

# BETTER TIMES



Produced for A.A. members, by A.A. members in the Greater Toronto Area  
**MAY 2020**

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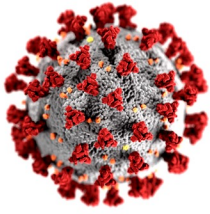
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**When A.A. members were asked how they coped during the pandemic, this is what they had to say...**



# WORD search



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## How we coped during this pandemic

W D E D K D X O T L O E H P E C A E P Z  
X C G R A T E F U L C I Z W P A O G J I  
D L A Q K M O Y Y I G Q G H V N W G C Y  
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F A U R K C X U O O E E H Y I Z E E F C  
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P A H C R R N O Y T X T N G X B G D T L  
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ACCEPTING  
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REFLECTION  
ROUTINE  
SERVICE  
SEX  
TRUST  
TRUTH  
WALKS  
ZOOM

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## CRISIS BRINGS OUT THE BEST OF THE GTA INTERGROUP WEBSITE

What a few weeks it's been since all the COVID-19 circumstances began coming to a head. To say it's been busy is an understatement, but it's also been extremely rewarding. While everyone might not know it, the process of updating the GTA Intergroup website falls primarily on the webmaster (David C.) to handle, with support from the alt-webmaster (Aaron M.).

Normally, we would see a dozen or so updates a week. Since the start of the COVID-19 closures, we've seen at least a dozen or more a day, often two or three times that. While it can certainly be stressful to manage such an influx, I certainly wouldn't call it a burden.

At a time when so many alcoholics are feeling isolated and separated from the fellowship, we have the pleasure and privilege of connecting with groups and members across the GTA on a daily basis, and the chance to lend a hand in a difficult time. I've often heard that an alcoholic left alone is in bad company. The constant interaction with others in the fellowship has helped me get out of myself and feel like I'm still actively working my program of recovery.

At the same time for me (Aaron), it's been an incredible opportunity to learn from the webmaster, performing modifications to the website that go beyond the updating and addition of meetings and medallions. As you may have noticed, with the rise of online meetings and the temporary digitization of our fellowship, our website has been undergoing changes and upgrades to ensure we're able to best serve our members. This has meant making changes and additions to the layout of [www.aatoronto.org](http://www.aatoronto.org) to allow increased communication with members and the still suffering alcoholic through our web forms.

This could mean providing direction to someone trying to find online meeting information for their homegroup. This could be information for someone who thinks they may have a problem with drinking and will be attending their first-ever meeting online instead of in-person.

Combined with the questions surrounding the cancellation of events and meetings, this crisis has vastly increased the scope of our positions and presented us with new challenges that we're doing our best to rise to meet.

It's an incredible time! Almost overnight, we've seen a paradigm shift in the way A.A. carries the message to the next suffering alcoholic. The website used to serve as a place to locate a meeting nearby. As the pandemic progresses, the website has become a platform to connect, to share information, and to link alcoholics virtually—from the comfort of their own homes.

Almost overnight, A.A. adapted to changing circumstances and applied virtual technology in an incredible way. A member of A.A. can now attend meetings from coast-to-coast, connecting with people in ways we have never seen before, on the basis of our common suffering of alcoholism.



It's incredible how, despite current adversity, we can still continue to adapt and break through barriers to help our fellows in need.

During a time when many of us are anxious and uncertain about the future, it's been, and continues to be, a pleasure to be trusted servants of GTA Intergroup. We both look forward to continuing to help in any way that we can. Please don't hesitate to reach out to either of us. We are here to help!

David C. GTA Intergroup Webmaster  
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# 70<sup>TH</sup> GENERAL SERVICE CONFERENCE WILL BE 'VIRTUAL'

Never to be deterred by adversity, the business of A.A. will go forward this year. The 70<sup>th</sup> General Service Conference (GSC) has been rescheduled for May 16-19 and for the first time ever will have a virtual format. Area 83 delegate Rob M. was disappointed when the annual event, originally scheduled to take place in April in New York, was cancelled as a precaution against COVID-19, but he's looking forward to a nevertheless historic event.

"Our approach is a new one," said Rob. "It will be a vastly different experience than any before it. We will be asked to make many sacrifices as to how we do our business this year. As a conference we will all rise to the occasion, as have our areas and homegroups and members all over the world."

This year's four-day GSC will be conducted entirely by videoconference with a streamlined agenda. Voting on agenda items and elections will all be done using online software. Many of the reports and presentations that are part of the regular business of the conference will be circulated in written form, with conference time reserved for questions and answers. Many details are still being worked out as the event approaches.

No matter the digital format, Area 83 will still have a distinct presence at the GSC following the pre-conference sharing sessions that took place in March. This new initiative—conducted, appropriately enough, by videoconference—allowed all members of the Fellowship to provide their thoughts and votes on the issues that will be decided at this year's conference. This exercise will allow our delegate to carry a more accurate group conscience than has ever been possible before.

"The feedback shared and the results of the polls taken are very helpful with my preparations for the conference," said Rob. "It provided a snapshot of the viewpoints of the Fellowship, and some interesting ideas that I hadn't considered. Area 83 is trying to improve communication between the Fellowship and the GSC. This year's videoconference experiment proved to be most helpful. I believe it's just the beginning of enhanced communications in our area."

As a member of the Treatment and Accessibility conference committee, Rob said an excellent example of the feedback he's received was on the idea for a Bridging the Gap workbook. Creating a manual for the program was the only agenda item that received 100 per cent approval. That's a strong message that he's now able to take to committee.

Over nine sessions, 120 members of A.A. shared on 45 GSC agenda items. It was not all the work of the delegate alone. The pre-conference sessions were organized by an ad hoc committee of seven members who also chaired sessions and submitted detailed reports afterward. By strange coincidence, these videoconference sessions took place in the weeks leading

up to the present COVID-19 crisis, and may have served to acclimatize A.A. members to meeting in a virtual environment, assisting in A.A.'s rapid transition to digital meetings. Traditionally, the Area 83 delegate reports from the conference at GTA Info A.A. Day. This year's Info A.A. Day is also being rescheduled, and organized to take place by videoconference with a date yet to be determined. Chris Z., [Port Credit](#)

## REFUNDS PROCEEDING AFTER ORC CANCELLATION

For everyone who pre-registered for this year's Ontario Regional Conference (ORC), if you haven't received your refund yet, rest assured it will be on its way shortly. ORC Committee chair Roman R. said the volunteers processing the refunds have encountered some obstacles in completing the transactions. While COVID-19 has slowed down every aspect of business, all the refunds are expected to be completed by the end of April.

The provincial shut-down couldn't have come at a worse time for the conference, which was scheduled to take place March 20-22 at the Sheraton Centre Hotel in Toronto.

"You have to understand the pressure the Committee was under," said Roman, describing the days leading up to the decision to cancel this year's ORC. "Speakers were starting to cancel. The virus was out there and it was like a dark cloud that kept closing in."

There was briefly a plan to go ahead with the conference using only local speakers. The major problem was that it was too late to cancel with the hotel and avoid being charged for use of the facility. It was only when on March 13th Ontario's chief medical officer of health called for the immediate suspension of all public gatherings that the hotel had to allow the cancellation. This announcement lifted that enormous financial pressure and the decision to cancel the event became obvious.

"The Committee really did not want to make that call," said Roman. "Just the thought of it now is super stressful." Negotiations are still ongoing to settle costs resulting from the cancellation. The ORC is definitely facing a deficit.

Immediately following the cancellation, there were many people in the Fellowship offering their registration fee as a donation. While the financial need is real, the ORC Committee isn't making that request directly. Instead, donations through GTA Intergroup are being encouraged and the ORC website, [aaorc.ca](#).

"After looking at options, the Committee decided just to go ahead and give everyone the refund," said Roman. "An email will be sent once all refunds are processed. There will be an opportunity then to make a contribution." The GTA Intergroup website at [aatoronto.org](#) is already set up to manage contributions.

# VIRTUAL RECOVERY IS STILL RECOVERY

When COVID struck, our churches and treatment centres had to close their doors to us. I wondered how A.A. could possibly respond? I presumed there was nothing we could do. We would have to wait it out like everyone else. Our doors need to always remain open for the newcomer about to make the most important decision of their life, and it looked like COVID was shutting those doors.

But God would have none of my pessimism. Within days, my A.A. friends formed phone chat groups as a means to keep connected. Video chats popped up. Full on Google Hangout and Zoom versions of regularly scheduled meetings appeared with links to them shared around through word of...text. I don't know who started it -- maybe everyone simultaneously -- but Google Sheets, listing meetings and corresponding video conference room IDs, were circulating wildly. My District Secretary combined a few lists to form even greater lists of recovery groups even beyond Toronto's borders. Within days, we members became nodes, disseminating information in an evolving network of virtual meetings and new connections. *A rapidly growing fellowship, as our Book described it - more than 80 years ago.*

It was awe-inspiring, organic, immediate! Members from my terrestrial group (The First 164) partnered up with some other GTA members and formed an online meeting: 1 A.A. Canada and listed it with [aaintergroup.org](http://aaintergroup.org). By our second meeting we reached the capacity of 100 participants. We expanded to three meetings a week: Sundays, Wednesdays, Fridays at 8pm. Rarely have we seen fewer than 100 participants. We endured and fought off the "trolls" and "Zoom bombers" effectively. Right from the beginning, we have had folks from all around the world join us, including folks from Australia, Iran, and Ireland. And, of course, we've had lots of folks from the USA. Two treatment centres -- one in Muskoka and one in Pittsburgh -- regularly attend our meeting. Our membership in this virtual group has more than doubled -- all from people outside of the GTA. We ask for people to email us if they can sponsor or if they are looking for a sponsor, and we've managed to introduce some people in Toronto and Montreal to sponsors they are now working with in Delaware and Virginia. I myself have found two sponsees through this meeting!

It hasn't been perfect. We know there are still people suffering who can't get access to online meetings.

Treatment centres in my District have invited us to host virtual service meetings, which is a great help for everyone involved. It's not ideal, but virtual recovery is still recovery.

These are ridiculous times, and I am so excited and proud of how A.A. has responded. I feel like I am living in the 1940s, watching A.A. spring to life around me. In mid-March, I assumed A.A. would dissipate for a time, but there's a line from page 164 that has never been more true than it is today:

***He will show you how to create the fellowship you crave.***

Sean L., [The First 164 Group](#)

## STEP FIVE: A Confession of a Different Kind

I remember growing up in the Catholic faith. We said the rosary every day, attended Mass every Sunday without fail, and I even became an altar boy. (Interestingly, I never tasted the wine until "a woman made me do it" when I was 17—and I even lost my virginity and woke up in a blackout, all on my first try!)

That dreaded confession always got to me, though. I cringed to enter the confessional; yet, for some strange reason, I always felt great after it was over. Was it the penance of three Hail Marys that allowed the new lightness I felt as the loads of sin were removed and forgiven forever? Cunningly, I never believed the priests had the power to forgive me all my sins, but I was willing to believe that three short prayers would win me that freedom.

I didn't find the rooms of A.A. until 10 years later, and lo and behold: as I was working the suggested 12 Steps with my sponsor, Step Five reared its head: "Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs."

At first glance, I liked this less than just rattling off my list of sins to my local priest in the vestibule, but something else was different. Now I had to share with God, myself, *and* another human being "the exact nature of my wrongs", and three Hail Marys was not going to cut it this time.



## STEP FIVE: A Confession of a Different Kind *cont'd*

I was to look forward to an entire overhaul of my thinking as a result of doing this step. I remember, as it took all of 12 hours that day sharing and discussing with my sponsor, and then his sponsor. They suggested that I go home and take an hour to reflect on the day of sharing my wrongs, and then complete steps six and seven immediately, asking God to remove my defects and shortcomings.

The good news I found after I finally finished what seemed to be a marathon Step Five confession was that same sense of relief I felt as a kid, but with a twist. Instead of just promising to never do it again, I was left with a set of tools to carry on digging deeper into myself, my fears, my wrongdoings, my sexual conduct, and everything. I then went on to make amends to those people I had wronged, as well as to then carry the message to others too, through God's help.

Since then I've done a few Step Fives, with each one going deeper into who I truly am and how I can be more like that person every day, instead of the one I selfishly become, or pretend to be so you'll like me.

Ash S., [Morning Discussion](#)

## TODAY

Today I find myself stuck in the world. My sense of needs vs. wants is very messed up. What I need is serenity, peace, acceptance and calm. What I want is chaos, excitement, the feeling of being alive. I don't feel alive. I am adrift in-between these conflicting emotions.

A sense of impending doom coupled with the common anger over the loss of control in my own life is devastating. I am willing myself to do anything and my thoughts want me to rebel, therefore I do nothing and feel worse. My mind is the trickster.

My mind tells me none of this matters, it's a conspiracy, it is the government, all the world's leaders are trying to make us into a single mindless herd.

## TODAY *cont'd*

My common sense insists it is a natural disaster brought about by humanity's incessant need to use the world around us as a commodity.

My spiritual sense leads me to think that the higher powers, our gods as we each understand that concept, are speaking to humankind as a single unit, telling us to smarten up and slow down. Stop destroying ourselves and the environment. Be content and just live simply, or to simply live.

I am dizzy from the mental circles.

I must follow the plan given to me for survival. I must follow the plan for the possibility even to grow, despite myself and the happenings of the world around me.

I will read passages shared by friends and think of the message I hear. I will pray to Allah for guidance and ask for peace in myself and yes, that elusive thing we call serenity. I will try to calm my mind. I will acknowledge I have little control in this world.

The only control I have is over my reactions to everything and anything, including my own thoughts, my own fears, and my own intolerances and anger. It is all there, it is all normal, it is all ok to feel. It is not ok to act on recklessly, without thought.

It is about what I do with all of that emotion that matters. And I must stop living in my own head. I need to talk to others. I cannot remain isolated from the world. I need the world, and oddly, the world needs me.

I will practice acceptance to combat the intolerance. I will find and share the love in my heart and soul to quell my anger, with myself and aimed at others. I will meditate to calm my mind. I will pray for guidance and allow my higher power to show me what serenity and peace look like today. I will engage in the world as it is presented too me rather than try and make it what I want.

Today I will work at not having expectations of the world and those in it that lead me to anger, want or intolerance, myself included. We are stronger than our fears.

May Allah's Peace be with you,  
Steven P., [Streetsville Group](#)

# DID YOU KNOW?

that from Dec. 1934 to May 1935 Bill W. works with alcoholics, but fails to sober any of them?

that on May 10, 1935 a business deal brought Bill W. to Akron, he attended the annual stockholders meeting of the National Rubber Machinery Company in an attempt to take over the company & lost the proxy fight? Bill remained behind at the Mayflower Hotel very discouraged and afraid he might drink.



that on May 11, 1935 Bill realized he needed another alcoholic, he made telephone calls in the Mayflower Hotel to members of the clergy? Rev. Walter Tunks referred Bill to Norman Sheppard who then referred Bill to Henrietta Seiberling, an Oxford Group adherent. Henrietta met Bill at her house (the Gatehouse) & arranged a meeting the next day at the Seiberling Estate at the Gatehouse with Dr. Bob & his wife Anne.

that on May 12, 1935 Mother's Day Bill W. first met Dr. Bob at Henrietta Seiberling's home (the Gatehouse) in Akron, Ohio? Dr. Bob was too hung over and planned to talk to Bill for 15 minutes. Bill told Bob of his experiences with alcoholism & recovery. Bob then opened up & they talked for over five hours.

that on May 18, 1939 led by Clarence S. the Cleveland, OH group met separately from Akron (and the Oxford Group) at the home of Abe G.? There were 16 members present. This was the first group to call itself Alcoholics Anonymous. The Clevelanders still sent their most difficult cases to Dr. Bob in Akron for treatment.

that in May 1938 Bill W. & other AA members began writing the Big Book, Alcoholics Anonymous?

that on May 22, 1940 Works Publishing Inc. is established (forerunner to AAWS) for Big Book & other literature?

that on May 8, 1941 Ethel M., the first female member in Akron, OH sobered up? Ethel spoke at the ORC in 1953.

that on May 8, 1946 the Kingsway Group started? Today, it is the oldest group in the GTA.

that on May 3, 1980 the 1<sup>st</sup> Information AA Day was held in Toronto? A combined effort of Toronto Inter-group & the 6 Districts in & around Toronto.

that on May 8, 1971 Bill W. is buried in a small private ceremony in East Dorset, Vermont?

that in May 1946 the long form Twelve Traditions (12 Points Assure Our Future prior name 12 Traditions) are published in the AA Grapevine?

that in May 1940 first anonymity break at the national level? Rollie H. catcher of the Cleveland Indians just caught Bob Feller's no-hitter, revealed been sober in AA one year, caused lot of publicity.

that in May 1949 Bill W. presented a talk to the American Psychiatric Association's 105<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting in Montreal, Canada?

that on May 1, 1944 the 30 Vesey St. Office was moved to 415 Lexington Ave., NY near the Grand Central Terminal? The new mailing address was P.O. Box 459, Grand Central Annex.

that in May 1941 Ruth Hock (Bill W.'s secretary) learns that Joe V. credited with thinking up the name "Alcoholics Anonymous" has a "wet brain"?

that in May 1938 Bill & Lois visit Bill R. in Hackettstown, NJ? It was Hackettstown Courier Post that ran the first newspaper article on AA.

that in May 1942 The Journal – Herald (Dayton, OH) runs huge story on AA with photos of members in Halloween Masks to protect anonymity?

that in May 1980 Dr. Bob and the Good Old-Timers, AA World Services, Inc.'s biography of AA's cofounder and a history of early AA in the Midwest, is published?

that on May 1, 1939 Bill & Lois leave 182 Clinton Street home? From 1939-1940 Bill & Lois moved 51 times.



NAME	YEARS	DRY DATE	GROUP
Steve B.	5	May 4, 2015	<a href="#">Prince Edward Group</a>
Catharine P.	5	Apr. 29, 2015	<a href="#">Markland Wood Group</a>
Dwayne S.	5	May 9, 2015	<a href="#">Anniversary Group</a>
Stacey W.	1	May 26, 2019	<a href="#">Prince Edward Group</a>

## COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE: Rising to a challenge

I've volunteered for service work during a time that the founders of A.A. most probably would not have envisioned. It has been a whirlwind for me and for the Fellowship. Almost a year ago, I joined the Communications Committee, a subcommittee to the GTA Intergroup. There are eight to ten volunteers including a chair, secretary, editor, webmaster, and reporters. We meet once a month in support of the website and The Better Times, our monthly GTA Intergroup publication.

I told the committee that I was a member of a communications team at work and that I liked seeing issues addressed, assigned and action undertaken and assigned. Then I was voted in as secretary. It took me some time to catch up with this dynamic group and I learned that this is a very dedicated group of A.A. members.

As there was direction from our government leaders to stop the spread of the deadly COVID-19 virus, I was witness to a metamorphosis.

Some tech savvy members in my home group set up a virtual meeting using our e-mail addresses. I met those in the group who moved away but could join in remotely now that our group meeting was virtual. It only took a few minutes to sort out how to chair and share and we became connected not only over the Internet but in that power greater than ourselves. Someone said at the end of the first virtual meeting, "I like these meetings better." Who knew? I thought that A.A. would always survive with face to face group meetings but never thought that virtual meetings could ever happen.

While normally there are over 500 GTA meetings, the worldwide pandemic started a surge of meeting cancellations and then their evolving technological substitutions. There was an enormous increase in the volume of phone and email inquiries which were met with ease as 12-Step volunteers began to handle their important service remotely.

***We became connected not only over the internet, but in that power greater than ourselves***

As for the Committee, it was like a roller coaster that was hit by an avalanche. The

challenge to maintain our support structure during the isolation of social distancing and quarantines was met in many ways. Quick adaptations to virtual meeting technology were made, and an ad hoc committee was created to define and develop an improved website.

With the onset of virtual meetings, there was a flood of requests to add links. The advent of virtual A.A. meetings brought issues of security, research and communication. Protecting our members' anonymity became even more paramount with this new digital exposure.

So, like a caterpillar who crawled and is now a butterfly who is learning to fly; our service work takes flight as we are challenged to find new ways to help the next suffering alcoholic.

Randy C., Secretary GTA Intergroup  
Communications Committee