

# CONCEPTS

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Northern Illinois Area, LTD. Area 20 Service Letter

Winter 2020

## “A.A. at Its Best”: New Approaches to the Seventh Tradition

In mid-March of this year, at the onset of the Coronavirus pandemic, the lights went dark at the General Service Office as G.S.O.’s workforce dispersed to their homes to continue helping members carry the message of Alcoholics Anonymous. As the days went on, A.A.’s many central offices strove to remain open to fulfill their essential function, and A.A. groups turned to virtual platforms to ensure that alcoholics everywhere could meet and stay sober. Over the last number of months, a situation without precedent in the lifetime of A.A. has been faced with fortitude, hard work and creativity.

“The amazing thing,” says Leslie Backus, Class A (nonalcoholic) treasurer of the General Service Board, pictured above, “is that whether at the local, the area or the intergroup level, A.A.s have found a way to continue carrying the message. Our primary purpose is going strong. It is an awesome and humbling thing to watch.”

Suffering alcoholics have been turning to A.A. for 85 years, and the need for Alcoholics Anonymous has never been greater. Despite the physical separation of its employees, G.S.O. General Manager Greg T. wrote in a June letter to the Fellowship, “G.S.O. in New York is continuing to support all levels of service. Literature still needs to be published and distributed, calls need to be answered, online platforms still need to be updated, and support operations sustained.”

At the same time, according to G.S.O. acting Chief Financial Officer Bob W., there were challenges: “In the immediate aftermath of COVID-19, G.S.O. experienced a sharp decline in contributions and literature sales.” The precipitous fall in both of these funding levels — because people could neither contribute in the same way at meetings nor buy books from the group’s literature table or at their local intergroup office — forced A.A. to take a \$3 million drawdown from its Reserve Fund at the end of April.

Fortunately, since then, there has been a dramatic increase in contributions from A.A. groups and members, culminating in \$1.1 million for the month of July — an extraordinary response. Leslie Backus, who reported on A.A.’s financial situation at A.A.’s virtual 70th General Ser-

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vice Conference and who was also featured in a video released to the Fellowship entitled “COVID-19 & the Seventh Tradition” (<https://vimeo.com/430834698>), says of the response from the Fellowship, “It was the spiritual nature of the Seventh Tradition in practice, one person stepping up to help other members over and over.”

Bob W. adds, “More than the actual dollars themselves, it is about participation, and that is what gets me emotional. That principle of participation is rooted in our Fourth Concept and the Seventh Tradition. Money and spirituality mix in the basket.”

Literature sales, meanwhile, have risen only slightly from April, according to Bob, and are nowhere near their average monthly sales levels pre-pandemic. And while some of the \$1.1 million in contributions came from groups, many others were made by individuals via [aa.org](https://contribution.aa.org) (<https://contribution.aa.org>). Greg T. considers this a sign of these unprecedented times, when “individuals perhaps feel a level of responsibility in a different way, under the circumstances.”

As many in A.A. know, however, even in the best of times, only 40 percent of groups send a portion of their Seventh Tradition basket to help support the General Service Office. This is nothing new. Bill W. made note of it in a 1966 letter to the Fellowship in which he stated, “We cannot depend on A.A. book and pamphlet income year after year to make up for lack of Group contributions.” But the situation we are currently in is new — a global pandemic, an age of transformative technology — and finding solu-



tions to the lack of group contributions that Bill refers to is a conversation that presents itself with some urgency.

Jimmy D., Class B (alcoholic) Southwest regional trustee, is A.A.W.S. treasurer and chair of the A.A.W.S. Self-Support Committee, which is examining the issue of how the General Service Office can provide members with a clear picture of the current situation while letting them know the difference their contributions can make. “I believe in general we’ve done a poor job of allowing the Fellowship to see the tangible results of their participation in the Seventh Tradition,” Jimmy says. The issue, he believes, is one of communication. “People working at G.S.O. are doing a stellar job, but the way we talk to each other — to other members — needs to get better. An example is self-support acknowledgments. We need to provide living, breathing examples of specifically what your contribution lets us do for other suffering alcoholics. ‘Because of your contribution, we can do x or y.’ We need to use clear, concise language and encourage feedback.”

On the technology side, a lot of hard work has been done at G.S.O. since the pandemic hit to make it easier for groups to make their Seventh Tradition contributions via various digital platforms. It costs G.S.O. about \$1.60 to process each check sent by a group treasurer the old-fashioned way, even though, as Greg says, “we have streamlined the system to the degree possible in this environment and are processing quite effectively.” The new contributions portal at [aa.org](http://aa.org) should help the situation, making the process of contributing digitally — if that is what groups choose to do — more user friendly.

Jeff W., staff member on the Group Services assignment, believes that “group contributions may still be lagging because some groups don’t fully understand how to pass the virtual basket. And it has been complicated. Individuals have stepped up, big time — intergroups say this, as well. But groups have recovered more slowly.”

Jeff is hearing from groups who are continuing the tradition of self-support in other ways, however. For example, some are paying the rent on church basements or other spaces they can’t, for the time being, use. Groups in some areas are working on plans for reopening physical spaces, which may create a need for further Seventh Tradition support within the group itself. “We are hearing from groups about reopening in a safe and spiritual way. There are questions surrounding this that need to be considered. Should they provide masks, gloves, hand sanitizer? If it’s a hybrid meeting on a virtual platform, groups might have to invest in better WiFi, a Bluetooth speaker, perhaps a microphone and PA system.”

Jeff agrees with Jimmy D. that, generally speaking, while people don’t like to talk about money, “if we are transparent and clear and communicate the situation, then people will come through. We do need, in the long run, to change how we deal with the Seventh Tradition and emphasize the spiritual nature of it, which really goes back to a sense of belonging. Contributing reinforces that sense of responsibility.”

Ultimately, Greg T. thinks, Alcoholics Anonymous will not only survive, but thrive. “I believe A.A. members and groups have stepped up and realized that it is time to change the way we conduct our business and services during this very taxing and difficult environment and in the immediate future. This is A.A. in action. This is A.A. at its best — mirroring the founding period when there was a need for trial and error, when the communications and the technology of the day were used to their greatest effect in carrying the message.”

Jane E., a Panel 69 delegate from Area 49, Southeast New York, echoes Greg’s sentiments. “We are in the Flying Blind Period 2.0.,” she says — the first “flying blind period” being the earliest days of A.A. “But now we have the Traditions and Concepts to guide us.”

When it comes to money, Jane says, “many groups aren’t making coffee or paying rent — so they don’t need as much money. But G.S.O. does. Mail is answered; emails are answered; and an entire virtual General Service Conference was organized — and the staff is doing it all from home. I believe it comes down to word of mouth. I think it’s possible that when G.S.O. announced they had taken \$3 million out of the Reserve Fund, people began to think about that and talk about it. I know I did. In fact, in my opinion, people in A.A. actually have a responsibility to talk about it, to say, ‘We need contributions, right now.’”

Two quotes from Bill W. in *The Language of the Heart* may suffice in summing up the current situation when it comes to Tradition Seven: “The future would ... lack its full use

and meaning did it not bring us fresh problems and even acute perils — problems and perils through which we can grow into true greatness of action and spirit.” And, second, “We don’t have to go to Akron, Ohio, to see Dr. Bob’s memorial. Dr. Bob’s real monument is visible throughout the length and breadth of A.A. Let us look again at its true inscription — one word only, which we A.A.s have written. That word is sacrifice.”

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# Working With Others

**Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.**

I was introduced to the circle and triangle very early in my journey. Alcohol brought me to the unity part of the triangle (the fellowship). A sponsor, along with the Big Book brought me to the base of the triangle (recovery). “Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps” brought me to my relationship with my Higher Power, thus bringing me to the service portion of the triangle. Now there is wholeness.

I was 1 year sober when I called the treatment center that I had attended just a year prior. I asked if I could volunteer as a recovered member of Alcoholics Anonymous. They were happy to have me. I have since been a regular volunteer at treatment centers for 21 years, carrying our experience out of the Book to next suffering alcoholic. I don’t know how many people got sober and remained sober. I can tell you, I stayed sober.

It’s funny how many paradoxes there are in the Big Book. Lack of Power is our dilemma. But yet we are given more power than we know what to do with. And to keep it, we have to give it away.

One of the greatest gift in Alcoholics Anonymous, for me, is sponsorship. To watch people recover, to see them help others, to watch loneliness vanish, to see a fellowship grow up about you, to have a host of friends; this is an experience you must not miss. We know you will not want to miss it. Frequent contact with newcomers and each other is the bright spot of our lives.

God has placed wonderful people in my path, showing me how to carry this message. The Message is directly out of the book Alcoholics Anonymous; to show other alcoholics precisely, specifically, with clear cut directions how they have recovered. I have had the undying pleasure to study our text with many God sent friends and sponsors in this amazing fellowship, and to carry this great news in prisons, jails, and around the tables.

I have been hooked on service since my early days in recovery. From setting up and taking down chairs at meetings, making coffee, chairing meetings, being involved at the District and Area level. I was told if you’re going to stay a member of A.A., you have to do something. You want to be a verb in A.A. not a noun.

Today includes taking people through our text. We do a deep dive into the Big Book every Wednesday at 6:00 pm on Zoom. We are not experts. We just love carrying the message that has transformed our lives. I get to do this with two of my running buddies, David & Nance.

I went from being a hopeless, helpless alcoholic, to being of maximum service to God and people about me. God is doing for me what I can’t do for myself. Service is all about the Buzz!

David G



# NIA 20

## Open Positions

There are currently a number of Area positions that are open. If you or someone you know is interested, please contact the Area Chair, Carmela R at: [chairperson@aa-nia.org](mailto:chairperson@aa-nia.org).



### **Area Secretary Alternate (2-3 hours per week):**

Responsible person with a reasonable period of continuous sobriety. • Computer literate, MS Office applications. (Primarily Outlook, Excel, and Word) • General office background: taking notes, typing, editing, and report writing. Perform all duties as outlined in the Officers Responsibilities section of this document. • At Assemblies and Committee Meetings make available copies of the Area Roster and the District meeting list. • Assist to compile and distribute minutes of Area meetings, including but not limited to, Assemblies and Committee meetings. • Create and maintain recordings of each Area meeting. • Work distribution list • Attend meetings of the N.I.A., Ltd., Board of Directors (Secretary and Alternate Secretary). • Provide Pre-General Service Conference Workshop support.

### **Answering Service Chair, Archives Alternate, BTG Chair, BTG Alternate, & Grapevine Alternate**

Recommended Qualifications • Service as a G.S.R. • Service as a District Service Committee Chair or Alternate or • Service as a District Officer or Alternate. • Familiarity with the A.A. Service Manual, the A.A. Service Structure, and the Twelve Traditions are very helpful.

Responsibilities • Encourage participation in your Area Service Committee comprised of all District Chairpersons and their alternates and other A.A.'s interested in service work. • Attend all N.I.A. Assemblies and Committee meetings each year. Northern Illinois Area 20 Service Manual, version 06/2019 Page 39 of 49 • Attend the Pre-Conference Workshop. • Attend the N.I.A. Spring Assembly Conference. • Attend the Illinois State Conference when N.I.A. hosts the State Conference. • Participate in the Spring and/or State Conference as requested by the Spring or State Conference Committee. • Coordinate regular communications with members of the Area Service Committee. • Be available to attend District meetings upon request. • Be accessible to the Fellowship. • Report on Area Service Committee activities at Area Committee Meetings. Committee Chairs or their Alternates must submit a written report at Assemblies and committee meetings. • Have a working familiarity with the A.A. Service Manual, N.I.A. Service Structure Guidelines, and the Service Committee Workbook. • Hold Workshops on carrying the message through your Service Committee. • Have available a limited supply of Service Committee related Conference Approved literature and/or service pieces from GSO at Assemblies and Committee Meetings. • Chair Assembly Service Committee meetings. • Chair committee meetings at the Pre-Conference Workshop (See Pre-General Service Conference Workshop Guidelines). o Report at the Assembly to include: o Committee activities since the last Assembly. o Discussions at your Committee breakout session. o Progress of activity on applicable Primary Purpose Motions, to include details regarding costs to date. • Share ways to carry the message through your Service Committee at Assemblies and Conferences. • Develop a forum for the discussion of District concerns regarding related service opportunities. • Foster a committee atmosphere among the District Committee Chairs. • Formulate an informed group conscience regarding Area-wide service opportunities and issues with an emphasis on General Service Conference agenda items. • Be a resource and consultant to District Committee Chairs and other volunteers regarding service activities in their communities including the assessment of service opportunities and the development of projects. • Develop guidelines for activities and services within the responsibilities of your Service Committee. • Mentor the Alternate Service Committee Chairperson in order to prepare him or her to become Chairperson in a future rotation.



## From the Area 20 web administrator ...



Our website continues to be a valuable tool for sharing information, both to and from Area Officers and Committees. Last month our site had 909 unique visitors who visited 1,400 times. The average time on site was 2.33 minutes. These are great statistics for a site of our type and size, and indicate that our site is meeting its goals.

### District Meetings:

The District Meeting lists are the most visited pages. Most of our Districts are now connected to the Meeting Guide app, so those meetings are updated in real time. For Districts without the Meeting Guide we

update their meeting lists when a District sends us updates. (<http://aa-nia.org/meetings/>)

### Officer Reports, Committee Reports and Minutes:

These are updated for each Area Committee Meeting and Assembly. These updates are posted at the beginning of the week before each meeting and continue until a couple days following each meeting. They are archived in date order. (<http://aa-nia.org/reports/>)

### Agendas and Motions:

These are posted as they are received. ( (<http://aa-nia.org/agendas/>)

### Area Events:

Events are posted on the Events Calendar as they are received. We are limited to posting only official Regional, Area, District, and open Group events. (<http://aa-nia.org/calendar-3/>)

Guidelines for flyers and other content are posted on the website page below:

([http://aa-nia.org/wp-content/pdf/guide/2018/Website\\_Policy\\_and\\_Guidelines\\_2018.pdf](http://aa-nia.org/wp-content/pdf/guide/2018/Website_Policy_and_Guidelines_2018.pdf))

There are many more links for tools and forms for Districts, Groups and individual members on our website – all listed on our homepage.

You may contact individual Officers and Committee Chairs here: (<http://aa-nia.org/area/>)

If you have any problems finding information, concerns, or suggestions to improve our website, you can contact me directly at [webmaster@aa-nia.org](mailto:webmaster@aa-nia.org).

Earl N, website administrator



## GRAPEVINE CORNER

Happy Holidays! May I suggest listening to 30 Grapevine YouTube shares over the next 30 days to supplement your sobriety during this known stressful season? Did you know there is an AA Grapevine YouTube Channel? There is! Listen to the introductory session (4 minutes) and then decide what playlist you would like to start with. 'From Relapse to Recovery' includes eight stories of experience, strength and hope and 'Many Roads to Spirituality' has seven personal shares from A.A. members. There are many useful instructional sessions about Zoom and its nuances. Individual shares are also integrated. Each is anywhere from 2-7 minutes long and a great way to quickly hear someone else's experience strength and hope.

In 2017, the General Service Conference recommended "that AA Grapevine create a Google for Nonprofits account limited to the YouTube Nonprofit Program." AA Grapevine, Inc. is currently displaying content on the channel, consistent with A.A. principles and copyrights. The channel was first populated with AAWS' engaging, Conference-approved PSA: "Doors", an animated version of a member's recorded story for the GV Audio Project and two behind-the-scenes clips from the plant where the magazines are printed. We have since added a timeline of the making of our Big Book as well as a discussion from one of our non-alcoholic Class A Trustees on the use of AA Grapevine in CPC (Cooperation with the professional Community) work. Expansion of the AA Grapevine YouTube collection is in process, with the ultimate goal of hosting video content that may be of use or interest to members, the general public and the professional community. The first series will fall under the umbrella of



"Explainer Videos" that will serve to convey useful information on various topics with the purpose of streamlining access to multi-media content. This has been launched with the release of animated videos celebrating our 75 Year Anniversary in both English and Spanish. The "comments section" on the YouTube page are disabled. Please go to [www.youtube.com/c/AAGrapevine](https://www.youtube.com/c/AAGrapevine) to view our YouTube page. Some very interesting information is easily available.

This month's (December) Featured Section is "Remote Communities & Sober Holidays." Members share hopeful stories about helping alcoholics having trouble reaching us. Plus, sober holiday stories! Also included are powerful stories of hope by members during the current COVID-19 crisis.

As your Area Grapevine/LaVina chair, I challenge you to the 30 of 30 shares of your choice. I am starting today November 22, 2020 and will let you know, next time, how I included this into my daily readings and listenings!

In Service,  
Susan H.







## A.A. Everywhere

Prior to my entry into A.A. I did a fair amount of travel, mostly for business but on occasion I would take a vacation trip somewhere for “rest and relaxation.” Regardless of why I was traveling, there was one thing I made certain of; I never went anywhere without an ample supply of alcohol. If traveling by plane my luggage would have at least a few fifths stashed, carefully packed against potential turbulence by clothing. If traveling by car, even better! Unopened bottles were placed in a box in the trunk of my car and covered by blankets or towels. These were the back up to the pint under the front seat. Hotels were strategically chosen to be near restaurants that served alcohol so that I was always close to that “social” drink or drink with dinner. Or, more accurately, to get drunk. Wherever I traveled the first thing I did, without fail, was find the closest bar.

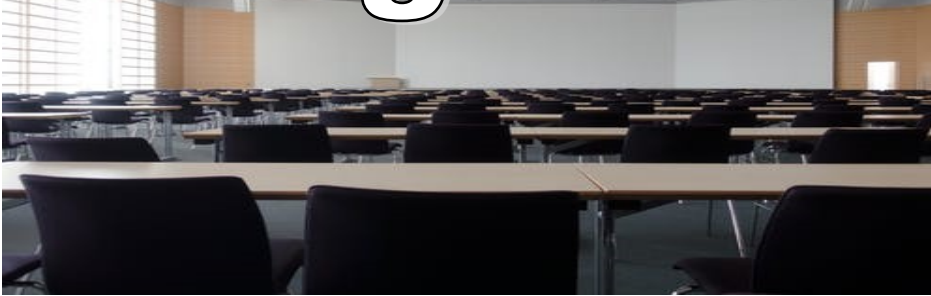
Following my early sobriety, my travel became a whole lot different. Thankfully, business travel had changed, and we had evolved into a much more health conscious culture. Gone were the three-

martini lunch and the after work happy hour marathons that somehow would end up well approaching closing time – and me wondering what happened yet again. My business travel now included copies of the A.A. Grapevine in my carry on and a soft copy of the Big Book in my luggage. And wherever I traveled the first thing I did, without fail, was find the closest A.A. meeting.

And they were everywhere! In the beginning it was a little trickier as the technology of today wasn’t available, but with a little pre-planning before heading out on a trip it was always possible. All it took was the desire not to drink. Later, I found meetings in small towns and large cities. Meetings where there were just a handful of people and meetings with lots of locals. On cruise ships and exotic vacation spots. Each A.A. meeting was just as unique as the people in them, and I loved them all. The new meeting location technology today gives us more options (and better GPS mapping) with a whole world of A.A. meetings to choose from when I’m on the road. The familiarity of being around other recovering persons no matter where I am, always makes me feel like I’m “home.”



# Delegate's Corner



Happy Thanksgiving

Do you believe it's November 2020 already? So much has changed for us in 2020. When was the last time that we met in person? Shook a hand, gave or received a hug? However, we have remained sober. We have helped each other at virtual meetings. Brand new people have gotten sober by going to virtual meetings only. Imagine that!

Our A.A. program is a blessing to the suffering alcoholic. Do you remember what it was like when you were still out there? Not pretty, was it.

We didn't get to go to the International in Detroit this year. I didn't get to go to the 70<sup>th</sup> General Service Conference in New York this year nor will I be able to go in person next year. But that's okay. I have learned to live life on life's terms. Slowly but surely, still learning to live life on life's terms.

I came to that conclusion (again) while reading the new book *"Our Great Responsibility"*. The group that I attend will occasionally read from that book on the last Wednesday of the month. It is a collection of Bill W.'s General Service Conference talks from 1951 to 1970. He also included talks from other speakers at those conferences such as Bernard Smith.

One night at the meeting we were reading *"1953 Bernard Smith"* starting on page 215 from *"Our Great Responsibility"*. Bernard Smith was a lawyer, author and non-alcoholic. He was an adviser to Bill W. and he believed in Alcoholics Anonymous.

I now quote from the book (with permission) from page 216: *"Let us remember that in keeping with the concept of the Twelfth Step, we in this room owe an obligation not only to those of this generation that suffer from alcoholism but to generations of alcoholics yet unborn. There's always a great driving force that invests newly born spiritual movements. That force is sufficient to preserve the sobriety of all of us who've found through A.A. a way of functioning in this material world of ours. History, however, is unfortunately replete with evidence of spiritual movements that, after the generation in which they were born and built and ended, lost their vigor; their purposes became diverted, and the spiritual sources within them began to dry up. And so, our Conferences are basically dedicated to the purpose of ensuring that our Twelve Steps and Traditions are insulated and protected against the ravages of the material world so far as possible, for the basis of our way of life is, after all, timeless. These Conferences serve, therefore, to ensure that the concepts of life and of living which have brought us our recovery are available to all who may suffer from alcoholism today, a hundred years from*

*now or a thousand years from now."*

After I read that I realized that I didn't need to be in New York, in the same room as the other 92 delegates. We did the work of the conference from our own homes.

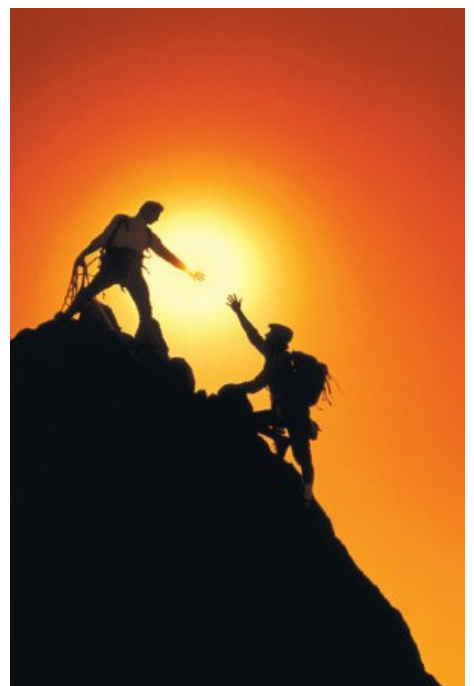
In the Spring of 2020 so many of you helped prepare me to attend the Conference by attending the Pre-General Service Conference Workshops. I would like to encourage you to do the same for the 2021 Conference.

Also from the same article on page 217: *"We must ensure through these Conferences that no principles and practices are adopted as part of the life and Traditions of A.A. until they have been tested by the hearts and the minds of these Conferences, which in sober fact are the basic custodians of all the greatness of the Society of Alcoholics Anonymous. So, the fundamental purpose of these Conferences is to ensure that our faith and our Traditions are preserved for all time, that no person in need of our help shall ever be denied it – for this Conference and the Conferences that follow must ensure that A.A. will never sanction indifference to human need. ... Our message to society is that we have found a way to live in God's world. For while the discarded bottle may be the yardstick of our recovery from alcohol, it is by no means the measure of our spiritual health."*

So, I look at the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* for Step 10, page 93, *"When in doubt we can always pause, saying, 'Not my will, but Thine, be done.'"* And with that, it is okay to recover in my home until it is okay to go out and meet with all of you. Acceptance is the key to all of my problems.

I'm so very grateful to be sober and to be serving you. Happy Thanksgiving everyone.

Marilyn F. – Delegate Area 20







## 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](http://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.”



## 2020 Events

- Dec 5** Virtual Eastern U.S./Canada Forum: Registration at [www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org)
- Dec 12** Winter Assembly - [Meeting Registration - Zoom](#)
- Feb 20** Virtual 10th Annual DuPage County Open [Save the Date Flyer](#)
- Aug 20-22** East Central Regional Conference [Save the Date Flyer](#)

The Winter Committee Meeting, Pre-General Service Conference Workshop, and Spring Conference dates have not been finalized yet. The Committee Meeting happens in January, the PGSCW happens in February, and the Spring Conference in March. Check the [Area Website](#) for dates, times and location.

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

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**Send articles for submission to the Concepts Editor by February 16th for the Spring 2021 Edition.**



