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Area 53 Ad Hoc Committee on Virtual-Only Group Registration

(Dan S., Nita S., Brenda B., Rick A.)

Proposal to Add New District for Virtual-Only Groups:

The Area 53 Ad Hoc Committee on Virtual Group Registration recommends that Area 53 add a new district within the General Service structure as a virtual-only district for those groups that have no affiliate district or wish to change from their district affiliation to virtual-only. This district would include all virtual-only meetings/groups that would like to remain/become active within Area 53 service structure.

This new district would function completely as a virtual district, having district meetings organized virtually. Each group within this district could elect a GSR to attend Area events and fulfill the responsibilities of a GSR. These GSRs could elect a DCM to serve as representative of the district at the Area Assemblies and to fulfill all other DCM responsibilities. The formation of this new district will ensure that all groups within Area 53 have the right to participate in Area 53 service, to have a voice, and receive service support, which is the right of all AA groups. After this proposal passes, this new virtual-only district will have the opportunity to vote at the Area. Once the district is formed, the operating structure and decision of this district will be left to the district as is its right of decision.

Background: During the Coronavirus outbreak, many meetings transferred from in-person, physical meetings to online (aka virtual) meetings. Online meetings became the norm, as some groups chose the online option for safety reasons or state regulations forced their hands. Other physical locations took the opportunity to sever relationships with groups and end meeting access. Additionally, to meet the new need for connection, virtual meetings (and corresponding groups) have sprung up without attachment to a physical space. To address this influx of new online groups, GSO is now recognizing virtual meetings/groups with a Group Number.

Virtual Districts, in practice, resemble Linguistic Districts, where groups are gathered by language preference vs. geographical location. These special districts allow groups to have a representative voice at the AA table and provide communications opportunities, a deficiency identified in GSO's recent Communications Audit.

Key elements from this proposal include:

- Virtual groups utilize technology to conduct their meetings. Current technology in use includes video conference platforms such as Zoom, phone conference, message boards, email listservs, chatrooms. As technology evolves, the tools Alcoholics use to get and stay sober will undoubtedly change. *"Nothing matters more to AA's future welfare than the manner in which we use the colossus of modern communication. Used unselfishly and well, it can produce results surpassing our present imagination."*—Bill W., The Grapevine, November, 1960

- AA is not a place; a home group doesn't need a permanent physical address. Our service manual states *"the home group affords individual A.A.s the privilege of voting on issues that affect the Fellowship as a whole; it is the very basis of the service structure."*—Service Manual S25

- Tradition 3 states *"any two or three alcoholics may call themselves an A.A. group, provided that, as a group, they have no other affiliation."*

- Concept 1: *"The final responsibility and ultimate authority for A.A. world services should always reside in the collective conscience of our whole Fellowship."* How can we expect GSO & AAWS to be fully informed when all groups are not included in the group conscience of our fellowship?

- Since all Areas are autonomous, an Area can organize in the way that is most effective for the groups and members involved.

Additionally, online meetings/groups fill the accessibility and inclusion shortfalls of AA and prove to benefit our current aging membership and provide opportunity for those, to this point, unable to join us. For example:

- Online meetings meet the homebound AA member's need for a meeting and fellowship while providing high value regarding meeting accessibility (no stairs to climb, unimpaired ability to hearing the speaker, no ride-getting hassles, etc.),

- Online meetings provide fellowship and sobriety networks by connecting working members, parents-without-babysitters, and other special-circumstance individuals access to meetings on their time, without scheduling conflicts or location limitations.

- Online groups provide those members unable to connect with a physical group, the opportunity to participate in the service structure and to share their experience, strength and hope.