

# CONCEPTS

# Special Election

# Edition

Northern Illinois Area, LTD. Area 20 Service Letter

## How do I *want to* serve?

Ask yourself, talk to your trusted advisor(s) **and** leave it to your Higher Power...

In AA, it's **always** election season somewhere! Every day, a group somewhere needs a new treasurer or secretary, a coffee maker or literature person. My home group calls for several positions on a monthly basis. A district is looking to fill its Accessibilities co-chair or Alternate position or for someone to take over as Alternate Secretary or maybe 2021 is their full committee elections year. The Area has several Alternate positions to fill over the course of a 2-year panel rotation and has its Elections Assembly coming up this year in September. No matter the election type, I venture to guess that each of us has been in a seat in one of those elections rooms and at different times asked ourselves; "Should I serve?", "Can I serve?", "Is my sponsor giving me the look?", "Can I even do the job?" Or we might say; "I'll leave it to the folks who always step up.", "I won't be able to attend all the meetings.", "I don't know what's required, I'll sit this one out." One question, asked of me 18 years ago, helped me to break through that doubt and wonder to find where I fit. And it got me more into General Service action. Here's how it went...



I was chairing an open speaker meeting on Sunday mornings at my local Alano club. That was a collateral duty to serving as the Vice President of the Board for that club at the time. As that rotation was nearing an end, I was being asked and encouraged to serve as Club President. It sure sounded like something important and a great chance to continue to serve. At the same time, my then home group was getting started on the General Service path and was calling for a GSR. That also intrigued me. I had the right amount of ego to be sure I'd get one or the other and felt I had a choice to make. Meanwhile, my personal life had been in complete turmoil and that year was wrought several tough truths to digest about myself and how I had been living. Long and short, I was only about a year back into being sponsored and connecting with GOD (Good Orderly

Direction). I was three years sober then, coming off of a period since my 2 year anniversary, which I spent on my couch, isolated at home, contemplating suicide. In many ways, service saved my actual life, not just my sobriety. I thought the choice was about which role to stand for. Or which role I was best suited for, prepared for, or available for. Then, my sponsor hit me with an forgettable question. She said, "How do **you want** to serve?" I sat with that for a bit, asked it of myself regularly, talked to my sponsor some more, and then took a chance on asking God for direction. After some time, I came to know that my service life would be geared to direct service to Alcoholics and Alcoholics Anonymous, the life-saving forces that have proven again and again to be just what I needed to keep away from those painful nights, alone, on my couch.

I was an annoyingly enthusiastic GSR until it was time to do something different. Again, where did I *want* to serve? I have always loved parties – bring on the Districts Events Committee Chair. I love talking to people and the public – led me to Public Information Chair. Okay, I did experience a shift in there and served as District Treasurer – ugh. I wanted to help fill a need though I did NOT want to be Treasurer. I highly encourage you to take on at least one role you do not want to do and learn from it. Alternate DCM and DCM followed and then came time for my next Area Committee Service role. I couldn't answer the question. I didn't know how I wanted to serve. I was stuck. It all looked like work and a lot of commitment and some of the roles looked more attractive to do than others. I had been around the Area long enough to see both its assets and its liabilities, and I while I knew I wanted to be of service – I was stuck about where I fit.

There's a quote on a piece of décor that hangs in my home that reads something like: "When I get to the end of my life, and I meet God, I want to tell him that I used everything he gave me." Whoa. So, what gifts can I bring to service? How do I *want* to serve? I have been so very blessed when it comes to working with other female alcoholics. God has seen fit to keep me humble and serving in the way of sponsorship for nearly my entire sobriety. I was sponsoring a woman at the time who was living in a safehouse, on probation and in drug court to waive her jail sentence upon successful completion. We worked together for many months and then came her drug court graduation day. I sat in the jury box with the other supportive community members. I heard probation officers, treatment facility coordinators, other local law enforcement, and finally the judge praise each graduate. Then I heard a the resounding thanks to the local community of Alcoholics Anonymous for what it does to help suffering alcoholics escape from the misery of their fate had they not gotten sober. The judge looked over to us in the jury box and I swear all the sponsors were brimming with pride and gratitude. THAT MOMENT was the answer to the question. How do I *want* to serve? I felt it and I knew. I wanted to serve so that other program coordinators, law enforcement and other professionals could know what AA is and is not. That the connection AA can have with its local community professionals reaches far beyond our meeting rooms. The 1958 article that Bill W wrote for the Grapevine, "Let's be Friendly With Our Friends" came ALIVE in the courtroom that day. Once again, God did for me what I could not do for myself.

I'll take my turn to ask you now, "How do **you want** to serve?" Ask yourself what it means to you, talk to those who guide you and leave the outcome to your Higher Power. In these many years since that time, it is still the most important question for me. I hope you will find it is for you as well. Chances are, the answer is right there waiting for you in your own experience, strength and hope.

In loving service,

Carmela R

NIA 20 Panel 70 Chair

## Strong Leadership – an Enduring Need

The continuing need to develop strong leadership within AA is not new to our Fellowship. Indeed, the spiritual principles which guide us all in service enunciate this notion rather precisely. Concept IX states in part: “Good service leaders, with sound and appropriate methods of choosing them, are at all levels indispensable for our future functioning and safety.”

Half a century ago, one of our founders also wrestled with this same notion of the continuing need for sound leadership within AA. In a compelling article entitled “Leadership in AA: Ever a Vital Need,” first published in the Grapevine in April 1959, Bill W. wrote: “No society can function well without able leadership in all its levels, and AA can be no exception.” (Language of the Heart at p. 287) He went on to describe his concept of leadership within the Fellowship:

Good leadership originates plans, policies and ideas for the improvement of our Fellowship and its services. But in new and important matters, it will nevertheless consult widely before taking decisions and actions. Good leadership will also remember that a fine plan or idea can come from anybody, anywhere. (Id. at p. 288)

Buoyed by a spirit of hope, Bill recognized at the time he wrote this article:

We have an abundance of men and women whose dedication, stability, vision, and special skills make them capable of dealing with every possible service assignment. We have only to seek these folks out and trust them to serve us. (Id.)

This Fall – at the Area level and in three fourths of our Districts – elections will be held to determine those who will serve our Fellowship for the next two years. In the spirit of rotation, we will ask members of the Fellowship to stand for or be nominated to positions from GSR to their Home Group to Delegate to the General Service Conference. As Bill W. noted: “Because our leadership of service can be truly rotating, we can enjoy a kind of democracy rarely possible elsewhere.” (LOTH at p. 78) This rotation compels those in general service to step away from the position they have held allowing another to step forward to grow in service. It also challenges each of us, guided by a loving God and the direction of our sponsor, to examine our hearts and look to how we may next be of service to the Fellowship.

On a closely related topic in 1962 Bill W. stated:

*[I]t is only the GSRs who . . . can name [Area] Committee Members and finally name the Delegates. Hence great care needs to be taken by the groups as they choose their Representatives. Hit-or-miss methods should be avoided. Groups who name no GSRs should be encouraged to do so. In this area a degree of weakness tends to persist. The needed improvement seems to be a matter of increased care, responsibility and education. (Twelve Concepts for World Service pp. 36-37)*

More than 50 years later, throughout much of Area 20, we seem to continue the “hit-or-miss” practice to which Bill alludes. The standing witticism – which I myself too often have repeated – is that, when elections are being held in AA, it is unwise to leave the room, because you may find yourself holding a position upon your return. Too often, one of the newer members of the Fellowship – with little or no explanation of a GSR’s responsibilities – is thrust into a position for which he or she is ill-prepared. In the past, at my home District meeting, I have heard an announcement that the position of GSR at a group was open and an invitation extended to others to consider going to the meeting to assume that position. Recognizing the need to fill such an opening is a step in the right direction; inviting outsiders to show up at a meeting they do not otherwise regularly attend to fill it misses the mark. The notion that it is appropriate to take the position of GSR at a group merely to give one a vote at the Assembly is similarly misplaced.

Personally, I have been heard to say that I was “grunted” into the open position of GSR at my Home Group. This description is, in some sense accurate, since no one stood against me and no formal vote was, therefore, necessary. But it misses a vital point. Prior to his suggestion to the group that I was someone they should consider for the open GSR position, my sponsor had insisted that I prepare myself by becoming aware of what would be expected of me. Prior to

my selection by acclamation, my sponsor took me to an Area GSR Orientation Workshop, a District meeting and an Area Assembly, and provided me with the GSR Handbook and AA Service Manual to read.

Prior to my serving as GSR, my sponsor had impressed upon me why GSR is the “most important position” in AA. He made me aware that, as a GSR to my Home Group, I would be expected to carry out the following responsibilities:

- Attend monthly District meetings, quarterly Area assemblies and AA service conferences and forums.
- Conduct a monthly business meeting.
- Make announcements to keep the group aware of matters and events of interest.
- Carry the informed group conscience to District meetings and Area assemblies.
- Prepare the Delegate for the annual General Service Conference.
- Report General Service Conference Actions back to the group.
- Make members of the group aware of opportunities to be of service.

Serve as the phone and mail contact for the group.

When I accepted the position as GSR of my Home Group, I had no basis for claiming that I was unaware that I would be expected to attend four Assemblies, twelve District meetings and other service events within the Area. I understood that I was responsible for providing my group with sufficient information to allow it to develop an informed group conscience on issues affecting it and AA as a whole. And I understood that I was to attend Assemblies and District meetings to vote that conscience on the group's behalf.

Now, more than fifteen years later – a period throughout which I have remained active in General Service – I am grateful for this opportunity that the members of the Fellowship in Northern Illinois have afforded me and enjoy the privilege of supporting others as they walk their path on this journey I have been blessed to take.

## A.A. Participation – It’s a “We” Thing

A member of the fellowship recently shared with me they had heard through other members that “A.A. was thinking of changing the A.A. Preamble.” And they weren’t happy about it. Their displeasure wasn’t necessarily directed toward the changes being made, although they had several thoughts about this, too. What was upsetting was that “A.A. had all of sudden decided to make wide-sweeping changes to our literature without asking anyone’s opinion first.”

I explained that A.A. wasn’t thinking of making changes to the A.A. Preamble. They had already been implemented. The revised A.A. Preamble changes had been published and made public. And that this action was *not* a quick, overnight decision made without consulting members of the Fellowship. That this, in fact, had not just been a recent Conference agenda item but an extremely popular topic during the past two General Service Conferences. And that our seated Delegate for each of these Conferences had asked the groups well in advance for their thoughts and opinions on this very subject – as well as many others – so that she could bring the Fellowship’s voice and vote forward to the Conference to be heard.

This year the A.A. Preamble agenda item included over 34 pages of background material dating back to 1947 and with it came lengthy and spirited discussion among A.A. members during the months and weeks preceding this year’s Conference. Reading through an

overwhelming amount of background material can be daunting. And having conversations where other’s opinions can be strong and divergent can be uncomfortable and at times, contentious. Yet each year, as members of A.A., we are presented with the opportunity to meet in our groups and present our GSRs with our opinions on certain topics of great importance to us as a fellowship of A.A. Our GSRs then bring our views and our votes to our Delegate, who will be our voice and our vote at the General Service Conference each April. The obligation to be well informed doesn’t just rest with Area trusted servants. There is a personal responsibility for each of us to be as informed and as participatory as possible so that we can all help make the best possible decisions for A.A. as a whole. The end result may not be what we *individually* asked for or voted on or worked towards. But *we* will *all* have been a part of the process together.

This process can be as simple as an idea that springs from a single desire to seek change within A.A., to getting consensus from others, to putting that idea into action. That action takes hold in business meetings and other group consciousness-related activities, and onto Area Assemblies. The final agenda for any Conference consist of items which come from a variety of A.A. stakeholders, most notably individual A.A. members, groups, Delegates and Area Assemblies. In other words, us. Just as we have been active participants in our own recovery, let’s be active participants in service to our Fellowship.

## Why do I do what I do?

Why do any of us do what we do?

Usually I do something because I will get some sort of reward for doing it?

Like sobriety... I started going to meetings because I HAD to go to meetings. Drinking was no longer an option for me. Alcohol didn't solve my problems but only made them worse. The reward for going to meetings was I got sober and started liking meetings.

Why do I do general service work? There are many reasons that I have done service work for the past years. I will list a few of them below:

It is fun.

I enjoy meetings new friends.

I like learning new service positions because they stretch me and I grow spiritually. (I get out of myself.)

I feel more a part of the whole Alcoholics Anonymous.

I no longer feel alone.

It is fun. Did I say that already?

I am giving back to the organization that saved my life.

The three legged stool will not topple over.



**Three** Legacies are Recovery, Unity and **Service**.

I also do some things to avoid punishment.

I continue working the steps because if I don't work them I may get thirsty. (drink)

If I don't continue doing general service work I may start isolating, feeling left out and any or all of the feelings that were so familiar to me when I was "out there".

That's why I keep coming back.

It does work if you work it!

Marilyn

## Standing on the Shoulders

Election time is quickly approaching and as is common at this time of year many of us may be thinking about whether we wish to serve the fellowship and stand for a position. As someone who has been working his way down the triangle for some time now I can relate to some of the feelings that one might feel when considering serving Alcoholics Anonymous as an “elected” trusted servant. I remember having mixed feelings myself, trying to balance my desire to be part of the service structure with the fear that I wouldn’t be able to do the job well, or that I wouldn’t know what to do or how to do it.

For me it all came to a head in 2006 when was when I stood for DCM. I don’t count (the election) for GSR because if the truth be told, I had been the alternate, and there weren’t any other interested parties when it came to the GSR election. Anyway, it was while serving as a GSR that I began to get an opportunity to observe others that were involved in service and see how they acted and how they served. I saw how GSR’s at other groups participated (or didn’t) in the district, I saw how our DCM (and Alternate) conducted the District meeting, and because I of course went to Assemblies, I saw how the folks at other Districts did their jobs and also how the people at the Area fulfilled their responsibilities too. At every level of service I witnessed some of the most dedicated, passionate caring people I’d ever met all striving to help make AA better through their service. It was the observation of those currently in the service structure, along with dare I say a bit of ego that inspired me to want to stand for DCM. I had ideas!! I saw how others did it, and I thought I could do it “just as well” and wanting to continue in the service structure stood for DCM, and LOST. It was then I learned that there is a job for everyone in AA who wants to serve. It may not always be the job you think you should be doing but invariably it’s the job that God wants you to do. For me, it was the time to be an Alternate DCM and then later, a DCM.

I think many of us share the same fears that we won’t “do a good job” or that a particular position might be a “beyond our ability” but the truth is that AA needs you!! Personally I can’t think of any service positions I’ve held when I didn’t think I was in over my head but the fact remains there are always those that have served before who will happy to lend a hand when needed. If you have a desire to serve, do the homework on the position, observe those that have done it before, ask questions, try serving as an alternate if possible and then avail yourself to the fellowship so we can reach more newcomers from your service. And remember, they don’t call it service WORK for nothing. Service work requires your time, your efforts and your passion, much of it done behind the scenes and out of the limelight but the payoff is the perseverance of a fellowship, through the contributions of many, to the still suffering alcoholic. That along with the personal rewards that services brings to your own recovery.

I could go on and on about the benefits of being involved in service but for me the greatest privilege has been the opportunity to be around the very people I most wanted to be like. I “get” to serve AA and in return I receive a full and purposeful life. So, as the season approaches, ask yourself if you can be of service to the fellowship, put your name in the hat, trust the process and buckle up for the ride of your life!

Chris DeGrane

Alternate Delegate P70/A20