

In 2009, I walked into my first-ever AA meeting in a church in Sunnyvale. I can't quite remember all the feelings I had that day at noon – I was fresh out of a night in jail after several months of homelessness. But hope was not one of them. Terror, yes, but hope, no. I felt far too different to belong to AA. Too gay, too young, too broken, with too many traumas and too many sordid stories. Everyone in AA looked normal, nothing like what I imagined (though I don't quite know what I imagined, since I had never been and didn't really know what to expect). Convinced I would be kicked out of AA, I kept a low profile while trying to absorb what was going on around me. And I eventually found a piece of literature that saved my life.

I stole it (no one told me the pamphlets were free, so I stole it). And when I went home and read that pamphlet, published in the 1980s after long discussions about it at the General Service Conference that stretched nearly a decade, I felt like I had a right to be here and I could belong. Actions taken by GSRs, DCMs, and DCMCs while I was being born, learning to speak, and in kindergarten ended up saving my life in 2009. I will never meet many of those people, but I owe them a debt; I am now your servant and my goal for the next two years is to be of maximum service to my higher power and to you, my peers in Panel 73.

Our theme for Panel 73 is "A.A.'s Three Legacies – Our Common Solution." Your service to your groups and to your communities ensures that we keep all of AA informed and engaged in making decisions for our Fellowship so we can preserve our recovery, unity, and service. Now is a good time to prepare for what we call the Agenda Topics (which can be described as matters of policy and finance that affect all of AA, upon which your group may form a conscience (opinion)). We will find out what these topics are relatively soon – and you will share them with your group and let me know what they think at our Pre-Conference Assembly in April so I can represent our Area effectively at the General Service Conference.

Each of the 93 Area Delegates is assigned to a Conference committee; I will be serving on the Corrections committee, which focuses primarily on encouraging AA members to assume responsibility to carry the message to alcoholics who cannot, of their own free will, seek AA help. We review all aspects of service to AA groups in correctional facilities and make recommendations for changes or improvements. Serving on this committee means that our Area's voice will be amplified – somewhat – in those discussions, but we have a voice regarding all of the Agenda Topics.

I am so grateful and privileged that an alcoholic of my type has been asked to continue to serve AA in this capacity. I will never be able to repay the debt I owe AA for my life. I look forward to meeting with you and hearing all that you want to share with me.

Yours in service,
Eric Lee, Panel 73 Delegate