

CONCEPTS

Volume XLV, No. 1

Northern Illinois Area, LTD. Area 20 Service Letter

Spring 2022

The Privilege of Service

Hello to all members of NIA! I'm happy to be serving you as your new Alternate Area Chair. I look forward to meeting any new people in service.

I began my service journey in February 2004, as a GSR. I wasn't quite sure what a GSR was for a bit, but I followed my DCMs lead, and I began to see that service kept the wheels of Alcoholics Anonymous turning. Each piece fit into the next, and the actual service to the alcoholics of Northern Illinois was very real.

I moved into the Alternate DCM role in my District, then DCM, then Alternate Area Secretary, Area Secretary, Registrar, Alternate Corrections, Corrections, Treasurer, and now Alternate Chair. I must say, I'm in "Service Kindergarten" for every rotation. There is no position I have ever had in NIA that I started out knowing how to do. The support of others in service and the experience of those previously holding the position always taught me what I needed to know, and helped me through the process. I have never been alone in NIA service. I come away from every service position with a greater knowledge of how things work in Alcoholics Anonymous.

I'm very excited to be taking on this new role. I will be working with the GSRs at Area Assemblies, and am hoping to have many opportunities to interact with them at other times as well. I will be the Area Liaison for the Spring Conference and the Big Book Conference, and we also have an indispensable Conference Advisory Committee with us every step of the way. One of the most rewarding things I have ever done in service is to chair or work on a conference, so this will be an amazing opportunity

Also, I'm here to assist any District hosting an Area Assembly or Area Committee meeting. I'll be there from planning to the very end of the day and all in between, so DCM's dive in and you'll be fully supported!!!

DCMs, please invite me to your District meetings, GSRs, please invite me to your meetings. I am happy to come and be of service to you in any way I can!

I believe it is a great privilege to be able to serve in Alcoholics Anonymous, and to have the opportunity to learn so much while I'm doing it. God's hand is always on our shoulders when

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we are serving our fellow alcoholic, of this I am certain. I wouldn't miss it for the world.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to serve you,

Dawn B. NIA 20 Alternate Chair Panel 72



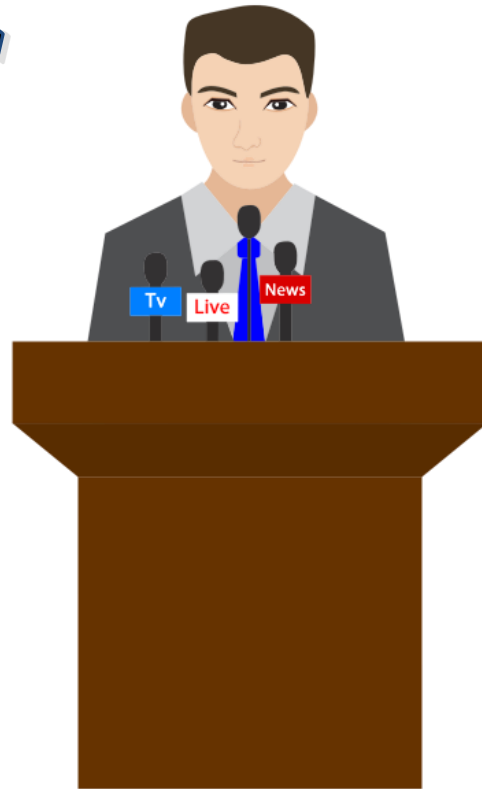
Meet the Chair

Hi my name is Rob M and I am a grateful recovering alcoholic. I am pleased for the opportunity to serve the area in this capacity. The last 2 years with Covid have been challenging for us all. This rotation should be exciting as we navigate our way back to in person and continue to use Zoom to help provide remote access via hybrid meetings to those that need it.

A little about me. I was born in Rogers Park, IL grew up and my early years were spent in Arlington Heights. My formative years were spent in western Michigan from the ages of 9-20 and then spent few years in California (1988-1992) but have spent most of my life in Northern IL. I lived in downtown Chicago from 84-88 and is where my life found new levels of unmanageability. After a geographic in March 1988 to get away from my problems (funny thing is no matter where you go there you are) I got sober in San Mateo, CA on 4/27/1988 I moved back to Northern Illinois 1992 with a new wife (my California Girl) and a son. I got back into NIA area service work around 2012 after my wife passed away.

AA has been the rock that has gotten me through all the highs of lows of life, and service is the foundation of that rock. I started service as ashtray cleaner and setup/cleanup. I had found something that seemed to work and I dove straight in. I and had the opportunity to serve in various capacities throughout my sobriety. Most recently I have served the NIA 20 in various capacities as GSR, DCM to Alternate and Committee Chair.

I currently live in Bartlett where I have lived since 1996. I have a new Fiancé', Susan. I have 3 kids 1 son(30), 2 daughters(27&24) all living on their own. At home I also have 2 dogs. I am looking to move to Plainfield area this spring with my soon to be new wife. I am a lifelong Blackhawks fan and I am an active member of .A.R.M. (Association of Recovery Motorcyclists) a large international recovery and motorcycle group and I love to ride my Harley in the summers with my brothers. If you ever need anything around service, NIA or recovery please reach out to me, I look forward to meeting as many of you as possible.



Working With Others

“PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE shows that nothing will so much ensure immunity from drinking as intensive work with other alcoholics.” Alcoholics Anonymous pg. 89

This is where our real “work” is. It’s my job as a recovered member of Alcoholics Anonymous to give the newcomer an adequate presentation of our program. I have to give away what was so freely given to me. I’ve learned a couple of things since coming into A.A. about sponsorship; one is that it is not extra credit, and two that I do not wait to be asked. I started working with others after about a year of sobriety, so I’ve learned a few things throughout the years. Upon meeting a newcomer now, I just simply ask a few questions to get a feel for where they are. I try to be

straightforward and simple. If they have a problem identifying as an alcoholic or not sure if they might be one, I always refer to page 21 in our book which describes the “real alcoholic”. I believe this uncomplicated description works best in the beginning. Most can relate and identify with this.



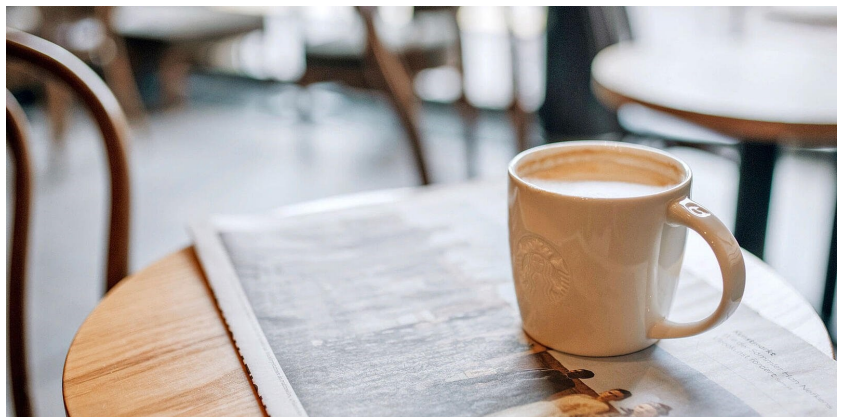
We often feel stuck with our friends and little “clicks” probably at some stage in our recovery. I know I have or still do at times. Now I make it a point to sit with those unfamiliar faces; the ones who may seem new or shy. It’s our job to make the newcomer feel welcome and at home. This is what had been done for me. Our book says on page 77 “Our real purpose is to fit ourselves to be of maximum service to God and the people about us,” this is a mission statement if you ask me. Once we’ve been through the Steps and have had a transformation, we/I become the messengers. Our Twelve Step says we carry “THIS” message. This message is the message of the program of recovery as it’s laid out in the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous. It’s not John’s, Bob’s, Angie’s, or my message.

The way I work with someone today is simply through Big Book sponsorship. Starting at the title page through page 164. Line by line and page by page, often turning statements into questions. No worksheets involved. And, of course, sharing my own experience with this work through this process. I feel there’s no better way for us to get outside of ourselves than to work with another alcoholic. And it gets me so much more involved in my own recovery. I always have a new experience when I take someone through this work. And that I’m truly grateful for.

In Fellowship,

Joey B

District 22



As our Delegate prepares for the General Service Conference (GSC) it is incumbent for us to participate in the process. Our organization is compared to an upside down triangle. This is because the fellowship, the groups themselves, are who is in charge. The group delegates authority to act for that group to the GSR who goes to the District Meeting and Area Assembly and represents that group's thoughts (the group's conscience). The District Committee Member (DCM) also attends the Area Assembly with the delegated authority of the District to provide the District's conscience. This is how the Area Delegate becomes informed. The Pre-General Conference Workshop is an Area Event that takes place prior to the GSC so that we can inform him of our Area's Conscience so that he can adequately represent us for the good of all of A.A.

The Agenda Items, for this year's GSC, are out. You can contact your DCM for access to them. Read through them and pick one or two to talk to your group about and obtain your group's conscience on them and then come to the Pre-General Service Conference Workshop to share that with the Delegate.

This is how it works. If you don't participate we don't move forward as a whole.

Walk Through the Big Book

There Is A Solution

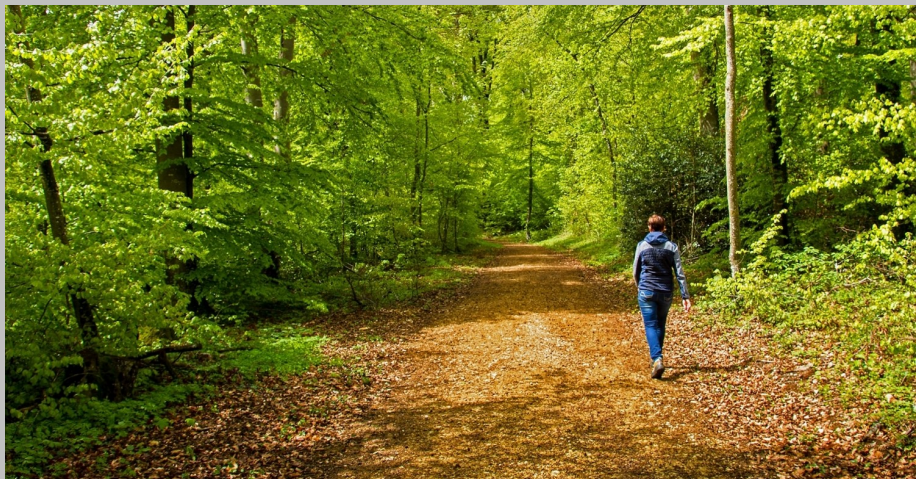
"We of Alcoholics Anonymous, know thousands of men and women who were once just as hopeless as Bill. Nearly all have recovered. They have solved the drink problem."

This is how the chapter starts and as a person suffering from alcoholism and the hell that is an alcoholics lifestyle brings this is great news. But how? That is my question because I have tried, too many times to count, to stop drinking all to no avail. Bill goes on to tell me that the "we" are average people from all sections of life who would normally not mix. But here they are recovered. "The feeling of having shared in a common peril is one element in the powerful cement which binds us." But "The tremendous fact for every one of us is that we have discovered a common solution. We have a way out on which we can absolutely agree, and upon which we can join in brotherly and harmonious action." What? These men and women from all sorts of different backgrounds, social and economic status, professions, and education can absolutely agree? How can that be?

"An illness of this sort – and we have come to believe it an illness – involves those about us in a way no other human sickness can." "... with it there goes annihilation of all the things worth while in life. It engulfs all whose lives touch the sufferer's. it brings misunderstanding, fierce resentment, financial insecurity, disgusted friends and employers, warped lives of blameless children, sad wives, and parents – anyone can increase the list.

"But the ex-problem drinker who has found this solution, who is

properly armed with facts about himself, can generally win the entire confidence of another alcoholic in a few hours. Until such and understanding is reached, little or nothing can be accomplished." So, the solution is something that one person has to pass on to another person. I am too hard headed, too wrapped up in my alcoholism and convictions to find the solution on my own. Bill is going to spend time going over the problem and offering the solution. That solution is based on "our combined experi-



ence and knowledge. This should suggest a useful program for anyone concerned with a drinking problem."

"If you are an alcoholic who wants to get over it, you may already be asking – 'what do I have to do?'" There are three types of drinkers that Bill describes: the first is the moderate drinker. This is a person who can take it or leave it. They drink to be social, to relax, or add flavor to a meal. But they don't have to, and they can stop at any time. This is the person who leaves half empty glasses, who throws out partially consumed drinks, who stop drinking because they are starting to feel it. Then there is

the hard drinker. This is the person who likes to feel intoxicated/drunk. Their drinking will gradually impair them physically and mentally. It may cause problems in their life, with bosses, spouses, and financially. But they can stop. It may be difficult but if something of importance is impacted, they can and do stop. Then there is the "real alcoholic." No matter how they start, moderate or hard, they eventually lose all control when it comes to drinking. Once they start, they have no control over how long or how much. This is the hopelessness of alcoholism. No matter how bad they want to stop, they just can't. This is the conundrum of the disease that Dr. Silkworth described in The Doctor's Opinion. Once they start drinking, they set off the allergy and when not drinking they are dealing with the obsession. If only they wouldn't start drinking, they might have a chance. So, the obsession is the real problem here. "The fact is that most alcoholics, for reasons yet obscure, have lost the power of choice in drink. Out so-called will power become practically nonexistent, We are unable, at certain times, to bring into our consciousness with sufficient force the memory of the suffering and humiliation of even a week or a month ago. We are without defense against the first drink." "When this sort of thinking is fully established in an individual with alcoholic tendencies, he had probably placed himself beyond human aid, and unless locked up, may die or go permanently insane."

"If you are as seriously alcoholic as we were, we believe there is no middle of the road solution. We were in a position where life was becoming impossible, and if we had passed into the region from which there is no return through human aid, we had but two alternatives: One was to go on to the bitter end, blotting out the consciousness of our intolerable situation as best we could; and the other, to accept spiritual help."

Alcoholics, of the hopeless variety, have those two choices. So, what is this spiritual help? Dr. Jung told a man he was trying to help "You have the mind of a chronic alcoholic. I have never seen one single case recover, where that state of mind existed to the extent that it does in you." The man replied, "Is there no exception?" "Yes," the doctor replied, "there is. Exceptions to

cases such as yours have been occurring since early times. Here and there, once in a while, alcoholics have had what are called vital spiritual experiences. To me these occurrences are phenomena. They appear to be in the nature of huge emotional displacements and rearrangements. Ideas, emotions, and attitudes which were once the guiding forces of the lives of these men are suddenly cast to one side, and a completely new set of conceptions and motives begin to dominate them.

This spiritual help, then, is working to find a spiritual power that can change your ideas, emotions, and attitudes to completely new ones. This can be difficult for those who don't believe in the idea of a spiritual/higher power. But Bill reassures us that it only takes an open mind. To put aside prejudices and move forward trusting that more will be revealed. Bill assures us that "What seemed at first a flimsy reed, has proved to be the loving and powerful hand of God. A new life has been given us or, if you prefer, 'a design for living' that really works."

So, the next question is, "how do I get this vital spiritual experience?" That is the suggested program of recovery that is our Twelve Steps.



NIA 20 Public Information

Lisa S. NIA 20 Public Information Chair and Ed M. NIA 20 Public Information Alternate Chair

It's always exciting to start a new position, especially when it's a position involving service in Alcoholics Anonymous. Last month all trusted servants in Northern Illinois Area began their new roles serving in their respective positions. As I rotated out of my last position, the thought of serving the Area in Public Information was daunting. I was leaving a position I was familiar and comfortable with. Even though it was difficult during the pandemic to assist the committee with the work needed, it was still gratifying to work with the individual committee members to carry the message into treatment settings as much as we were allowed to during a health care crisis.

My first introduction to Public Information was through an anonymity break at a meeting that was my homegroup at the time. A local newspaper had interviewed a member for an article during National Recovery Month, and the member identified themselves as an active member of Alcoholics Anonymous while providing their full name. Many members had read the article and all sorts of spirited discussion took place as a result. There was great misunderstanding and hurt feelings. One of our members was also the District P.I. Committee Chair and they brought the A.A. pamphlet "Understanding Anonymity" to our next meeting. As a result, a different, more informed discussion took place. This basic P.I. pamphlet, among many other pieces of literature and videos, is the foundation for a shared understanding of the role P.I. plays in providing information and communication within the Fellowship and beyond.

Literature Committee

Without its literature, the A.A. message "would be hopelessly garbled", our relations with the community outside our Fellowship "would have become a shambles", and our society "would have bogged down in a welter of controversy and disunity". I'm paraphrasing yet the words written by Bill Wilson in 1964 remain clear. A.A.'s literature plays an important role in carrying a consistent message to ourselves and the world about us. We must be good stewards of our message.

Standing to serve you in this capacity for the next 2 years was by far an aspiration. Let's be honest, I much prefer books with lots of pictures, maybe a good conspiracy theory or history of WWII. Yet it remains my experience that I must serve or I die inside; it completes the triangle. "Why not me?" Literature is not my passion nor am I very organized. But there can be a champion for any cause, that we might make a difference. So, I am willing to try. I am willing to try some new things and contribute and see if it makes a difference. And if it doesn't work then we try again. Pretty simple.

This position was appealing to me because of all the changes through the years that A.A. had been making to improve communication through PSAs and other current media platforms to carry the message to a broader audience. Public Information is brand new territory for me, but I also have the assistance of a seasoned and knowledgeable Alternate Public Information Chairperson. Working with the P.I. Committee and the community to share what A.A. is and does, and does not do, and convey A.A.'s very important primary purpose to the general public promises to be a very exciting and rewarding position.

I am very happy to be getting started with a public information rotation as the alternate chair. There was a time not too long ago where if you said public information you would be talking about booklets, pamphlets or perhaps looseleaf information. This of course could be supplied by groups, districts, areas and of course General service office. This is still very true today, but as the saying goes something new has been added.

Electronic communication has been available for some time within AA. What is truly different now is the amount of material relating about alcoholism on the web. This is information that is often used by younger members.

Our job with public information could very well be to direct inquiries to approved AA literature, via the website. The reason this is important is to get information that has been reviewed so that it can be recommended to our society.

Here's the dividends. I receive back the gift of learning, of getting out of my comfort zone, meeting new people I would otherwise have not, all summed up in one word: growth. Case in point, I had the good fortune to speak with our webmaster a few weeks back. We're looking to make some enhancements to the Literature section of the NIA website and he was going to give me a crash course in "how to". He gave me his time, for fun and for free. What likely could have been a 30-minute deal magically turned into a 2-hour conversation about life. And it was amazing.

None of this could have happened without you, this Fellowship and a God in whom I trust and rely. Learn, grow and engage with others. Who would have thought this to be the life beyond my wildest dreams. Before all this I just wanted the money tree, red brick house, white picket fence and 1.13 children. Thank you for allowing me to serve.

Scott C, NIA Literature Chair



Hi. I am the new NIA 20 BTG, Bridging the Gap, Chair. I want to introduce myself and Bridging the Gap. I will qualify myself by saying, I have no qualifications. What I do have is the ability to share my experience, strength and hope to the alcoholic that is still suffering. I have never been in prison, treatment or hospitals for mental illness. I have however, been in all of them to carry the message of recovery from the disease of alcoholism. All of our stories are similar if we are looking for it.

Bridging the Gap is how we can connect with the alcoholic still suffering. They are the people that need a ride to their 1st meeting, an introduction to members of a group, phone numbers, meeting lists and this is a way to connect. By signing up for BTG, you are putting your name on a list and when someone reaches out for help, we can connect you.

Covid has made it challenging to connect with people that are in institutions. We need to get our information into the institution and give them the ability to reach out to us in a one-on-one format. I am planning on having a workshop in the near future and will post the information on the NIA20 website along with reaching out to DCM's in our area Districts.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to be of service, and I am looking forward to hear how you are reaching out.

Karen F.

NIA20BTG

Bridging the GAP

Between
treatment and A.A.
through
contact programs

This is A.A. General Service Conference-approved literature.

Delegate's Corner

Service in the Digital Era-

Sitting down with my coffee and watching the news this morning I must admit I'm becoming more and more confident that this pandemic might just be beginning to lose its teeth. I know, we've said that before, at least a couple of times, however all signs currently point to a gradual return to "normal" in the coming months. The question is "What will normal look like in the days ahead". Here in Chicago, theaters, and venues long closed are beginning to reopen and our mask mandate is expected to be rescinded (something very specific to our region). Signs point to a gradual return to normal within the fellowship as well, with many AA and district meetings now being held in person, and following suit, the General Service office has informed us that the General Service Conference will once again be held in person this April in Brooklyn. As we "return to normal", the question must be asked "What do we do with the virtual technology that evolved during the pandemic. New words like "virtual", and "hybrid" have now been added to our lexicon and we must ask ourselves if these concepts have a place in the fellowship for good?

The "virtual" aspect is clear cut. In times when we were not able to meet in person (whether due to the pandemic, distance, or other reasons), we have adopted the video conferencing model as a sound and proven method to continue our service both to one another and to the alcoholic who still suffers. From the standpoint of personal recovery there does appear to be evidence that this technology works. Just last night I was on a meeting where a woman announced her 6-month anniversary, all of which was achieved via online meetings (along with the occasion in person visit with her sponsor). To her, this is the only AA she knows, as well as many other AA's across the country in remote communities who have embraced "online meetings" for years.

The hybrid aspect however is one which is still "evolving". This involves meetings conducted in person that have video conferencing capabilities in place to allow others to sign on and participate remotely. This suggests an opportunity for increased participation for those unable or unwilling to meet in person, for

whatever reason. Our own Assembly recently passed a motion to allow hybrid meetings for our Area meetings and we are now embarking down this road. Time will tell whether this is something the fellowship chooses to embrace. This technology too though hasn't been met without some resistance. Concerns about anonymity, cost, and applicability continue to be raised. Concerns about the absence of the personal in-person approach of one alcoholic talking to another are valid, and in the end, will likely be a personal choice. However, in the end, I believe this technology will be here to stay, especially at Area events where significant distances sometimes prevent some from attending. Keep in mind, as Areas go, ours trends towards the lower end for distances traveled by participants, as many Areas cover entire states, or provinces!!

On a personal note, the advent of "video conferencing technology" has afforded me the opportunity to make many new connections and learn a great deal in a short time. The pre-General Service Conference workshops were all held virtually last year and are being scheduled that way again. This has seemed to me to be a great advantage and allows people to attend several different workshops, while allowing for maximum participation. My conference Finance committee and Archives committee have met 3 times so far and have more meetings scheduled (prior to the conference). Additionally, the old Regional Trustee-Delegate phone call has been replaced with a virtual breakfast once a month where all 14 Delegates from the East Central Region are able to share with the trustee on concerns specific to their Area. There really is no end to the possibilities that exist with virtual technology. There is a limit though to the advantages of this and in that vein, the GSB voted this year there would not be a hybrid element at the General Service Conference. That means you either attend in person, or you don't attend (something many other Areas are also embracing). That decision too was met with a bit of resistance which just goes to prove that the entire subject is still up for debate.

In the end, I think we need to be patient, open minded and willing to see the benefits, while at the same time not being afraid

to voice our concerns. For this alcoholic there is nothing that will ever replace the one-on-one connectedness that happens when two alcoholics are in the same place, but I also concede that the technology has benefits. As is the case with most “issues” in AA, I believe the voice of God will be present in our leader’s hearts which will enable them to make the best decisions for the fellowship. In the meantime, I’m packing my bags for New York city!

Chris D. Delegate P72/A20

Concepts is published four times a year in the Spring, Summer, Fall , and Winter just prior to the Area’s Assemblies. It is posted on the Area Website in both English and Spanish. If you would like to receive a copy via email please send your request to the Concepts Editor by clicking this [link](#) or using the Contact Us page of the Area Website. Happy reading.



GSR Preamble

We are the General Service Representatives.

We are the link in the chain of communication for our groups with the General Service Conference and the world of A.A.

We realize the ultimate authority in A.A. is a loving God expressed in our group’s conscience.

As trusted servants, our job is to bring information to our groups in order that they can reach an informed group conscience.

As trusted servants, we are helping to maintain the unity and strength so vital to our fellowship.

Let us, therefore, have the patience and tolerance to listen while others share, the courage to speak up when we have something to share, and the wisdom to do what is right for our groups as a whole.



Is A.A. For You

Only you can decide whether you want to give Alcoholics Anonymous a try—whether you think it can help you. We who are in A.A. came because we finally gave up trying to control our drinking. We still hated to admit that we could never drink safely. Then we heard from other A.A. members that we were sick. (We thought so for years!) We found out that many people suffered from the same feelings of guilt and loneliness and hopelessness that we did. We found out that we had these feelings because we had the disease of alcoholism. We decided to try to face up to what alcohol had done to us. There are some of questions we tried to answer *honestly* (www.aa.org, search “Is A.A. for you”). If we answered YES to four or more questions, we were in deep trouble with our drinking. See how you do. Remember, there is no disgrace in facing up to the fact that you have a problem.

What is NIA?

The principal function of Northern Illinois service Area 20 is to be a forum for effective communication between the Groups and the General Service Conference through its Delegate. In addition to counseling its Delegate about the collective Group Conscience of the Fellowship in Northern Illinois, NIA will assist its Districts, Groups and members to carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers in a broad variety of ways, including but not restricted to conducting workshops, sharing sessions and seminars in all fields of general service.

NIA Statement on Self-Support

Our Seventh Tradition states that “Every A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.” Northern Illinois Area 20 wants our fellowship to endure, and be ready for the still-suffering alcoholic to come. NIA makes this possible by taking care of its essential services such as website. The groups and districts in Area 20 fund this website thru their continued contributions and support. For additional information see the A.A. pamphlet regarding self-support.

NIA Statement on Singleness of Purpose

Our Third and Fifth Traditions state that “The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking.” “Each Group has but one primary purpose – to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers. And as a Fellowship we do one thing only: “- share our program of recovery.”

Area 20 Spring Assembly Business

1. Election of open positions
 - a. Accessibilities – Alternate
 - b. Answering Service – Chair and Alternate
 - c. Archives – Chair and Alternate
 - d. Bridge the Gap – Alternate
 - e. CPC – Chair and Alternate
 - f. Grapevine – Chair and Alternate
 - g. Literature – Chair and Alternate
 - h. Treatment – Chair and Alternate
2. Area Hybrid Meeting Update
3. Area Event Hosting / NIA 20 Events Calendar
4. Bids for 2022 Big Book Conference
5. Finance Committee recommendation for funds disbursement
6. Announcement of Appointed Committee Positions
7. Service Committee Breakout Sessions and Reports





2022 Events

Spring Assembly, March 12th via Zoom

<https://us02web.zoom.us/join/ztZakdequrDIqG91MSh8AP-YUyo8MdOuhbK1f>

Pre-General Service Conference Workshop, April 9th

Spring Committee Meeting, May 14th

Summer Assembly, June 1th

49th Annual Illinois State Conference with East Central Regional Conference, August 12th - 14th - Sheraton Lisle Naperville Hotel

Please Note: At this time, all events are subject to be cancelled, postponed, or attended through a virtual format such as Zoom, Skype, etc.

Concepts is published quarterly by the Northern Illinois Area of Alcoholics Anonymous. It is intended as a form of communication between Northern IL Area, Districts, and GSRs. Subscription is free but generally limited to A.A. members within the NIA geographical area. All publication costs are paid by A.A. members through their contributions to NIA. Opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the thinking of Alcoholics Anonymous, NIA or the Editor. Comments, suggestions, subscription requests, and experience, strength and hope, should be directed to the editor: Concepts@aa-nia.org. All A.A. members are encouraged to see Concepts on-line at: <http://www.aa-nia.org>. "CONCEPTS" is a confidential document. It should only be used and distributed within the Fellowship.

Submissions for the next edition must be in by May 15th 2022

