

A.A. AROUND THE GLOBE

When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A. always to be there. And for that: I am responsible.

Early in its existence Alcoholics Anonymous spread from place to place through the efforts of individual A.A. members who moved to a new town or traveled on business. Even Bill W.'s first meeting with Dr. Bob came about because Bill went to Akron on business. Today that tradition continues. What follows is a brief history and sampling of the way A.A. members have helped spread the message around the world.

In 1944, Bill W. toured the United States to visit A.A. groups. Then, in 1950, he traveled to Europe. In a letter he wrote to Dr. Bob after almost seven weeks there, he says, "A.A. has come to Europe to stay."

- Bill visited Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Holland, France, England, and Ireland.
- At the time there were 3,527 groups in approximately 34 countries. Today there are more than 114,000 groups in approximately 170 countries.

At first, the spread of A.A. was left almost to chance.

- An early Internationalist, Captain Jack, carried the message of hope from port to port where his life as a merchant seaman took him.
- Others carried the message as they traveled on business or on vacation. In 1946, an A.A. member from Philadelphia visited Dublin and took the opportunity to carry the message of recovery there. His efforts paid off and Ireland's first A.A. meeting took place in Dublin in November of that year. A.A. was likewise carried to Brazil, El Salvador, and Iceland by traveling A.A.s from the U.S.; to Japan, by a U.S. soldier serving with the occupation forces; and to Romania, by an American couple.

As A.A. grew, countries with an established A.A. service structure began to help fledgling countries. In one example, Germany sponsored A.A. in Poland in the 1980s. Poland was then in a position to help spread A.A. to other Eastern European countries. Other instances of this activity include Japan helping carry the message to Korea, and Mexico acting as a sponsor to Cuba. Meanwhile, South Africa, with the help of Britain and the United States, has played the role of sponsor in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The practice of country-to-country sponsorship continues today as A.A. grows around the world.

In the late 1960s, the World Service Meeting (WSM) was conceived as a forum where A.A. members from around the world could share with each other how A.A. operates in their respective countries. The WSM convenes every two years, alternating between New York and a site in a host country.

- At the first meeting in 1969, 27 delegates from 16 countries participated.
- In 2012, 61 delegates representing more than 35 countries participated.

As the World Service Meeting matured, the concept of a zonal meeting was introduced. The zonal meetings are like mini-World Service Meetings, opportunities for countries from the same geographical area to meet. And A.A. representatives who have participated in the World Service Meetings can then share that experience with those who have not.

- The Meeting of the Americas, the first zonal meeting, took place in 1979 with participants from 10 countries.
- This was followed in 1981 by the European Service Meeting with 14 participants. By 1997, this zonal meeting had grown to 21 countries.
- An Asia-Oceania Service meeting began in 1995 and in 1997 had seven participating countries.
- The first Eastern European Service Meeting took place in April 2002 in Warsaw, Poland, with 14 countries represented. This meeting has subsequently merged with the European Service Meeting.
- The first Sub-Saharan Africa Service Meeting took place in June of 2003 in Johannesburg, South Africa, with 17 delegates from nine countries.
- While not a full-fledged zonal meeting, in 2007, service structures from countries in French-speaking Africa gathered in Paris to begin the process of sharing together, forming what is known as R.A.C.O. (Réunion de Service de la Zone Afrique Centrale et Occidentale). More recently, A.A. in countries from the Middle East cooperate in what is known as the Middle East Region Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous (MERCAA).

The explosion of new A.A. activity internationally since the 1980s has created an enormous need for basic A.A. material. In response, G.S.O. U.S./Canada allocates funds to assist in translating and printing A.A. literature in countries where A.A. is developing. This helps ensure a consistent interpretation of the A.A. message of recovery, and supports the management of copyrighted A.A. material through licensing arrangements.

This, in turn, helps preserve the integrity of the A.A. message. Countries that wish to can contribute to an International Literature Fund that supports this work. The proposal for the Fund came out of the 11th World Service Meeting in 1990 and is managed by A.A.W.S. Over \$1.4 million has been contributed to the fund, directly helping provide A.A. literature in more than 90 languages.

The trustees' International Committee of the General Service Board (U.S./Canada) is responsible for suggesting policies and actions that result in carrying the A.A. message to alcoholics overseas, particularly in countries without an established service structure.

G.S.O.'s International desk shares information and experience on the General Service Board structure, activities and G.S.O. services with A.A. groups in countries that request help in establishing literature distribution centers, boards or general service offices; and cooperates and exchanges information with A.A. groups and members in countries that do not have a General Service Office or comparable structure.

Over the years, the trustees, general managers and staff members have been invited to participate in events all over the world, offering the experience of trial and error, sharing what has worked and what has not. We do not govern; we share experience, strength and hope to help others carry the A.A. message of recovery to those who still suffer.

- In recent years, trustees and staff members visited many countries, including Columbia, Dubai, Germany, Japan, Mexico, Peoples Republic of China, Russia, Slovenia, South Africa, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom.
- The chair of the General Service Board traveled with one of our trustees-at-large to India, where they were interviewed by representatives of that country's press, radio, and television. They also visited treatment centers, schools for social work and social sciences, and met with A.A. members from all over India.

Today, the A.A. way of life is practiced in approximately 170 countries. Most of this is still accomplished, as in the earliest days of A.A., through the miracle of one drunk helping another.

If you would like additional information about the international activities of the General Service Board and the General Service Office of U.S./Canada, please contact:

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