SERENITY MESSENGER

FOR RELATIVES AND FRIENDS CONCERNED
ABOUT ANOTHER'S USE OF DRUGS, ALCOHOL,
OR RELATED BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE FAMILIES ANONYMOUS FELLOWSHIP

SERENITY MESSENGER

Newsletter of the Families Anonymous Fellowship



EDITOR'S NOTE

As you may have noticed, the cover of this issue is designated "Spring 2024." (Normally, this would have been the "March/April" issue.) The change is because we're moving the *Serenity Messenger* from a bimonthly to a quarterly publication schedule.

There are two reasons for changing from six issues per year to four.

First, we constantly struggle to find quality articles, poetry, and artwork from the fellowship to fill each issue. If you look back at our recent issues, you'll see that many (often the majority) of the articles we publish are reprints from earlier editions of the *Serenity Messenger*, going back years to when it was called *The Twelve Step Rag*.

We only reprint articles that we believe will resonate with the fellowship, regardless of the fact they may have been written five, ten, or more years ago. Yet, although this newsletter has been published for decades, there's still a finite supply of back articles that meet that standard.

The bottom line: We always need new content. The Serenity Messenger does not print material from outside the fellowship, that means we need to hear from you, our current FA members and Serenity Messenger readers, about your thoughts on recovery, the FA program, and how it has affected your life and the lives of your loved ones.

A short reflection on an entry in Today A Better Way, or the retelling of a particularly impactful "share" you have either made or heard in your weekly

group, or an anecdote about how you apply the Twelve Steps in your everyday life, or a description of your struggles to understand and apply some of the FA principles—all these would make interesting topics. Think of it as what you might share verbally with your FA group, but in written form.

WE NEED YOUR HELP

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EDITOR'S NOTE (CONT'D)

Some of you may write poetry or create artwork related to your recovery journey in FA. We welcome those submissions, too.

The point is, we strive to publish only quality content, and our ability to do that will be better assured if we have to fill only four issues per year rather than six.

The second reason for our move to a quarterly publication schedule is purely practical: Regularly putting out this publication requires a lot of work. First, someone must gather and edit any newly submitted articles, anecdotes and poems and then scour through back issues for appropriate reprints, edit them to ensure they read as "current," and convert them to the correct word-processing format. Someone also has to gather and design announcements about upcoming FA events, educational forums, the Annual Business Meeting, and the like. Finally, someone needs to select the cover art and design and format all the text and graphic elements into the finished, integrated publication you see here. And each of these people has more help from others along the way.

It takes our small team of dedicated volunteers many hours to produce each issue. As with the content, we can be more confident of consistently delivering a well-designed product if we scale back to four issues per year instead of six.

You can expect to see the Summer 2024 issue toward the end of June. Thereafter, our goal each year will be to publish the Fall issue during the first week of September, the Winter issue during the first week of December, and the Spring and Summer issues during the first week of March and June, respectively.

We appreciate your interest in the Serenity Messenger and hope this publication brings you valuable insights, useful information, and comfort. Our publication schedule is changing, but our mission remains the same.

And if you feel inspired, please write for us or consider joining the newsletter committee. The fellowship, and this publication, are what you make it!

IN FELLOWSHIP, BOB S.

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newsletter@familiesanonymous.org

Editorial Team Elizabeth S., Bob S., Nicole G., Ann P. Chris Y

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WORD FROM THE BOARD

Outreach to Behavioral Health Professionals

Carrying the message to others is an integral part of "working the Steps." Here are pointers for reaching out to behavioral health professionals.



Families Anonymous relies on each individual FA group to make their local communities aware of FA, so that people in need can experience firsthand the benefits this remarkable fellowship has to offer. This is the second in a series of Serenity Messenger articles from the World Service Board to help FA groups spread the word about FA.

In this issue, we'll focus on how to reach out to behavioral health professionals in your community, who are often on the front line in the fight against the epidemic of substance use disorder (SUD). May is National Mental Health Awareness Month (see box), which makes this a particularly appropriate time to reach out to this group of providers.

As the number of persons suffering from SUD grows, so, too, does the number of their friends and family who are in crisis as a result of

this insidious, deadly disease. Clearly, FA is needed more than ever. But most people don't even know we exist.

Family members and friends of persons suffering from SUD will often turn to behavioral health professionals for

advice about how to deal with this problem. These professionals might recommend that such individuals seek out FA, but only if they first understand how FA works, and how it can be a valuable tool in their efforts to help those persons.

Here are suggestions for how your FA group can raise their awareness of FA:

- Email behavioral health professionals. Make clear in your message that you recognize and appreciate the important work they do to support wellness. Share with them how FA provides support to family members and friends dealing with a loved one's SUD and related behavioral problems.
- Reach out to behavioral health centers and hospitals, and leave pamphlets for their practitioners.
- Volunteer to attend a staff meeting at behavioral health centers, rehab centers, hospitals, or other facilities that treat SUD and to provide an overview of FA. Leave materials for them to hand out to their clients and to family members of their clients; include your local FA group's meeting information (including day, time, and physical location and/or virtual log-in instructions).
- Ask if they will agree to display or distribute brochures such as those listed below, and if they do, make sure to check back periodically to ensure they always have a good supply. Visit them often, if possible, to build personal relationships and trust.



"As the number of persons suffering from SUD (substance use disorder) grows, so, too, does the number of their friends and family who are in crisis as a result of this insidious, deadly disease. Clearly, FA is needed more than ever."

WORD FROM THE BOARD (CONT'D)

- Inquire about leaving printed materials explaining the FA program in common areas, and about posting information on their bulletin boards or websites.
- Attend "family night" meetings and share information about FA. Hand out informational material.
- Volunteer to serve as the point of contact for anyone interested in further exploring FA. Make sure you give your contact information to staff members who may be interacting with interested individuals.

Electronic Resources

These items can be downloaded and e-mailed or can be printed for free distribution.

- <u>#7010E-**BEHAV**</u> FAMILIES ANONYMOUS AND THE PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY FAITH LEADERS
- #7003E FAMILIES ANONYMOUS FOR ME?
- #7009E ARE YOU TORN APART?
- #6003E TO THE CONCERNED FAMILY MEMBER OR FRIEND
- #7014E ARE YOU AT YOUR WITS' END?
- #5003-1 AN INTRODUCTION TO FAMILIES ANONYMOUS

Printed Materials

Each of the following can be downloaded as an editable pdf, and your local meeting information can be added:

- #7014 ARE YOU AT YOUR WITS' END?
- #7003 FAMILIES ANONYMOUS FOR ME?

"If you can, make just one call. Have just one conversation. Send just one email. Even small steps move us forward."

You need not do all these things to try to raise awareness about FA among behavioral health professionals in your community. But if you can, make just one call. Have just one conversation. Send just one email. Even small steps move us forward.

It only takes a little time to start the important Twelfth Step work of helping to "carry this message to others," but the WSB and the fellowship will be forever grateful for your help. None of us can do this alone!

MARIA AND BOB S WSB MEMBERS

May is Mental Health Awareness Month (MHAM)!

MHAM was established in 1949 to:

- Increase awareness of the importance of mental health and wellness in Americans' lives
- Celebrate recovery from mental illness
- Provide resources and information to support individuals and communities who may need mental health support

LIVING IS A PROCESS OF LEARNING

FA member Joanne M. has learned to take responsibility for her happiness instead of her son's addiction.

When I walked into my first FA meeting more than 15 years ago, the members were friendly and welcoming. I was dazed, but they seemed fraternal and somewhat "normal." They were speaking in English, about their own recoveries, but I felt as if they were speaking in tongues. Some talked about being there for more than 30 years. I had thought I'd go to a few meetings and get "the answer" to all my problems.

I wasn't young then, and I'm obviously no younger today. Newer members say I'm "wise," but what I have is practice and help from members who came before me. Our "Serenity Prayer" speaks of wisdom; I believe now that wisdom lies in the principles of the Twelve Step program: knowing the difference between accepting the things I cannot change and changing the things that I can. We do not have control over events or people that impact our lives, but we do have control over how we react to them.

I survived Hurricane Andrew but did not resent my Higher Power for the storm. My son picked up drugs at the age of 15; by the time he was 20, I was doubting my Higher Power and was certifiably insane by the simple definition that I kept doing the same thing over and over while expecting a different result. I just couldn't accept his behavior. I created my own storm in response to his dysfunction.

"I've learned that I cannot make other people happy, and their happiness is not my responsibility. Yet, in the process of worrying and obsessing about my son's every move, I became stressed, anxious and sick."

I worried about my kids being happy. I've learned since then that I cannot make other people happy, and their happiness is not my responsibility. Yet, in the process of worrying and obsessing about my son's every move, I became stressed, anxious and sick. Would he have found his own peace earlier if I had let go earlier? Maybe. I'll never know, and I'm OK with that. Yes, I wish that I had had the lessons of FA earlier—but I didn't. Life unfolds as it will.

"My want seemed simple enough:
All I wanted was for my addicted
loved one to wake up to realize
how drugs were ruining his life and
to quit using."



My want seemed simple enough: All I wanted was for my addicted loved one to wake up, to realize how drugs were ruining his life, and to quit using. What happened? I finally woke up to the realization that my worrying, nagging, obsessing and stressing were ruining my own life. I gave him a choice: Out of my house and on his own, or into rehab. And that was the beginning of my recovery—even though he went back down the rabbit hole after many months of rehab.

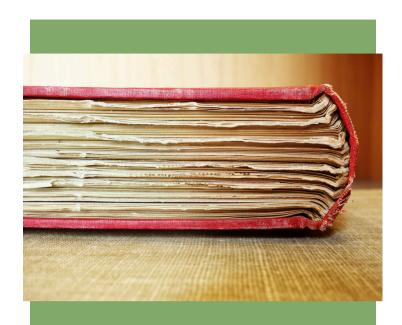
Today, the peace of my life is grounded in gratitude. Being grateful is a practice, and we are surrounded by opportunities if we stay aware. I'm grateful for freedom—in my country and in my soul. I'm grateful to

LIVING IS A PROCESS OF LEARNING

no longer be bound by my expectations and am surprised by many unexpected things that have happened. I'm grateful for all the members of this fellowship who helped me grow out of my grief and misery (no matter what my son was or wasn't doing). I'm grateful for our "red book" (*Today A Better Way*, #1015). My TABW volume has tattered pages and coffee stains. I've read it through more than 15 times but still marvel when I hear something "new" because I am always changing—and as I change, how and what I hear also changes.

Long ago, I accepted the reality that my son might never recover; he had that choice. After years lost and homeless, he got sick and tired of being sick and tired. By the time he returned with a few months of recovery, he was introduced to a different me. I stay in FA, even though he has sustained recovery for 11 years (and surprised us in ways we never expected). He, too, has learned, changed, and grown in mind, body and spirit.

I have grown. I'm older, now approaching the age when my sister passed away. Mentally, I froze myself in time at a young age; my mirror belies that. Now both "kids" are into their own lives, relationships, careers and more; thankfully, neither is spending their time worrying about me. I'm grateful that FA allowed me the opportunity to refocus, to learn that I need to take care of me. Something that has not changed? Whether or not I am well and happy is up to me, one day at a time.



"I'm grateful for our "red book"
(Today A Better Way, #1015). My
TABW volume has tattered pages
and coffee stains. I've read it
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something "new" because I am
always changing—and as I
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JOANNE M.



Want to learn more about how your FA group can thrive and grow? Go to <u>familiesanonymous.org</u>, click on "Members" and go to "Group Materials," where you'll find an array of helpful, informative publications concerning group dynamics and management.

Still have questions? Send an email to the Group Outreach Committee at GO@familiesanonymous.org.

Have a great meeting!

BEREAVEMENT MEETING ANNOUNCEMENT

Families Anonymous Virtual Meeting



- Have you lost a loved one as the result of the use of drugs or alcohol?
- Would you or someone you know like to join and support others who have experienced a similar loss?
- Are you aware of former FA members who might benefit from a bereavement meeting?

Based on feedback from the UK FA Bereavement Group Meeting, the World Service Board of Families Anonymous is starting a second FA Bereavement Meeting based in the US.

All are welcome to join either group if you have been bereaved through addiction and are, or have been, a member of FA and are willing to support others who find themselves in similar circumstances.

These meetings are specifically for FA members, current or past, who would appreciate connecting with others to give and receive additional support. We understand that sometimes the regular FA meetings may not feel right at this time, but we do encourage participants in this group to also attend their regular FA group meetings if/when they are ready.

Interested in participating? You are welcome to attend either or both of the following options:

UK FA Bereavement Group Meeting

- Meets via Zoom
- Second Thursday of the Month
- 19:00 to 20:30 UK Time
- Meeting since December 2022
- Contact: office@famanon.org.uk

US FA Bereavement Group Meeting

- Meets via Zoom
- Last Sunday of the Month
- 12:00 to 1:00pm Eastern Time
- Meetings Launch April 28, 2024 NEW
- Contact: marias@familiesanonymous.org



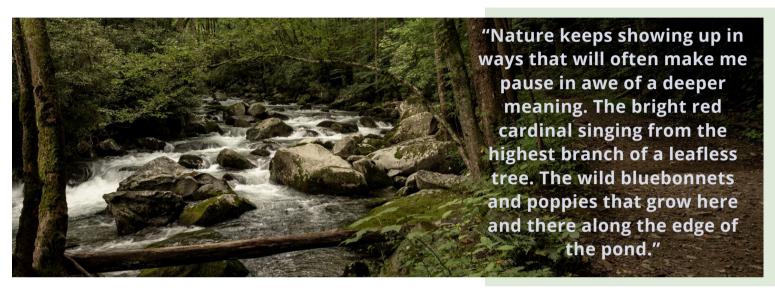
Remember - your FA Family is here for you.

You are not alone.

HOW A NATURE TRAIL SAVED ME

For FA member Maureen B., nature has been her place of comfort through the stress of addiction.

There is a nature trail connected to my neighborhood in North Texas that runs along a creek. The trail is five miles of paved paths that were once wide, open spaces of farmland. This pathway through a protected nature reserve has often saved me from my thoughts, my worries, and my fears. It has heard the whisper of my dreams, my secret hopes, and my silent prayers. Some days, I walk with a friend for what we call a "walk and talk." Other days, I walk it alone. Some days are accompanied by music or a podcast. Other days I go in blissful silence, with nature as my soundtrack. In all these ways, this trail has saved me on some of my darkest days and celebrated with me in some of my most joyous moments.



Nature keeps showing up in ways that will often make me pause in awe of a deeper meaning. The bright red cardinal singing from the highest branch of a leafless tree. The wild bluebonnets and poppies that grow here and there along the edge of the pond. A mother duck with her three ducklings who stay close in the careful protection of their mother. A blue heron on high alert, balancing perfectly on one leg, prepared to take flight at the slightest noisy disturbance. Even something as simple as the abundantly obvious change of seasons snaps into clear focus when my feet take to the trail.

When facing the daily struggles of a loved one with addiction and mental health issues, you often forget to breathe.

When we chose a wilderness therapy program for our struggling teenaged son, I hit that trail daily like it was my job. Rain, ice, snow, 60-mile-per-hour winds, flooding—nothing stopped me. I'd track my walks, step by careful step, reaching up to 38 miles some weeks. I taught myself how to pay attention, look for the signs, and, most importantly, breathe. When facing the daily struggles of a loved one with addiction and mental health issues, you often forget to breathe. There were many days in the thick of our struggles that I felt like I was holding my breath. I'd get into bed at night and exhale what felt like a giant weight I had been carrying on my heart all day. During our darkest days,

HOW A NATURE TRAIL SAVED ME (CONT'D)

there was no comfort of predictability, no easy rhythm to each day. Every day felt like facing the great unknown. It's on those very days that I laced up my sneakers and headed for the trail. And more days than not, the simple action of putting one foot in front of the other saved me from myself.

Recently, I saw a series of imprints on the trail I had never noticed before. On different stretches of the pavement, there are tiny, leafy imprints that were not part of the original plan. Even with all the careful planning and consideration that went into paving that trail, our Higher Power had another plan in mind. What remains now is a permanent stamp in the concrete. A gentle reminder that the struggles we experience as parents walking alongside



(photo credit: Maureen B.)

our children are imprints. Each experience leaves a stamp on our story even when it wasn't part of the

"It's on those very days that I laced up my sneakers and headed for the trail. And more days than not, the simple action of putting one foot in front of the other saved me from myself. "

original plan.

I encourage you to take the walk. Begin by placing one foot in front of the other and just keep going. You never know where the path might lead you.

MAUREEN B. PLANO, TX



Serenity Messenger

SURVIVING THE STORM

FA member Teresa reflects on how FA is her safe space, a shelter in the storm.

Addiction is a monster that ravages and decimates. It's like a hurricane or tornado that ramps up and leaves destruction in its path. It annihilates relationships and whole beings. There is no stopping it when at full force. If we have warning, we can prepare. But when we don't see it coming, God help us.

It takes much more than self-will to survive the destruction as it rages on. FA is a safe place; a shelter in the storm. And if by God's grace the storm passes, FA helps pick up the pieces.



Either way, we are in this together. By practicing the principles of FA in all facets of our lives, we grow spiritually and emotionally. We regain our sense of self-worth, we find light overcomes darkness, we experience newfound peace of mind, and we embrace the courage to move forward with our own lives.

TERESA, GROUP 1416

THINKING OF SUBMITTING AN ARTICLE OR ANNOUNCEMENT TO THE SERENITY MESSENGER?

For our upcoming issue, the deadline to submit announcements is May 31st.

We gladly accept submissions of original articles, letters, poetry, or artwork at any time!

Email us at <u>newsletter@familiesanonymous.org</u>. We'd love to hear from you!

FINDING HAPPINESS THROUGH FA

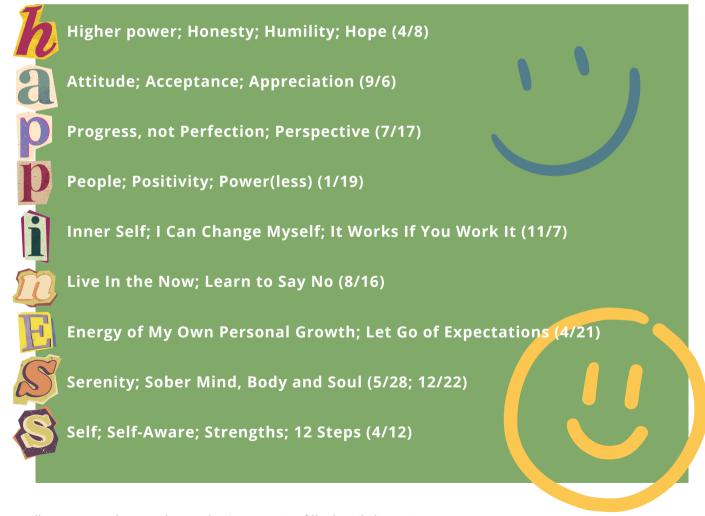
Your Happiness Is Within Your Control

How was your day today? What contributed to (or robbed you from) it being a great day? Which of those things are within your control?

After a decade or more of having FA in my life, I have truly learned how to practice its principles in all my affairs. And although I still consider my journey a work in progress, there are many lessons learned. The first was that happiness comes from within. Giving anyone else the ability to derail my happiness is totally in my control.

That said, in a recent FA lead that I shared, I found all the principles of H-A-P-P-I-N-E-S-S right there in every letter of the word. I'm sure there are even more, but these are a few of the key principles (along with some related TABW reading dates) that guided our discussion.





How will you spend your day today? Hope it's filled with happiness!

MARGARET V., FORT MYERS, FL



LITERATURE SPOTLIGHT



TABW UPDATE

Today A Better Way January 1: "To the Newcomer"

The World Service Board, as recommended by the Literature Committee, has approved a change to the January 1 reading in Today A Better Way (#1015).



In the second paragraph, the first two sentences remain the same, but the rest of the paragraph has been changed, as shown below in red:

We can't tell you what to do. We can only share our experiences with you and tell you how we found the strength to deal with our problems. Your loved one might be in recovery. Perhaps not. Or that person, for whatever reason, might not be physically present in your life. Regardless of your individual situation, all of us are here to welcome and support you.

Some newcomers who have lost loved ones to drug use have expressed, based on the old wording, that they do not see a place for themselves in FA. This new wording is more expansive and makes clear that FA welcomes everyone affected by substance use disorder in their families.

Many groups include the January 1 reading in any meeting where a newcomer is present. Thus, the WSB and the LC are informing you of this change in a timely manner.

The new January 1 reading will be included in the next printing of TABW.

Until then, however, please feel free to insert the new wording into your current copies of TABW.

click here for printable page





LITERATURE SPOTLIGHT



Setting Boundaries... A Very Loving Thing to Do

When I think of boundaries, I usually think of external ones, like fences between yards, rivers running between states, or walls along borders of countries—boundaries that divide land and define who lives where.

I also think of external boundaries as attempts to control or protect people, such as with restraining orders or speed limits.

In FA, however, when we speak of boundaries, we speak of the internal kind: the limits that each of us needs, for ourselves, to protect our own serenity, our home, and our home life. These internal boundaries are for our sanity, so we can continue functioning and living our lives regardless of what our loved ones are doing or not doing.

In FA, boundaries are not meant to control or rule anyone else. That is why setting boundaries is such "a loving thing to do." We must first find it in our heart to love ourselves enough to believe we have the right to have needs; at that point, we can then proceed along a clear-headed path to set boundaries to protect those needs.



Another way to define FA's boundary-setting is "detaching with love." The Setting Boundaries booklet has a quote from Today A Better Way (August 18, "Detach with Love") that reads:

"When I say the words now that demonstrate my loving detachment, I further my own recovery and avoid standing in the way of his."

Setting Boundaries...A Very Loving Thing to Do starts out by defining and explaining the importance of boundaries. It then gets us started on setting boundaries for ourselves with the help of a handy worksheet.

Implementing boundaries and sticking to them can be tough, but as relayed in the numerous personal experiences that make up the bulk of this booklet, doing so is most worthwhile. The guidance found here is invaluable, the process of setting boundaries can be life-changing, and the results are profound.

Here are titles of just a few stories contained in this booklet. All of them describe the wisdom and healing that derive from setting boundaries:

- The Path to Sanity
- Taking Charge of the Conversation
- Detaching to Allow Growth
- Regaining Control of My Life
- The Path to Acceptance
- Self-Revelation

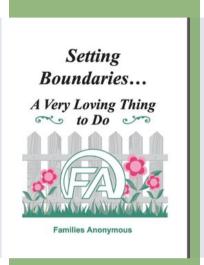
LITERATURE SPOTLIGHT

Finally, this incredible piece of literature wraps up with "Invaluable FA Slogans for Challenging Times," all of which are related to boundary-setting, such as:

- APTDOTC [apt•dot•c] = Allow people the dignity of their consequences.
- Stepping back provides the space for them to step forward.
- "No." is a complete sentence.

MAKE THE CONSCIOUS CHOICE TODAY TO BEGIN
SETTING BOUNDARIES FOR YOURSELF—OR TO IMPROVE
THE BOUNDARY-SETTING SKILLS YOU'VE ALREADY
EMBARKED UPON.

ORDER COPIES OF SETTING BOUNDARIES...A VERY LOVING THING TO DO (#1028 IN FA'S LITERATURE CATALOG) FOR ONLY \$4.00 EACH, AND START YOUR LOVING DETACHMENT TODAY!





Spotlight Alert on New Piece:

KEEPING WHAT'S MINE AND LETTING GO OF WHAT'S NOT (#1037)

Keeping What's Mine and Letting Go of What's Not is FA in a nutshell!

This new single-pager shows us how to stay in our own lane, by providing ready reminders about the essence of Families Anonymous.

Available for free download,

Keeping What's Mine and Letting Go of What's Not
fits easily into your pocket or purse.

Keep it close at hand for those moments
when you need a quick refresher on
what truly belongs to us and what does not.

Download yours today!

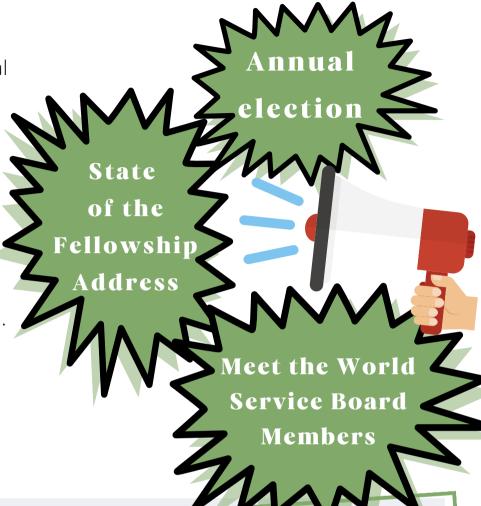
Keeping What's Mine and Letting Go of What's Not (#1037)

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ANNUAL BUSINESS MEETING ANNOUNCEMENT

The World Service Board will be holding a virtual (on-line) Annual Business Meeting (ABM) this year on **Saturday**, **June 8 at**2:00 pm ET. It will be held utilizing GoTo™
videoconferencing capabilities.
All members of the fellowship are welcome to attend the ABM. Those attending can connect to the meeting using the following information:



Families Anonymous Annual Business Meeting

Jun 8, 2024, 2:00 – 4:00 PM (America/New York)

Please join my meeting from your computer, tablet or smartphone.

https://meet.goto.com/586951389

You can also dial in using your phone.

Access Code: 797-217-381 United States: <u>+1 (571) 317-3112</u>

Get the app now and be ready when your first meeting starts:

https://meet.goto.com/install



DONATIONS

COMMEMORATIVE DONATIONS

- In memory of Jason R., on behalf of members of Group 1318, Boca Raton, FL
- In memory of Jason R., on behalf of Patricia S.
- In memory of Jason R., son of Mark and Jane, members of Group 1318, on behalf of Marci G.
- In memory of Joel R., on behalf of Joel and Goldie
- In memory of Benjamin B., with light and love on behalf of Group 1615
- In memory of Jon S., decades-long FA member, former WSB chair, and beloved friend. From Ann P. and Howard P., Group 1301, Syracuse, NY.



Over \$500

• GR1152 NJ, Englewood

\$101 to \$500

- GR0133 CT, West Hartford
- GR1301 NY, Syracuse
- GR1318 FL, Boca Raton
- GR1480 Canada, Winnipeg
- GR1522 IL, Chicago
- GR1639 GA, Atlanta
- GR1735 NJ,
 Ramsey/Mahwah
- GR1906 GA. Roswell
- GR2056 FL, Bradenton
- GR3001 IL, Chicagoland

Up to \$100

- GR0162 IL, Des Plaines
- GR0171 IL, Arlington Heights
- GR0478 IL, Glenview
- GR0579 OH, Columbus
- GR0631 TX, Dallas
- GR0641 CA, Redlands
- GR1979 CA, Ridgecrest

DONATE

As per the Seventh Tradition, each group should be self-supporting. Your donations also help support the activities of the World Service Office. For more information on how to donate, please <u>click here</u> or visit www.familiesanonymous.org and click **DONATE!**

Thank you for supporting the many activities of FA World Service.

Your contribution is tax-deductible.