

First Things First

Newsletter of the Western Maryland Intergroup of Alcoholics Anonymous

To change or not to change? Members discuss Founders' writings

A.A. members from across Maryland and the region met Jan. 28 on Zoom to voice their opinions about how the Fellowship should treat the writings of A.A. founders Bill W. and Dr. Bob.

The hour-and-a-half forum was part of an ongoing effort to get input from A.A. members and groups across the U.S. and Canada on whether changes should be made in the program's two major texts — *Alcoholics Anonymous* (the Big Book) and *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, known as the Twelve and Twelve.

What do you think?

A.A. members can share their opinions on how the Founders' writings should be treated:

—at a sharing session from 2 to 3:30 p.m. on Saturday, Feb. 3.
Zoom Meeting ID: 878 3930 5599
Passcode: 216293.

—at this spring's Conference Agenda Review Committee (CARC) meetings to take place in March. There will be four – one in Western Maryland. Times and places TBA.

“...addressing the historical context of some of the writings of our Founders, many members in our Fellowship have expressed strong sentiment against any changes in the first 164 pages of *Alcoholics Anonymous*,” says a letter from the trustees' Literature Committee, sent in November. The committee seeks input from the Fellowship “regarding any possible future changes to literature written by A.A.'s founders.”

Published in 1939, the Big Book (*Alcoholics Anonymous*) — beloved by many in the Fellowship — contains some out-of-date references and is a product of its time. Some wonder whether more modern language and references might help attract newcomers and better “carry the message.”

In Bill W.'s story on page 7, he writes, “for three or four months the goose hung high,” for example. In the chapter “Working with Others,” there's mention of “plain ordinary whoopee parties” (page 101).

See “Change” on page 2



Ring in 2024

Around 25 A.A. members gathered at Trinity Lutheran Church in Cumberland on New Year's Eve for an 8 p.m. meeting, followed by food and fellowship to usher in the new year. The fare included fried chicken from Martin's and assorted homemade sweets, and the church was decorated with streamers and festive table settings. Meeting discussion focused on Step 8.

AA slogans: In A.A., or around A.A.? What does it mean to you?

Erin B., Sunday Step Group

When I go to a meeting, am I disconnected from the experience happening in front of me or am I fully participating in the experience? I've been in both situations.

As a non-participant, I've found myself in the back of the room, not listening, phone in hand, isolated to my own thoughts. Unavailable to the newcomer. Heart closed.

As a participant, ready to go to any lengths, I sit in the front, free from distraction, am introducing myself to the newcomer, helping the home group clean up the space. Best of all, checking in with my friends in the fellowship. Heart open.

The latter works best for me. Where I got sober, they said, "stay in the middle of the herd." I understand that by participating in AA, actively working the program of Alcoholics Anonymous, and practicing tolerance; I am gifted a happy, joyous and free life. Yay AA. Yay God.



“Our stories disclose in a general way what we used to be like, what happened, and what we are like now. If you have decided you want what we have and are willing to go to any length to get it — then you are ready to take certain steps.”

—Alcoholics Anonymous, page 58)

“Change” continued from page 1

Here are some of the thoughts shared during the Jan. 28th Zoom meeting:

- “I think those out-dated references are a good opportunity for a sponsor and sponsee to look up those references together and learn about the history of Alcoholics Anonymous. I think that’s a very important part of the process.”

—Rhonda

- “I do know people who won’t come in here and are driven out by some of the language, the patriarchal nature of it. I believe in the A.A. program completely. I rely on my interpretation of everything...I actually love some of the dated, pompous language of Bill.”

—Terry

- “I’m basically a traditionalist. Aside from some minor changes in some words that may or may not be commonly used these days, my opinion is we should leave the writings alone. My sponsor would have me look things up. I think it helped me grow.”

—Ed

- “The demographics of A.A., I noticed that there were some sectors of our society that we did not have very strong membership numbers. I’m assuming that these writings are ways for us to carry our message. If our message isn’t getting carried to some sections of society, I guess we’ve got to find better ways to get our message out.”

—Dennis

Sunday Night Step Group focuses on Steps, Traditions

Carol C., H.O.W. Group

The *Sunday Night Step Group* has moved its meeting to an earlier time — 7 p.m. — in hopes of making it more accessible to our community.

The meeting, at Trinity Lutheran Church, 328 North Centre Street, Cumberland, is completely handicap accessible. Entrance to the meeting is at the rear of the church.

The space is bright and open, so the tables can be arranged in a large square, and the group provides copies of the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* (12 & 12) book.

This setup was particularly appealing to me for two reasons: there were tables for me to write on (I always have a notepad with me! People are always dropping profound gems I collect for later reflection...) and I could see everyone's face! I have always felt more "a part of" when I can see the face of the speaker and other fellows in the meeting.

The kitchen is to the right as you walk in and the offerings included both caffeinated and decaffeinated coffee, which was wonderful. Cookies, of course, were also offered. The space provides bathrooms for both genders in the far right corner just past the display of pamphlets. The walls are hung with the Steps and Traditions,

and the meeting is very organized and friendly.

A Tradition is the topic every third Sunday with the Steps flowing according to the length of the Step, not the month of the year.



Once the selection has been read, the meeting opens for discussion.

The mood of the room seemed to change a little bit as people ruminated on the importance of our Steps and Traditions. The seriousness of many shares reminded me of the seriousness of our disease. Crosstalk is seriously monitored, making this a remarkably safe place for vulnerability. Compassion and empathy were evident on faces as the room filled with the love of the Spirit.

Wrapping up on time, the mood lightened, with hugs and handshakes freely offered as everyone helped to clean up and return the tables to their original positions.

This meeting used to be held in the lower level of Fort Recovery and was held at 8 p.m., but moved to the church several months ago. I asked the secretary about the move, and she said it has made the meeting more accessible for many of the older fellows. All in all, the changes have made the meeting even better!

Roving Recovery

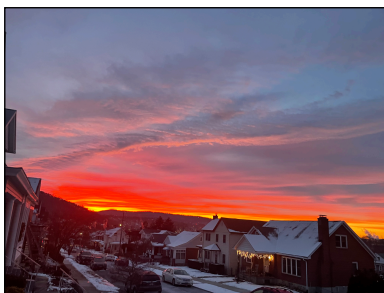


Photo by Lisa Z.

Tell us about a meeting you attend either regularly, or as an out-of-town guest for our "Roving Recovery" feature. Send it to westernmarylandaa@gmail.com.

What We Do...

at Western Maryland Intergroup

- Maintain a website: www.westernmarylandaa.org and a hotline: 844-568-3422
- Create and distribute Where & When's
- Host workshops and activities, including the annual Gratitude Breakfast in April
- Provide literature to local treatment and detention centers
- Publish a monthly newsletter
- Cooperate with the professional community to increase awareness and understanding of Alcoholics Anonymous
- Provide a P.O. Box for correspondence (P.O. Box 3005, Lavale, Md., 21504).



We need you!

Every A.A. group in the area can elect a representative to Intergroup. Intergroup representatives attend monthly meetings, contribute ideas and skills, and help to form the collective group conscience for A.A. in the area.

Meetings are at **6 p.m.** the third Friday of each month at various locations in Allegany and Garrett counties. **The next meeting is Friday, Feb. 16, 2024**, at Emmanuel Episcopal Church, 16 Washington St., Cumberland, Md.

Thank you for your support!

January donations

Unity Group: \$84.00

First Things First is published monthly by the Western Maryland Intergroup of Alcoholics Anonymous.

P.O. Box 3005, Lavale, Md., 21504

Website: westernmarylandaa.org

Email: westernmarylandaa@gmail.com

24-hour Hotline: 844-568-3422, or 844-LOVE4AA

Submissions are welcome! If you have an idea or a story, send us an e-mail.

The views expressed in *First Things First* represent those of individuals and do not imply endorsement by Alcoholics Anonymous.



Tradition Two: “For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority — a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.”

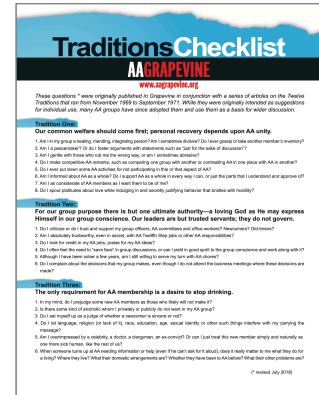
The Traditions Checklist is a tool for A.A. members and groups to take inventory of how well we know and follow A.A. Traditions. You can find it at aagrapevine.org/sites/default/files/2020-01/GV-Traditions-Checklist-2018.pdf.

Tradition 2 Question #4: Do I often feel the need to “save face” in group discussions, or can I yield in good spirit to the group conscience and work along with it?

I remember how shocked I was the first time I saw the group conscience work, despite the fact that it went against the way I initially thought it should go. It was eye-opening and life-changing. I saw how through thoughtful conversation, ideas could be floated, tried out, augmented or adjusted and a decision could be reached that went beyond my own knowledge and wisdom. In that case, I made peace with the final decision and saw value in how it had come about. In other cases, I haven’t been so serene. But I don’t really feel the need to “save face” when it comes to group conscience discussions.

I have an opinion that I can offer. I have ears to listen and hear what ideas others are offering. I have a brain to help me make adjustments and modify my views, if needed. My hard truth is that I defer to the Group Conscience, even if it goes against my wishes. I can go to a different meeting if my tail feathers really get ruffled. Or I can hang around and see how things play out. Either way, I have learned that I don’t always know best.

—Kristin B.



The Group Conscience

“The group conscience is the collective conscience of the group membership and thus represents substantial unanimity on an issue before definitive action is taken. This is achieved by the group members through the sharing of full information, individual points of view, and the practice of A.A. principles. To be fully informed requires a willingness to listen to minority opinions with an open mind.



On sensitive issues, the group works slowly — discouraging formal motions until a clear sense of its collective view emerges. Placing principles before personalities, the membership is wary of dominant opinions. Its voice is heard when a well-informed group arrives at a decision. The result rests on more than a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ count — precisely because it is the spiritual expression of the group conscience. The term “informed group conscience” implies that pertinent information has been studied and all views have been heard before the group votes.”

—from the “The A.A. Group...where is all begins,” page 28

What happened at the meeting?

Western Maryland Intergroup, Jan. 19, 2024 meeting minutes

Attendance

Lora, Farren, Kenny, Erin, Cody, Les

Call to Order at 6:04 pm

Adjourned at 7:13 pm

Serenity Prayer

Traditions - Les

December 15, 2023 minutes approved.

Treasurer-Farren

Starting balance: +\$3390.68

Paper statement fee -\$1

Hotline Jan -\$36.78

Legal Printing Paper (Wendall) -\$9

New Hope Group +\$250.00

NYE supplies (Erin) -\$126.09

Breakfast Printings -\$165

Frostburg Rent -\$8

Frostburg Rent +\$8

Toner & business cards -\$140.32

World Services Donation -\$500

Unity Group Donation +\$84

PO Box 1yr -\$110

Ending balance: +\$2636.39

Savings Acct: \$23.02

Reserve fund: \$2190.08

Institutions: Chair - Les (Cody)

- Massie is on lockdown. No idea when they will open up.
- Cody is going to Garrett County Detention Center.
- Marvin and Lora are going to Allegany County Detention Center.
- Lora will email Bob about downloading literature to inmates' tablets.
- Cody will talk to Captain Wise and Lora will talk to Stephanie about how to get the literature on the tablets.
- Approved buying a subscription to Massie for Grapevine.
- Lora will also ask Bob about downloading Grapevine to tablets.

Activities: Chair: Kenny

- Kenny said NYE was a hit.
- Erin suggested next year we make NYE an early, small affair with good food and a good meeting.
- Gratitude Breakfast;
 - Farren will ask Paul T for speakers.
 - Lora suggested a female speaker.
 - Dan suggested that we have the gratitude breakfast in Oakland.
 - Discussed organizing and planning Gratitude Breakfast and past issues.
 - Erin is MC.
 - We'll have two speakers: an Alanon speaker and a female AA speaker. Thirty minutes each.

Newsletter: chair - Kristin B.

- Erin has photos from NYE that she will send to Kristin.

Website: Chairs - Erin and Wendell

- Erin thought the where and when issue was fixed. She will work on it.
- 236 page views and 13 messages to the inbox.
- When you look at the anniversary form, she thought a field was not clickable. Lora and Farren tested it. It works.
- Erin sent an email to Kristin to ask her to print the where and when on 8.5 x 14 paper.
- Western MD Facebook Recovery group wanted a Facebook group to maintain.

CPC: Chair - Woody

- Woody did not attend.

Where & When handouts: Chair - open position

- Wendell did not attend.

see *Meeting* page 7

Meeting continued from page 6

Literature: Chair - Les

- Les is getting books for Massie.
- Approved a subscription to Grapevine for Massie.

Hotline: Chair- Dan

- Dan did not attend.

Old Business

- If you don't file taxes for three years, you lose your EIN number. We no longer have an EIN number. If we want one, we need to attach it to someone's Social Security.

- Without an EIN number we can't open a Venmo or Paypal. (Last month's task: Farren will investigate how to open a PayPal or Venmo account before next month's meeting. Restrictions on how you can pay.)

New business

- Discuss holding a workshop in Grantsville in June or July.
- Bike ride in the spring.

Our next meeting will be February 16, 2024 in Cumberland.

Baltimore Intergroup hosts
Founder's Day

BUS TRIP TO GSO

Join us for a trip to the
General Service Office in NYC
\$60 per person

Call 410-663-1922 to sign up
LIMITED SPACE-MUST PAY TO RESERVE A SEAT

When: June 7, 2024
Time: Bus leaves 6:30am from
1000 Cromwell Bridge Rd Park N Ride, Towson, MD 21286

GSO Tour: 11am AA Meeting, 12:15pm Tour
If you wish to participate in the tour, GSO requires a list with full name for security purposes. You must also show ID when we enter the building

Return: Bus leaves NY 7pm and returns around 10pm

Bring some snacks to share, we will provide water!



GSO Bus Trip, June 7, 2024
June 7, 2024 @ 6:00 am - 10:00 pm | \$60.00

2024
60th International Women's Conference

ONLINE!

INTERNATIONALWOMENSCONFERENCE.ORG



February 8-11, 2024
Live from Portland, Maine

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS broadcast to you from Portland, Maine
ENTERTAINMENT and fellowship Friday and Saturday nights
HYBRID PANELS: Attend select panels as they happen live
EXCLUSIVE online panels & workshops for attendees
OPPORTUNITIES to be of service to other sober women

\$15 Registration

Questions? IWCPORLAND24@GMAIL.COM

Corny Joke Corner



An alcoholic law student walked into a bar. He regretted not passing the bar.

We have good news and bad news. The good news is that the Steps are only suggestions.

The bad news is that we don't have any other suggestions.



Western Maryland Intergroup
Gratitude Breakfast
Saturday, May 18, 2024
More information TBA soon!

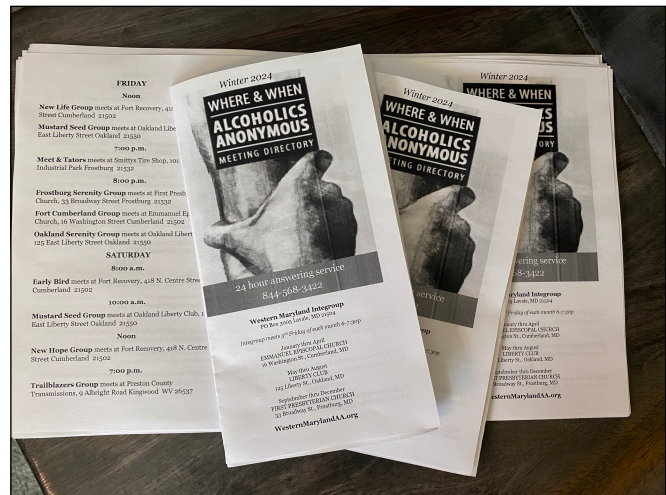
Anniversaries

Larry I., New Life Group, Jan. 5, 2012

Shirley C., New Life Group, Jan. 28, 1989

Lisa Z., Jan. 28, 1996.

Lora B., New Hope Group, Jan. 29, 1985



A new Winter edition of the Where & When is available from Western Maryland Intergroup and will be distributed to various meetings in the weeks ahead. If your group needs Where & When's, email us at westernmarylandaa@gmail.org, or talk to an Intergroup Rep.

Where to send 7th Tradition money

Western Maryland Intergroup has a new P.O. Box number. Send correspondence and contributions to:

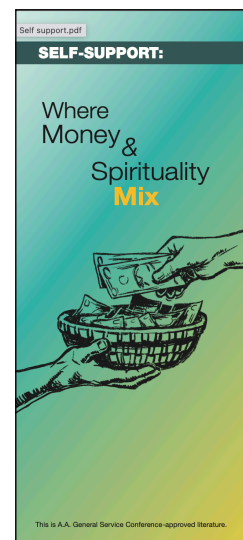
Western Maryland Intergroup
 P.O. Box 3005
 Lavale, Md., 21504

Maryland General Service also has a new mailing address. Send contributions to:

Maryland General Service
 P.O. Box 1834
 Frederick, Md., 21702

Send individual or group contributions to the **General Service Office** online at aa.org, or mail to:

P.O. Box 2407
 James A. Farley Station
 New York, N.Y 10116-2407



A Declaration of Unity

This we owe to A.A.'s future: To place our common welfare first; to keep our fellowship united. For on A.A. unity depend our lives and the lives of those to come.

1970 International Convention of Alcoholics Anonymous in Miami, Fla.