

District 28 Newsletter

September 2026

Sheila M Newsletter Editor

Woodbridge.aa.org

Single mom finds Hope

When I was drinking, I was desperately lonely. As a young single mom with four kids, I felt my life was already ruined. I was miserable and irritable, and nothing could make me happy. The only thing that quieted my feelings and racing thoughts was alcohol. It was the one thing that seemed to stop the pain, even if only for a little while.

When I finally walked through the doors of Alcoholics Anonymous, I was able to put the drink down. More than that, I found something I had almost given up on, hope for a better life. My external situation didn't magically change—I was still a single mother with the same responsibilities and challenges. But something inside me began to shift. I came to understand that AA is so much more than simply stopping drinking. It is a foundation for an entirely new way of thinking and living.

In the rooms I found friends who became family. People who understood me without judgment, who showed up, and who walked beside me as I learned a different path. I also came to accept that I had a disease, and that the only real cure for the kind of deep unhappiness I had lived with was to work the Twelve Steps. Through that work I began to experience true happiness—not the temporary relief alcohol once provided, but a steadier, more lasting peace.

Today I can say with certainty that Alcoholics Anonymous has given me a great life. Not because every problem disappeared, but because I was given the tools, the fellowship, and the spiritual foundation to meet life on life's terms. For that, I am deeply grateful.

Erin H. Woodbridge VA

Upcoming Events

- District 28 Annual Picnic September 27 @ Leesylvania Park. POTLUCK
- Gratitude Breakfast November 8 (Sunday) @ Stacy Sherwood Community Center
- FALL DISTRICT 28 OFFICER ELECTIONS



A "Spiritual, Not Religious" Rebel Who Helped Build AA



From the Archives Corner:

By Jen K [Archivist/District 28]

In Alcoholics Anonymous, we often proudly declare that ours is a "spiritual, not a religious" program. Because we fiercely guard our inclusivity and our own understanding of a Higher Power, it is completely natural to feel a bit protective—even defensive—when formal religious titles start popping up in our fellowship's history. But the truth is, in our earliest and most desperate days, before we even had a Big Book or an official name, a few dedicated non-alcoholics of faith stepped up to save our lives when the rest of the medical world had written us off. One of these influential pioneers wasn't an alcoholic at all, but a frail, fiercely rebellious Catholic nun named Sister Ignatia. Long before society viewed alcoholism as a disease, she saw our humanity, and she was willing to break the rules to save it.

The Flower Room and "Acute Gastritis"

In the 1930s, the medical community generally viewed alcoholism as a moral failing rather than a disease, and hospitals simply would not admit patients just for being drunk.

Sister Ignatia was working in the admissions office of St. Thomas Hospital in Akron, Ohio, when she first teamed up with Dr. Bob. To get alcoholics the medical care they desperately needed, she began intentionally circumventing the hospital's strict rules. She formally admitted intoxicated patients under the false diagnosis of "acute gastritis." Because there were no official beds for these patients, she originally hid them in the hospital's flower room to sober up! Her quiet rebellion made St. Thomas the first religious institution in the country to recognize the rights of alcoholics to receive formal hospital treatment.

The Coffee Bar Ultimatum

Sister Ignatia was known for being frail but fiercely protective, demanding that alcoholics be treated with absolute dignity.

In 1952, she was transferred to St. Vincent Charity Hospital in Cleveland to establish a new alcoholic ward (which became the famous Rosary Hall Solarium). While setting up the ward, she insisted on building a proper coffee bar for the recovering alcoholics, knowing how central coffee and fellowship were to the AA program. A hospital board member reviewed the plans, questioned the expense, and told her, "A table will have to do."

Sister Ignatia refused to compromise. She put the entire project on the line by replying, "Let's forget about it if you're not going to give us the proper setup." The board member backed down, and the coffee bar was built.

Recognition from the White House

During her lifetime, Sister Ignatia is credited with directly helping an estimated 15,000 alcoholics recover. She was also among the first to acknowledge the impact on families, helping to lay the groundwork for what would eventually become Al-Anon. Despite this, she remained deeply humble and always credited AA members for the success of her wards.

Her quiet work eventually reached the highest levels of government. In March 1961, President John F. Kennedy sent her a personal letter from the White House, thanking her for her pioneering contributions and for restoring so many individuals to "useful citizenship." When Bill W. read a copy of the president's letter, he immediately wrote to Sister Ignatia to add his own praise, expressing his endless devotion for her constant spiritual inspiration and friendship.



Tracing the Origins of the Coins

When discharging patients from St. Thomas Hospital, Sister Ignatia didn't hand out secular keepsakes; she specifically gave each person a Sacred Heart medallion. She asked for one solemn promise in return: if they were ever tempted to drink, they had to bring the medallion back to her before taking that first sip. By tying their physical sobriety token directly to a symbol of divine love, she gave early members a powerful, spiritual reminder of their commitment to a daily reprieve.

Sources & Historical References

- **The Flower Room & Admissions:** Documented in historical archives from the *Catholic Health Association* and the *Women Religious Archive Collaborative* detailing St. Thomas Hospital's early alcoholism treatment.
- **Rosary Hall & The Coffee Bar Ultimatum:** Sourced from the historical records of Rosary Hall Solarium in Cleveland, Ohio, and corroborated by regional AA historical archives.
- **The 1961 JFK Letter & Bill W. Quote:** Verified through the official General Service Office (GSO) archives, currently documented on [AA.org's historical profile of Sister Ignatia](#).