

The Minority Opinion

With Rights comes Responsibility

David T.

Area 62 Delegate

Upon attending my first Assembly as a new GSR, one of the first things that struck me as different as anything I'd experienced before was this idea of the minority opinion. With matters of importance, we come to the mic and voice our opinions on the subject at hand. After a thorough discussion, a vote is taken. If 2/3 of the voting members are in favor, the motion passes, otherwise it fails. With most things I had experienced before, that's it, we move on. Not in AA. After the vote is taken, the chairperson may call for the "minority opinion." A member of the losing side may express an opinion which may lead to the majority choosing to reopen the discussion and possibly, to a reversal of the previous vote.

As I began to study the Twelve Concepts, I came to understand and respect the principle at work here. In AA, we strive for unity and an informed group conscience in making decisions. In order for either of these to occur, we must protect and encourage the

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Thoughts on Unlimited Abundance

EI N.

Southeast Regional Trustee

Bill W. wrote in Warranty Two about his 'book money' earning, "This independent income also has enabled me to think and act independently of money influences of any kind – a situation which has at times been very advantageous to AA as well as to me personally." Bill was grateful that he was able to 'act independently of money influences' when he had an adequate amount on which to live. However, today the 'money influences' facing AA are clear when financial statements from the Grapevine and the AA World Services are studied. The burdensome effort to educate the fellowship on the need to support the services of both entities is enormous. Why, after all these years, does this challenge continue?

Perhaps there are two factors contributing to the phenomenon of limited financial support. First, the focus of AA is generally on "carrying the message" as described by one person helping another through meetings or 12 step calls. Sometimes this is expanded to include financing AA meeting rooms. Seldom are the support materials such as literature or GSO staff responses to troubling questions ever included under the umbrella of "carrying the message". If services are not seen as important elements of our 12 Step work, support for these services will continue to be limited.

Another possible limitation to financial support lies in our thinking. In the 1950's when Bill wrote for the Grapevine and outlined the Traditions, focus was on limiting the "promoter", adopting corporate poverty, and having 'bare running expenses plus a prudent reserve'. (12 & 12 p165) Early AA's accepted the concept of corporate poverty because "we were all broke" and "we were as tight as the bark on a tree". Our supporters

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minority voice. For unity to be maintained, all present must feel they have had an opportunity to be heard. For a group conscience to be informed, we need to hear every possible point of view in making important decisions. We recognize the best democracy for us is one in which we recognize that the minority may be right. The minority opinion protects us against an uninformed, misinformed, hasty or angry majority.

Nowhere have I seen this principle more evident than at the recent General Service Conference. Most items were discussed until no one was left at the microphone before calling for a vote. After the vote, the minority opinion was heard, sometimes reopening the discussion with the possibility of changing the prior vote. The process works. However, I began to notice that a number of times, on very important issues, there would be only a few viewpoints expressed on the minority side before the vote. Then, when the minority opinion was called, there would be a dozen or so people at the mic who had not spoken prior to the vote, often expressing opinions not heard before the vote.

I believe that the process works well in maintaining unity by protecting the minority voice, but can only work well in achieving an informed group conscience if the minority accepts the responsibility to express their views during the full discussion before the vote. This is not always easy to do. We want to be liked. We want to feel a part of the whole. Many of us are nervous about speaking and even more so when we think the majority disagrees with us.

I had such a moment at the conference. There was a matter I felt to be of great importance and the majority view was opposite of my own view and experience. The general sentiment was that anyone holding my viewpoint was intolerant and somehow less compassionate toward the newcomer. However, I had been that type of newcomer that was being discussed and felt that the solution being offered was absolutely wrong for alcoholics of my type. Still I did not want to get up. My resistance to getting up and speaking against the majority opinion surprised and disappointed me. But I got up and spoke anyway, not as well as I would have liked, but I can sleep at night knowing that I did. After the vote went against my wishes, over a dozen people came to the mic for the minority opinion. I thought, "Where were you guys when we were discussing this before?"

I would like to suggest to the members of the Assembly that your experience and ideas are important to the well being of your Area, your District and your home group. Without a variety of ideas and experience, we can rarely reach an informed group conscience. When you find the majority sentiment is against your view, yours may be the voice needed to help others reach a balanced and well considered decision. You not only have a right to participate, but a responsibility to do so.

Fellowship Sharing Request

At the recent General Service Conference, just as in our Area, there was much discussion of the AA Grapevine magazine. An advisory action was passed instructing the AA Grapevine Corporate Board to gather sharing from our fellowship on matters concerning the purpose and content of the Grapevine.

The questions to be addressed are:

1. What is the value of the Grapevine magazine to you?
2. How do you use the Grapevine magazine?
3. What would you like to change about the Grapevine magazine?
4. What do you think the purpose of the Grapevine magazine should be?

To assist with providing this feedback to the Grapevine Corporate Board, I would like to ask that our groups take up a discussion of these questions in their group conscience meetings. The result of these group discussions, as well as input from interested individual members, may be emailed to me at 62deleg@area62.org or mailed to me at the address of our Area contact list.

Thank you,
David T.
Area62 Delegate

UPCOMING EVENTS

75TH INTERNATIONAL AA CONVENTION
SAN ANTONIO, TX
JULY 1-4, 2010

66TH SOUTHEASTERN REGIONAL CONFERENCE
MIAMI, FLORIDA
AUGUST 11-15, 2010

SOUTHEAST REGIONAL FORUM
SPRINGMAID RESORT
MYRTLE BEACH, SC
DECEMBER 10-12, 2010

MORE INFORMATION AT

AREA62.ORG

Keep in Touch (KIT) is distributed at each Area Assembly. KIT is a way for us to keep up with service in Area 62. If you have a story to share about service work in the area or suggestions for future issues, please send it to 62kitchair@area62.org. or you can mail it to me at the address on the Area contact list. KIT presents the experience and opinions of members of Alcoholics Anonymous on the disease of alcoholism. Opinions expressed here are not those of AA as a whole, nor does publication of any article imply endorsement by Alcoholics Anonymous or the Area 62 Assembly.

thought it wise and the AA's thought it practical. Thus, the idea of a "prudent reserve" was accepted. It is at this point that perhaps "prudent" was thought of as being a sensible amount or a practical amount. Regardless, the operating expenses are not met through contributions and the reserve became one of maintaining a limited amount of money.

In later years Bill wrote Warranty Two: "Sufficient operating funds, plus an ample Reserve, should be its prudent financial principle." The operating fund and ample reserve provide the financial underpinning for the spiritual as well as financial principle under which AA should operate. Plentiful funds should be available to carry the work of AA which suggests that self-support must be generous. Why are self-supporting contributions as well as the ample Reserve lacking?

Is our vision based on abundant services to make 12 Step work possible? Is our practice of prudence based on scarcity rather than wise, or thoughtful choices? Do we accept our responsibility to maintain an ample reserve in conjunction with meeting our operating expenses? When the AA World Services and Grapevine provide stated purposes for needing money, why is this call for self-support not heeded?

Bill did not answer these questions but provided a solution in *Language of the Heart* (p86). He wrote, "Yes, we AA's were once a burden on everybody. We were 'takers'. Now that we are sober, and by the grace of God have become responsible citizens of the world, why shouldn't we now about-face and become 'thankful givers'? Yes, it is high time we did!"

My responsibility in financial contributions must be more than \$1 in the basket or even my birthday contribution. I must quietly find ways to act as a responsible citizen and practice my belief, as a 'thankful giver', that there is unlimited abundance of all good things, including money.

BEHIND THE WALLS

Changed Forever

I'm Tony and I belong to the "Step Down" group in the Trenton State Prison. Let me start by thanking God he gave me a tender and kind heart. I always wanted to be like the others. All the time I was drinking, I really thought I was. Beer had me fooled into thinking even though I drank; everyone around me had to like me because I did the same thing as they did. I felt like everyone knew who and what I was and liked me anyway.

I was hard working and made good money so my wife and children did not have to go without. I never understood why my wife did not like to do things with me when beer was involved. But I didn't care, I did them myself. I stayed home drinking alone most of the time thinking no one was being hurt. I know my family was not my #1 companion...beer was! I will never get the life back that I lost, but most of all the life I took when I wrecked and killed someone.

I knew Ronnie well and saw him weekly at his restaurant near my house. I know that God forgave me for his death, but I don't understand how I can get over all of the hurt I have caused his family and my own. He did not deserve to die like that, I did. I feel like I cheated him and his family, perhaps from a whole different life. There is no way I can justify his death.

I received a sentence of twelve years in prison. I really hated myself for what I did. I can't believe how stupid and selfish I have been all my life, really never caring how someone else felt as long as I kept that numb feeling I got off beer.

Today, for the first time in my life, I feel like I am free in both my mind and my heart. Alcoholics Anonymous has given me a new life. It has opened my eyes, heart, and mind so I may see all the pain and problems that alcohol has caused me and others in my life for the past 30 years. I can now see how sick I have been most of my adult life and how it has caused me to be a prisoner 'in the system' and not just in my mind. I depended on alcohol to get me through every problem, not knowing how much worse they became with it.

I now feel that with the God of my understanding and A.A., I can make clear decisions that will better myself and others around me. I look at life differently now and want others to

see it before it's too late. That's why I attend every AA meeting in here. I try to help other people and talk to counselors here trying to set in motion more opportunities for others and myself.

My goal is to stay sober the rest of what life I have, one day at a time, and try to help others. The brotherhood feelings I receive at the meetings just warms my heart and soul. Now I depend upon God to help me each day with anything I can't handle myself. I really look forward to my next AA meeting. I am the last remaining inmate that helped get our meeting started and was at the meeting when our volunteer brought in our letter from GSO informing us that we were a registered group. I hope for my remaining time here to see our group grow.

To stay alive and sober is AA for me. Thank you so much for Alcoholics Anonymous.

AA's Legacy of Service

Our Twelfth Step -carrying the message- is the basic service that the AA Fellowship gives; this is our principal aim and the main reason for our existence. Therefore, AA is more than a set of principles; it is a society of alcoholics in action. We must carry the message, else we ourselves can wither and those who haven't been given the truth may die.

Hence, an AA service is anything whatever that helps us to reach a fellow sufferer—ranging all the way from the Twelfth Step itself to a ten-cent phone call and a cup of coffee, and to AA's *General Service Office* for national and international action. The sum total of all these services is our Third Legacy of Service.

Services include meeting places, hospital cooperation, and intergroup offices; they mean pamphlets, books, and good publicity of almost every description. They call for committees, delegates, trustees, and conferences. And not to be forgotten, they need voluntary money contributions from within the Fellowship.

(from the pamphlet *AA's Legacy of Service*)

Inter-district (70, 71, 72&73) Treatment Committee

The Charleston area consists of 4 districts that are composed of the Charleston, Berkley and Dorchester counties. The Inter-district Treatment Committee serves any group in those four districts that would like to help carry meetings into Treatment Facilities. These meetings are “treatment facility AA meetings” as described on the top of page 13 of the “AA in Treatment Facilities” pamphlet and are open to the clients or residents of that facility and the members of the AA group hosting that particular meeting.

Traditionally in the Charleston area there have been 3 detox facilities that we have been bringing meetings into. There had been approximately 6 meetings a week at those 3 facilities. To my knowledge there had never been an abundance of groups willing to participate in order to fill the schedule every month. Some months it was difficult to find people to go to all these meetings. In the past 3 years the Charleston Treatment Committee has grown quite rapidly. As the number of groups wanting to go into treatment centers has increased, we have attempted to increase the number of meetings that we are able to go to.

Although we are not affiliated with the Tri-County Intergroup Office, we have always met in the small room behind the intergroup office. In that little room there is a small sofa, a coffee pot, a lot of books and a small fold up table with a couple of fold up chairs. You could comfortably seat about 10, maybe 12 people. We meet there to fill the treatment schedule every 4th Thursday of odd months. If a group wants to be on the schedule they will send a treatment representative from their group to the Treatment Committee meeting.

Some time in the past 2 years the Treatment Committee has acquired its own page on the Area 62 website. (Accessible from each district’s page) There were treatment meeting format suggestions that were posted there, instructions on how to enable your home group to participate, and the schedule was posted. As participation increased, we added structures and procedures to our committee. We added a meeting at a local shelter for veterans and an intensive out-patient facility.

New groups are popping up all over Charleston and new members from older groups want to be a part of

this movement, especially members that are sober today because somebody from AA came to the facility that they were at and encouraged them to attend their home group.

Every other month the small room in the back of the intergroup office gets a little more crowded than the time before. We have increased the amount of treatment meetings that we hold every week to about 14. The 3 main facilities have AA treatment meetings 4 nights a week. We are currently seeking out other facilities within the scope of AAs “treatment landscape” to bring AA treatment meetings to. There are currently 27 groups in the Charleston area that are participating and trying to get onto the treatment schedule. People are getting sober and people are staying sober. Our committee has a Chairperson, District Reps, we’ve added a Secretary and we have minutes. At some committee meetings there are over 30 people in that little room. There is standing room only and there are people standing in two hallways that lead into the room.

We have recently added a Saturday night speaker meeting at one Facility that has 3 treatment programs on one floor; a detox, a 28 day program and a 90 day program primarily for women with children or pregnant women. This meeting is also open only to the patients and the AAs bringing the meeting in. Most of these patients are not required to attend this meeting but many have been attending, some of them had never been exposed to AA. The toddlers are baby-sat by the staff in a separate room and the infants come into the meeting with the mother. The AAs bring a couple of members to talk to the patients after the meeting and exchange phone numbers.

This facility has asked the Treatment Committee if we could find them an AA meeting out in the community that would allow the women and their children to attend their AA meeting. It had to be a facility that would have an extra room to accommodate the toddlers to be babysat by the staff member from the facility. They would have to not mind the women bringing the infants into the meeting. The facility had told of past experiences where they had been bussing the women to a meeting (not sure what fellowship) and had been asked by the group not to return because of disruptions in the meeting. (Babies cry sometimes).

We found a meeting that would have been perfect for them. We brought it up to a few of the group members. It was suggested to bring it up to the group Chairperson. The

Group Chairperson scheduled a Steering Committee meeting where we were able to ask for the groups' help. The Steering Committee decided to announce it at the meeting for four continuous weeks and scheduled a group conscience. This would also give the group members time to approach the church and allow them to work out details of liability with the treatment facility. The church agreed with pleasure and the group conscience was unanimous!

The first meeting was last Tuesday night. Two vans full of patients and children pulled into the parking lot of the church 20 minutes early. The women were given a chance to have a cigarette before entering the church and to get the children settled into the babysitting room. The infants came into the meeting room and the mothers sat down with a cup of coffee. There were 14 patients and I don't even know how many children. The arrival of these ladies at this meetings was widely announced around the Charleston area so sober women came from all over Charleston to support the cause.

It was truly an honor to be a part of this movement as I sat through this meeting. The topic was on step 10, but many who shared thanked the women for coming and they thanked them for bringing their children. They related stories of their own experience trying to drink and trying to get sober with their children. One baby fussed a little during the meeting but nobody cared. Most people just smiled as the mother held the child with a bottle of milk and rocked him back to sleep. The group did a tremendous job at making these women feel comfortable and welcomed in AA and the women were encouraged to come back next week.

We are currently working on implementing the Bridging the Gap Program here in the Charleston area. We are about to vote on some locally created forms to better help the treatment facilities in implementing this program at their facilities. We've been working on it for a while and most of the members are unified in these efforts.

It has been an honor to be a part of this movement and I am truly grateful to be sober in an area where there are so many that want to be of service to suffering alcoholics.

Some of the groups in the Charleston area that have made this possible are: The Eustabafflous Group, the Riverland Terrace Group, the God's Grace Group, the Oakbrook Group, the Goose Creek Group, the Acceptance Group, Old Central, the West Ashley Group, the Trident

Group, the North Area Group, The Heritage Group, High Noon, the St. Joseph's Group, the Crowfield Group, the Daily Reprieve Group, the Folly Beach Group, Cool-Hip and Sober, The Seabreeze Group, the Three Legacies Group, the Second Chance Group, the Downtown Men's Group, the Survivor's Group, the Summerville Group, the Carolina Group, the S.O.S. Group, Oh God It's The Big Book Thumpers! Group and the St. Paul's Group.

It's an honor to serve.

NOTES FROM THE AREA 62 ARCHIVIST

MAKING WAY FOR THE FUTURE: AREA 62'S GENERAL SERVICE COMMITTEE ARCHIVES GETS A NEW HOME.

After five years at its current cramped location, the Area 62 Archives has a new home. The location of the archives is at 7356 Garners Ferry Road, Columbia, South Carolina. After the March 2010 Area Assembly's approval, the Archives has moved upstairs, from Suite # 129 to Suites # 217 & # 218. Prior to the Garners Ferry Road address; the archives spent more than a decade and a half at 4103 Devine Street in Columbia in two large rooms like we have now. The much needed space will now allow better access to the existing materials for research, sorting, preservation, and storage. The heart of the archives work remains virtually invisible to the fellowship. However, it is our hope that as GSR's and DCM's come to the Area Assemblies, that they pause and take the time to visit the Area Archives and report back to those that they serve what they find. I would also like to thank the three anonymous members of Alcoholics Anonymous that helped to move all of the items from its old location to its new one. I'm sure that they will feel the joy that comes from service as well as the sore muscles that come from manual labor. I hope to see many of you at the International Convention in San Antonio, TX this July.

As always, thank you for your continuing support of the Area 62 Archives.

K.C.H.

Area 62 Archivist

Anonymity in the Digital Age

“...personal anonymity at the level of press, radio and films.” ...but What About the Internet?!!!

“Hi, my name is David O., I am a long time member of AA and am troubled by what I see as clear violations of our Traditions in an invitation I received to join the "Alcoholics Anonymous Group" on [*social net working site name*].

“Not only am I concerned that members’ full names and faces are visible, that the name of the group is obviously misleading, but most egregious to me is in the photos section of the groups page [where] there are photos taken at official AA events which clearly show not only the faces of the subjects but also the faces of people who have attended with a reasonable expectation of anonymity.

“Please let me know what you think about this, and advise me as you see fit.” --*Taken from a recent email to the G.S.O.’s Committee on Public Information.*

It *should* go without saying, but let’s be reminded that we A.A. members are free to decide in what ways we approach our personal recovery, and that many of us choose to participate in opportunities provided by an astounding number of online groups, chat rooms, blogs and social networking sites.

And just as we have the right to decide what level of anonymity we’re comfortable with at any meeting we physically attend, we also have the right to choose what level of anonymity we want in our online recovery activities.

Our Traditions apply to us and no one else, so certainly no A.A. member can expect an entity like the Internet to adhere to any of A.A.’s Twelve Traditions. And G.S.O. can’t dictate anything to anyone, either. Therefore, it rightly falls to each individual to address the principle of anonymity, whether online or not.

It’s abundantly apparent, though, even if you take only a brief glance at the many sites on the ‘net, that once out “in the real

world” many of us either innocently forget about the principle of anonymity, or think it doesn’t apply “in all of our affairs,” regardless of what the Twelfth Step suggests should be the case.

Our fellow A.A. member David had another concern, too; he said later on in his email that such anonymity breaks affect A.A. as a whole. The reply he received said in part that G.S.O. is “currently at a loss as to how to handle thoughtful questions” like his. They went on to say, “Some A.A. members feel that [*social net working site name*] is a private communication; other members strongly disagree and view it as a public setting. G.S.O.’s A.A. Guidelines (on the) Internet, which can be found on our web site, AA.org, at http://www.aa.org/lang/en/en_pdfs/mg-18_internet.pdf state on page 3 that social networking web sites are public settings.”

The reply continued: “It seems that G.S.O.’s current method of handling anonymity breaks at the public level doesn’t apply well on social networking web sites. Normally, we would be alerted to an anonymity break in a magazine, newspaper or on TV, and, after verifying it truly was an anonymity break, would forward the matter to the Area Delegate, in the Area where the member resides, for the Delegate to handle as he/she sees fit. (The Area Delegate usually sends a loving reminder to the member about the importance of our Eleventh Tradition.) As you can imagine, it’s not possible to follow this procedure when 6,000+ members break their anonymity at once.”

Because G.S.O. is receiving many complaints like David’s, they are interested in how A.A. members think the principle of anonymity should be addressed in this so-called “digital age.” In fact, G.S.O. asked us to tell them whether this issue is one that deserves to become the theme for a future Conference workshop. Area 62 members, at our March 2010 meeting, replied through our Delegate, “Yes”!

What do some think personally about this issue? One of our own anonymous Area members offers their experience, strength and hope, as follows:

“Very early in my recovery I had used a picture of myself on my blog and I had also listed my full name as I signed up for the blog. When I began to blog about my recovery a good friend in Florida e-mailed me to explain the 11th tradition, he included the [*name of a*] website and explained his own experience with blogging and learning about anonymity. For a

very short time I had my blog hooked to my [\[social network site\]](#) page, too.

“Upon reading the heartfelt experience of my friend and reading the 11th tradition in the 12x12 and also the experiences on that web page I spoke to another fellow about how I felt, what I learned, and after seeking their perspective, we talked about what I needed to change.

“I changed. I disconnected my blog from the [\[social network site\]](#) page, I took off personal identifiers (last name and picture) and moved on. I am continually committed to the process of doing just that. I want to continue to become less self-seeking and selfish and more considerate, patient, loving and kind as I move forward.”

All A.A.'s and their groups are encouraged to discuss “Anonymity in the Digital Age” and contribute to the discussion on what has already become an important issue to which G.S.O. is frequently being asked to respond.

Here are some starter questions that can serve as topics for meditation, a discussion meeting, a District workshop, or as part of a Group Inventory on the 11th and 12th Traditions:

1. Should the principle of anonymity apply to the individual AA's Internet activities?
2. Is it practical or desirable to monitor social networking sites for AA member anonymity breaks? If so, who should be the designated “police”?
3. Can individual AA's lack of anonymity on the internet affect AA as a whole? If so, how?
4. Is a social networking site really public if it requires registration, a password, and privacy settings that restrict the viewing of profiles and comments?
5. Have you read G.S.O.'s Internet Guidelines? Do you agree or disagree with them?
6. Are you and/or your Group willing to pass along a Conscience on this matter to G.S.O. through your GSR, DCM or Delegate?

– Article submitted by Anonymous ☺

Big Man, Big Heart

My name is Joe W. and I am a genuine alcoholic. My sobriety date is November 27th, 1999. I am writing this article, not about me, but about a big man with a big heart, who died sober in Alcoholics Anonymous.

I first met Sammy R. about two years ago. He embraced this program, as most of us do, as a last resort. He quickly became involved in all Shady Group functions and was loved and cherished by all.

Sammy was a big kid at heart. He loved to have fun and laugh hard. During his first Christmas sober, he once introduced himself as “I'm Sammy Claus and I'm a genuine Alky-holic.” From that point on he was known as “Sammy Claus”.

I was fortunate enough to be at his first year anniversary celebration. He had asked a young lady to present him with his 1st year chip. I think that everyone in the room was in tears when he got it. I was too.

In January of 2010, Sammy and I had talked of trading vehicles. He had an old Ford pickup, which I wanted and I had a motorcycle, which he wanted. So, we made the trade. Sammy was like a kid with a new bag of candy. He was so excited about owning a motorcycle. He had a young lady taking pictures of him on it. That was on a Sunday and the last time I would see Sammy alive. On the following day, Monday, my sponsor gave me the devastating news that Sammy had died in a motorcycle crash that afternoon. I was crushed and in tears.

The morning before the accident, Sammy had started his day like any other. He went to a tanning bed parlor and waited on the young lady who had given him his 1 year chip. When she got there, he told her “I just wanted to tell you I love you” and then left. He rode his motorcycle to the Shady Group Hut. At the Hut, he sat and played dominos with several members. After that, he left with another motorcycle rider for a nice afternoon ride. During the ride, a dog ran out in front of Sammy. He hit the dog and flipped his motorcycle. Sammy died on the way to the local hospital.

The Shady Group was devastated by this news. The group had lost a kind and gentle soul. Everyone in the group will miss him dearly. As for me, I have lost a very dear friend and I feel it is my responsibility to share “Sammy's Story” with you. Sammy, I will always remember and love you.

In Loving Memory of “Sammy Claus”

Sober from July 18th, 2007 to March 8th, 2010

Joe W. – Shady Group, District 80