give each group a sense of participation in the Conference.

Regional service conferences such as the Regional Forum, PRAASA, and the PNC and are helpful. Many areas now have service structure schools for the GSRs making it possible for them to provide their groups with an understanding of the Conference. A chart of the Oregon Area's service structure appears in the Oregon Area Guidelines.

## **FURTHERING YOUR GROWTH AND EDUCATION**

You will find it advantageous to attend all training sessions, workshops and seminars, etc., to get new ideas, knowledge or clarification of a principle. These include:

- Visiting other districts and their events.
- Attending area workshops of all kinds.
- Regional service assemblies:

Pacific Region A.A. Service Assembly (PRAASA) held annually during the 1st weekend of March.

Pacific Northwest Conference (PNC) held annually, usually on the 4th of June weekend. Except, that it is not held at all in years of the International Convention.

Regional Forums; held every two years in **even numbered years**.

## **WHAT ARE THESE REGIONAL ASSEMBLIES?**

### **Pacific Regional Alcoholics Anonymous Service Assembly (PRAASA)**

"The purpose of PRAASA is to develop greater unity among the members, groups, and areas of the Pacific Region, to encourage the exchange of ideas and to provide an opportunity for members to discuss pertinent aspects of A.A. Recovery, Unity, and Service should always be the primary purpose for each assembly. The thought of how we can better serve Alcoholic Anonymous should never be compromised." PRAASA is held annually the first weekend of March. It consists of two days of presentations concerning our three legacies and matters on the agenda of the upcoming General Service Assembly. Time for questions is always provided.

## **WHAT ARE THESE REGIONAL ASSEMBLIES? (Cont.)**

There are roundtable discussions concerning every facet of service. At these you will meet people from nine states all sharing a common bond of interest; whether that interest be in Public Information, Finance or GSRs, etc. All share their experience, strength and hope with others with similar interests.

PRAASA is a gathering of, in recent years, about one thousand people all striving to learn how to better carry the message of A.A. This assembly is hosted by a different area each year.

### **Pacific Northwest Conference (PNC)**

The purpose of the Pacific Northwest Conference is to develop greater unity between the members, groups and areas of the Pacific Northwest, to encourage the exchange of ideas and experiences and provide an opportunity for members to discuss pertinent aspects of A.A. Recovery, Unity and Service should always be the primary purpose for each Conference. The thought of how we can better serve Alcoholics Anonymous should never be compromised.

The Pacific Northwest Conference has traditionally included members from Oregon, Idaho, Washington and British Columbia. Currently Oregon Area 58 and Washington State East Area 92 host the PNC, with some participation from the other nearby areas of the Pacific Northwest.

### **Regional Forum**

Regional Forums originated in 1975 through a good idea on the part of the late Chair of the Board Emeritus, Dr. Jack Norris. They are weekend sharing sessions designed to enhance and widen communication among service and potential service people, and representatives of the General Service Board, Staff, and Grapevine Staff. At the invitation of a region, four forums are held each year. Since our U.S. / Canada structure is made up of eight regions, a Regional Forum is held every other year in a particular region, and on a rotating basis.

There is no registration fee for a Regional Forum. The General Service Board covers the expenses of hotel meeting rooms, transportation and rooms for its board and staff personnel. Many areas / districts / groups cover or defray the transportation and hotel room expenses of the service people representing them at a forum. A Regional Forum is not a formal, decision-making body, thus no formal actions come about as a result of forums. Rather, forums provide a unique opportunity to share valuable experience, ask questions, and spark new ideas.

Our regional trustee and some staff members from the General Service Office and Grapevine attend PRAASA and Regional Forums.

## **SPONSORSHIP IN SERVICE**

Sponsorship in A.A. is basically the same, whether in helping another individual's recovery or in service to a group. It can be defined as one alcoholic who has made some progress in recovery and/or performance or service, sharing this experience with another alcoholic who is just starting the journey. Both types of service spring from the spiritual aspects of the program.

Individuals may feel that they have more to offer in one area than in another. It is the service sponsor's responsibility to present the various aspects of service: setting up a meeting, working on committees; participating in conferences, etc. In this matter, it is important for the service sponsor to help individuals understand the distinction between serving the needs of the Fellowship and meeting the personal needs of another group member.

The service sponsor begins by encouraging the member to become active in their home group ---- coffee, literature, cleanup, attending business meetings or intergroup meetings, etc. The service sponsor should keep in mind that all members will not have the desire or qualifications to move beyond certain levels and, thus, the service sponsor might help find tasks appropriate to individuals' skills and interests. Whatever level of service one performs, all are toward the same end ---- sharing the overall responsibilities of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Eventually, the service sponsor encourages the individual member interested in this form of service to attend district meetings and to read about the history and structure of Alcoholics Anonymous. At this point, the individual beginning this work should begin to understand the responsibilities of service work, as well as feel the satisfaction of yet another form of Twelfth Step work. Such individuals should be encouraged to take an active part in district activities and consider being elected to alternate positions in the district so as to learn about the responsibilities of various jobs in the service structure.

During this process it is important for the individual to continue to learn about the three Legacies--- Unity, Recovery and Service, and to understand that the principle of rotation not only allows them to move on in service, but also gives newer members the privilege of serving. Rotation also allows them to understand that no one should hold on to a position of trust long enough to feel a proprietary interest and thereby discourage newcomers from service.

Now, through knowledge and experience, the newer member is aware that service is our most important product after sobriety. With this knowledge, the individual is able to share their vision with others and ensure the future of Alcoholics Anonymous.

The above section on service sponsorship has been quoted directly from the A.A. pamphlet Questions and answers on Sponsorship. With permission.

# SECTION VI

## PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Now, if you start doing all the things indicated above, you'll be active and find yourself attending many meetings. Some of these may seem boring to you. This is not unusual. The main reason for this is that you are a newcomer in a whole different sense of the word. Try to remember how strange and confusing some of those first A.A. meetings that you attended seemed. Keeping this in mind may make it easier.

You may not know any of the people there, or fully understand what is being discussed; possibly just as it was at your first A.A. meeting. But similarly, everyone there was once also a newcomer and knows what it feels like. Talk to people. Ask questions. Find out how to get information.

You'll find that people involved in service are a friendly bunch and love to take time to share and explain this most valuable part of recovery with new people.

Service work takes every bit as much energy as learning and working the Steps. It is probably more difficult to explain and share with the general member until we have told enough people not currently in service what it is really all about. With patient practice and participation in an informed group conscience, the only recognized authority in A.A., this dimension becomes a normal part of recovery for all of us.

This organizational method; region, area, district and group may seem complicated and overly structured at first but it is really in accord with our Tradition of "least possible organization". It has been tested over time and provides the most balanced way to arrive at the only recognized authority in A.A., an Informed Group Conscience which must be communicated to others when it deals with issues affecting A.A. as a whole. Perhaps this will be clearer if we start at the top of the A.A. structure.

## SUMMARY OF THE SERVICE STRUCTURE

Therefore, the structure from the **TOP DOWN** is:

The Group: is part of and served by

The District: is part of and served by

The Area: is part of and served by

The Region: and are all part of and served by

The General Service Conference.



## **TOOLS FOR THE G.S.R.**

### **Some Vital Aids**

Some of the reading material seems tough at first; but study it, discuss it, and see how it relates to other parts of the program. It will surprise you someday soon when it comes alive and becomes a part of you and your message. All of our A.A. literature is important but those pieces most directly related to service include:

- *The A.A. Service Manual Combined With The Twelve Concepts for World Service, [booklet]*
- *The A.A. Group, [pamphlet]*
- *A.A. Comes of Age, [book]*
- *A.A. Tradition - How it Developed, [pamphlet]*
- *Supporting The A.A. Support System, [pamphlet]*
- *Circles of love and Service, [pamphlet]*
- *Inside A.A., [pamphlet]*
- *The GSR May Be The Most Important Job In A.A., [pamphlet]*
- *The Twelve Concepts For World Service Illustrated, [pamphlet]*
- *The "White Sheet," What A.A. Does and Does Not Do, [One page flyer]*
- *A.A. Literature Catalog.*

*Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. [Book]*

#### **The Oregon Area Guidelines**

This handbook explains how our area conducts business, charts our service structure, contains maps of our Districts, and tells how a district or a combination of two or three districts may host an assembly.

#### **Final Conference Report.**

A detailed report from the General Service Conference held in New York City in April of each year.

Using these you will get both a good overview of the service picture and enough detail to deal in specifics.

## IN CONCLUSION

Concept IX tells us:

*"Good service leaders ... are at all levels indispensable for our future functioning and safety."*

Leadership starts with informed group members and GSRs, many of who go on to become DCMs, area service committee chairs, area officers, delegates and trustees.

In order to fulfill the responsibility that our group has given us we must become as knowledgeable as possible. If we keep an open mind and a willingness to learn, we soon find that we are the ones that benefit.

**In so helping to carry the message more usefully are we not doing what the 12th Step asks of us?**

## GLOSSARY OF COMMON A.A. TERMS

**Alternate:** A General Service worker who, according to local autonomy and needs, is elected at the group, district or area levels to participate with, assist in and, in appropriate circumstances, assume the duties of a principal office holder, i.e., Alternate GSR, Alternate Delegate.

**Archives:** A collection of A.A. memorabilia. The Archivist functions might include collection, indexing, storing and exhibiting original and reproduced local, national and international A.A. material such as newspaper and magazine articles, tape recordings of important A.A. functions, oral histories of older members, group and district histories, minutes of area assemblies and district meetings, etc.

**Area:** A geographical division within a State or Province. Normally there is one area for each State or Province. Where there is high population, a State or Province may divide into two or more areas.

**Area Assembly:** An area assembly is a periodic meeting of the GSRs, DCMs, area service committee chairs and area officers. All A.A. members are encouraged to attend, but only the above listed members of the assembly are entitled to vote. From among the members of the assembly, they elect their delegate and alternate and the area officers and their alternates. The assembly is a basic unit of the general service structure and conducts or helps coordinate most of the business for the area.

## GLOSSARY OF COMMON A.A. TERMS (Cont.)

**Autonomous:** Our Fourth Tradition states: "Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole." This means that we have been given the courage to declare each A.A. group an individual entity, strictly reliant on its own conscience as a guide to action. In charting this enormous expanse of freedom, we found it necessary to post only two storm signals: A group ought not do anything which would greatly injure A.A. as a whole, nor ought it affiliate itself with anything or anybody else.

The above was quoted from pg. 147 of *Twelve Steps And Twelve Traditions*, published by A.A. World Services, Inc., with permission.

**Box 4-5-9:** A bimonthly publication of the General Service Office, the title of which is also the New York mailing address of GSO. (Grand Central Station, New York, NY. 10136). The masthead of this informative mini-magazine consists of the words "*News and Notes From the General Service Office of A.A.*" It includes such items of interest as: a calendar of important local, national and international events; questions and problems of GSO about A.A.; committee reports from Public Information, Cooperation With The Professional Community, Cooperation With Treatment Facilities, Correctional Facilities Committee, Hospitals, Finance, etc.; vignettes and anecdotes from A.A. people, history and events; as well as much other information of interest to the dedicated and/or curious member. Many fruitful ideas for a GSR's reports to the group can be derived from the pages of *Box 4-5-9*.

**Conference:** Delegates, the Board of Trustees and the GSO Staff. This meeting keeps the individual A.A. member and GSO in close, supportive contact with each other through the general service chain. This chain is made up of several links: the Trustees' Committees working closely with the comparable Delegates' Committees (such as P.I., C.P.C., Treatment Facilities, Finance, etc), the delegate from and back to the area; and the individual A.A. member through the GSR. In the Conference, each area has one representative delegate who confers with the ninety three other delegates, twenty-one trustees, GSO staff members and representatives from the two corporations - A.A. World Services, Inc. and the A.A. Grapevine, Inc. See "What is the Conference Plan?" in the *A.A. Service Manual*

**Delegate:** The man or woman elected, for a two year term, at the Area General Assembly to represent the area at the annual meeting of the General Service Conference in New York. The delegate carries the group conscience of our area to the conference and brings back to us the results of the conference meeting.

**District:** A geographic sub-division within a general service area created in order to come closer to the individual A.A. group.

**District Committee Member (DCM):** An experienced GSR who has been elected by the other GSRs within a district. The DCM is primarily responsible for coordinating and assisting the efforts of the GSRs in the district. Many districts assign further duties to their DCM.

**General Service Representative (GSR):** An A.A. member who is elected by a group to represent that group's opinion in discussions at the district and area levels. The GSR also keeps the group as fully informed as possible of important decisions, discussions and events occurring within A.A. at the district, area, regional, national and international levels. They are further responsible for seeing that the best possible A.A. representatives are chosen to serve the whole fellowship by voting for the DCM of their district, area officers, the delegate to the conference and their alternates.

**Region:** A grouping of several States or Provinces from which a regional trustee is elected to the Board of Trustees. There are eight regions in the Conference - six in the United States and two in Canada.

**Third Legacy:** Recovery and unity are our first two legacies handed down to us from the founders of A.A. Our Third Legacy is **Service:** the sum total of all A.A. services, from the twelfth step call to A.A.'s coast-to-coast and world wide activities.

**Third Legacy Procedure:** A voting procedure, unique to A.A., designed to help reduce some of the negative aspects of elections - such as personality clashes, ego battles and dissatisfied minorities. See "Third Legacy Procedure" in *The A.A. Service Manual*.

**Trustee:** The usual term, or name, for a member of A.A.'s General Service Board of Trustees. Currently the board is made up of twenty-one trustees including the eight Regional Trustees; all of who are alcoholic. Seven of the other trustees are 'Class A' (non-alcoholic) and fourteen are "Class B' (alcoholic).

**Twelve Concepts:** As the twelve Traditions are to the preservation and unity of Alcoholics Anonymous; so are the Twelve Concepts to General Service. They are a set of principles and practices intended to preserve service to A.A. and the still suffering alcoholic. They also protect the structure by which such service is made possible. (See *The Twelve Concepts For World Service* in the back portion of *The A.A. Service Manual*)

**Warranties:** The Twelfth Concept Of World Service consists of **The Six Warranties** which are also Article 12 of the Conference Charter. These Warranties are considered, by some, to be the A.A. Bill Of Rights.

#### **Responsibility Statement:**

I am responsible....  
When anyone, anywhere,  
Reaches out for help, I want  
the hand of A.A. always to be there.  
And for that: I am responsible