

# About AA

## A.A. Reaches Out to Our Friends in the Corrections Field

### Looking to the Future . . .

"A significant part of our Fellowship's future is locked up right now in jails, prisons and juvenile detention centers," says Class A (nonalcoholic) trustee Amos Reed of Salem, Oregon, chairperson of the trustees' Correctional Facilities Committee, "and alcohol is the primary or supporting cause. The many professionals frustrated by the revolving door syndrome—and by the treatment gap beyond talk or drug therapy—have found that A.A. sustains over time and with all nationalities, ages and conditions."

Now retired from his position as secretary of the Department of Corrections for the State of Washington, Amos has spent more than 50 years working in corrections, education and public welfare. "For me personally," he notes, "it has been thrilling to participate in active A.A. throughout the world. The intrinsically spiritual qualities of the Steps, Traditions and Concepts have enhanced the lives of all who have accepted and practiced them. Daily, I gain help and encouragement from having them in my own life. Also, I have noted that a host of other individuals and twelve step groups pay homage to the A.A. principles by adapting them to their own needs."

Looking to the future, however, Amos voices "concerns similar to those expressed by A.A.'s co-founders Bill W. and Dr. Bob decades ago. They stressed the importance of: holding true to human principles; avoiding the worship of money and personal power, as well as affiliation with other causes; sharing the experience and hope of the Fellowship with still-suffering alcoholics; and recognizing the permanent fallibility of all-alcoholics, drunk or sober, in the presence of alcohol." Like Bill and Dr. Bob, Amos is "resistant" to any dilution of A.A.'s basic principles that could erode its substance and base. This must not be permitted to happen."

At present, he points out, "there are nearly 1,700 A.A. groups in U.S./Canada correctional facilities, but we can do better." A.A. will make a real impact in the years to come, he believes, if:

- Members carry the message "inside" in greater numbers and try harder to reach the minorities who constitute a disproportionate number of our alcoholic inmates.
- Temporary-sponsorship networks are stepped up and sustained. "The first day out of incarceration is crucial," Amos warns. "Without a bridge between prison and A.A., all our Twelfth-Stepping inside may go for naught."
- Efforts are made to build an ever-stronger cooperative relationship between A.A.s in corrections work and prison officials, their chaplains, counselors, probation officers and participating agencies.

"For those who are sober in A.A.," Amos contends, "and for those dedicated professionals in corrections, the years ahead can be a mission in which we make a collective effort to help alcoholics get well—always remembering that patience and perseverance will be required."

### While Learning from the Past . . .

"Founded in 1935, the Fellowship was into its seventh year, with a growing membership of more than 8,000, when a progressive warden at San Quentin asked for nearby members of A.A. to carry the message to alcoholics behind the walls. The year was 1942 and the warden, who would defy many skeptics, was the now-legendary Clinton Duffy. He said, 'If this program can help just one man, I want to start it.'"

So relates Class A (nonalcoholic) past trustee Jim Estelle, a retired director of the Texas Department of Corrections. Thanks to Warden Duffy's historical peregrinations, we know that "the first A.A. meeting 'inside' had 20 inmates and several free-world guests in attendance. Warden Duffy recognized the importance of their presence to the growth of that new A.A. group of imprisoned alcoholics. Others, both inmates and Duffy's colleagues alike, remained skeptical until the return rate for alcoholic parolees dropped from 80% to 20% and stayed there.

"By 1960, A.A. in prison had gone international, with seven groups in Finland and two in Holland. The Fellowship was lauded widely as a 'twentieth-century miracle' that could make the difference in the transition from prison to freedom."



From A.A. in Prison: Inmate to Inmate  
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## ... And Understanding the Present— To Slow the Revolving Door

"Are our prisons largely filled with alcoholics who have been convicted of a crime? Or, are the rooms of A.A. filled with criminals who haven't been caught?" When Ray McD. of Poughkeepsie, New York, asked this of a renowned criminologist, the reply was an unequivocal "Both!" Says Ray, a member of the trustees' Committee on Correctional Facilities and a retired correctional administrator, "That answer made me think not only about the magnitude of the problem but about the potential for healing that abounds in A.A."

Speaking at a sharing session of the General Service Board, Ray explained that the problems faced by A.A.s carrying the message behind walls is enormous in scope: "Over 350,000 persons are incarcerated in city, town and county jails; some 715,000 are in state and federal prisons. Additionally, there are more than 407,000 parolees and more than 2,386,000 men and women placed on supervised probation in lieu of incarceration. The increase in these groups since 1985 has been a staggering 34.6 percent. But more important than actual statistics is the fact that, without help, most of these people fall through the cracks and get trapped in the revolving prison door."

Offering insight into some of these problems, Dennis R., of Freehold, New Jersey, another member of the trustees' C.F. Committee, said that "the most effective way to reach an alcoholic inmate is through the sharing of another alcoholic's experience, strength and hope. We need to encourage more outside A.A.s to take meetings inside and serve as release and prerelease sponsors. Once involved, they'll appreciate, as I did, our common bond as fellow drunks." Dennis further cited the need for simplified A.A. reading material and audiovisual tapes.

Both Ray and Dennis emphasized the importance of our message. "That," said Ray, is the greatest challenge: "to reach alcoholics before their illness drives them into crime."

## A Change of Heart

"It's been a long time since I felt like I mattered somewhere besides here in prison," writes Perry L. from Red Creek, New York. "But then came the gifts from G.S.O.—the Big Book, Twelve and Twelve, and some pamphlets—and the wonderful letter that helped me believe someone out there cares about me and my life.

"Reading those words 'I am an alcoholic' and 'I understand' took a great weight from my spirit. I thank everyone in A.A. who has brought about this change of heart that I could not make myself. I understand now what the phrase 'There is strength in numbers' really means.

## New Booklet Fills a Need

The new 128-page, illustrated booklet *A.A. in Prison: Inmate to Inmate* (\$2.95), is a collection of 32 stories, previously printed in the A.A. Grapevine, that share the experiences of men and women who found A.A. while incarcerated. *Inmate to Inmate* in Spanish will be available soon. Presently in the works is a 60-minute audiotape of stories adapted from this

A.A. Conference-approved booklet.

Additional A.A. literature of special interest to C.F. inmates and personnel includes the pamphlets: "A Message to Correctional Facility Administrators"; "A.A. in Correctional Facilities"; "Memo to an Inmate Who May Be an Alcoholic"; and "It Sure Beats Sitting in a Cell" (also available as a 17-minute film). For information on ordering these and other material, a number of them available in Spanish as well as English, please contact the Correctional Facilities Desk at G.S.O. Easy-to-read literature is also available, including the new pamphlet "The Twelve Steps Illustrated."

## Extending the Hand of A.A.

The Correctional Facilities desk at A.A.'s General Service Office extends the hand of A.A. to those who can not walk to a meeting, phone a sponsor, or participate freely in the A.A. activities that A.A. members on the "outside" take for granted. An important part of this staff assignment is to serve as secretary of the trustees' C.F. Committee which, together with the C.F. Committee of the General Service Conference, endeavors to communicate the A.A. message to the "nation within a nation" in U.S./Canada correctional facilities.

The C.F. staff member writes over 6,000 letters a year. Basically, correspondence with inmates falls into three main categories: (1) providing information about A.A. through literature; (2) answering inmates' requests for prerelease contacts; and (3) providing information about the Corrections Correspondence Service.

This service, in which an outside A.A. member shares the message of recovery with an inmate on a one-to-one basis, has enjoyed steady growth. At present, more than 2,000 A.A.s active in their local groups are participating in this mutually rewarding program. The way it works: G.S.O. sends the name and address of the inmate desiring correspondence to the outside A.A. member, who then initiates the first contact, usually using a home A.A. group's address or P.O. box number.

On a daily basis, the C.F. desk seeks to facilitate prerelease support. When an inmate sends in an approximate release date and name of his or her home community, the C.F. staff member notifies the appropriate area C.F. committee so it can establish contact with the inmate (for up to 24 months prior to release). Thus, the inmate's difficult transition from inside the walls to the pressures of outside life is supported by an established A.A. network.

## How Can A.A. Help?

What can A.A. do for correctional facilities' administrators? Are you interested in an A.A. exhibit, video presentation or open meeting at one of your professional conferences? Or would you like information about a specific aspect of recovery in the Fellowship? Please contact the Committee on Cooperation With the Professional Community at G.S.O. We welcome your questions, comments and requests, so let us hear from you!

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