

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 120,000 groups in approximately 181 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 Great 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 closed forum where 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 2020, due to the global pandemic, the WSM was held virtually for the first time with 70 delegates representing 44 countries participating.
- In October 2022 delegates from participating countries will be meeting virtually once more with the fitting theme, “A.A. in the Digital Age” and look forward to meeting again in 2024 in New York in keeping with the rotation.

In 2018 the WSM established the World Service Meeting Fund as a way for countries to contribute funds to provide financial assistance to countries that request funding and to support the World Service Meeting. The World Service Meeting Fund is maintained and administered by A.A. World Services and under the purview of the World Service Meeting Policy/Admissions/Finance Committee.

As the World Service Meeting matured, the concept of a zonal meeting was introduced. Since their infancies, country participation has grown. 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. In 2021, zonal meetings that were held, met virtually.

- The Meeting of the Americas, the first zonal meeting of REDELA countries, 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.
- More recently, some A.A. in countries from the Middle East cooperate in what is known as the Middle East Region Committee of Alcoholics Anonymous (MERCAA). MERCAA participates in the Asia Oceania Zone.

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, printing, and distributing A.A. literature in countries where assistance is needed. This helps ensure consistent translation of the A.A. message of recovery and supports the management of copyrighted A.A. material through licensing arrangement.

This, in turn, supports the integrity of the A.A. message, and our unity. 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. Nearly \$2 million has been contributed to the fund, directly helping provide A.A. literature in more than 110 languages among them Visayan, Arabic, Tagalog, Thai, Georgian and Serbian. At the 25th World Service Meeting held in South Africa in 2018 it was agreed that A.A. World Services consider the use of the International Literature Fund to offset administrative costs associated with translation review and copyright registration of A.A. Grapevine, Inc. books.

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 internationally, 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. In recent years the mainstreaming of virtual platforms has offered additional opportunities for participation. In all situations we do not govern, nor do we become involved in local disputes; 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 at large U.S./Canada and staff members visited many countries in-person and online, including Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, Chile, Cuba, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Portugal, Russia, Slovenia, South Africa, Iran, Ukraine and the United Arab Emirates. At the public level, Class A trustees have been able to share on a broader scale with their peers both in person and on public virtual platforms.

- In 2018 a Class A (nonalcoholic) trustee of the General Service Board U.S./Canada spoke at a professional conference geared towards almost 100 doctors, addiction specialists, social workers, nurses and medical students in the city of Guantánamo, Guantánamo Province, Cuba. Dr. Luongo's talk "Healthcare Professionals and A.A.," outlined the ways in which A.A. and the medical profession can work together to help address the problem of alcoholism.
- In 2021 a Class A (nonalcoholic) trustee Dr. Al J. Mooney spoke at a webinar put on by the Pan American Health Association, entitled "Treatment and recovery from alcohol dependence in the Americas" on the topic, "What is A.A. and how can it serve as a resource for professionals and their alcoholic clients?" The international

webinar included panelists from various professional backgrounds, organizations and those who may have a drinking problem from the Central and South Americas and the U.S./Canada.

Today, A.A. is present in approximately 181 countries, with about 66 G.S.O.s around the world. Most recently, virtual platforms have offered additional accessible avenues to potentially connect with alcoholics. In recent years the phrase “A.A. around the globe” has taken on a much broader meaning.

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 visit the G.S.O. website’s “A.A. Around the World” page: www.aa.org/pages/en_US/aa-around-the-world

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