

Our Twelve Traditions: A.A.'s Future in the Modern World

**ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS
25TH WORLD SERVICE MEETING**

Durban, South Africa | October 7-11, 2018

Our Twelve Traditions: A.A.'s Future in the Modern World

25th World Service Meeting 2018
Durban, South Africa

Final Report

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Our Twelve Traditions: A.A.'s Future in the Modern World

From October 7 through 11, 2018, 72 delegates representing 45 countries or zones where Alcoholics Anonymous has a national service structure or service office gathered at the Southern Sun Elangeni and Maharani Hotel in Durban, South Africa, for the 25th World Service Meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous. Established in 1969 “to carry the message to the still-suffering alcoholic, wherever in the world he or she may be...” the World Service Meeting (WSM) has been held every other year since 1972, alternating between New York and a city outside the U.S./Canada structure, as chosen by the WSM itself.

Noting the historic nature of the meeting, the chair of Alcoholics Anonymous South Africa, Class B (alcoholic) trustee Frank V., warmly welcomed all delegates and support staff at the opening session, expressing gratitude for the sacrifice each one had to make to get there. “As chairperson of the board of Alcoholics Anonymous South Africa, it gives me great pleasure to meet and greet you here in Durban... For A.A. South Africa, it is both an honor and a privilege to host this milestone 25th World Service Meeting of our beloved Fellowship... This is the first time that this key event on the A.A. worldwide calendar is being hosted on the African continent. And probably the first time that some of you have set foot here.”

Referencing the theme of the meeting, “Our Twelve Traditions: A.A.’s Future in the Modern World,” Frank noted, “A.A. exists today in a modern world. It is a world virtually governed and driven by the phenomenon of social media. A world that

provides, at the tap of a keyboard, instant access to information, as well as the capacity to share it in a heartbeat. An almost alarmingly fast-moving world. Against that background, are our Traditions still vital? Still relevant? Still spiritual? Still as important as ever?”

These questions — vital across the entire A.A. world — reverberated in much of the communication between delegates throughout the week.

“The Traditions apply to the life of the Fellowship itself,” said Frank. “They outline the means by which A.A. maintains its unity and relates itself to the world around it — the way it lives and grows. So, it is obvious that part of the purpose of delegates gathered here in Durban will be to find common ground on whether the Twelve Traditions are still meeting their intended purpose in today’s modern social media-driven world.”

The Keynote Address was given by Lubomir B. of Slovakia, who shared that “Our Traditions, amongst other topics, talk about anonymity, humility, unity and tolerance... Humility and tolerance transcend what we call the modern world. Whether it is a new gadget or a new social media platform. These are just communication tools that will come and go. I don’t know what the future world will look like. Social platforms and the biggest brands on the market might not exist in the future, but I believe A.A. will. Today I know that A.A. principles work, and we need to continue to carry the same message A.A. has

always carried, no matter what technological advances the future world might bring us.”

While many countries with long-established A.A. structures have been participating in the WSM for many years, attendance varies with each meeting. Paraguay and Slovakia were represented for the first time in 2016, for example, and this year, as those countries returned for a second time, Bolivia and Turkey attended their first WSM. With multiple languages represented by the 72 delegates, English and Spanish are the two official languages of the WSM, and interpretation from Spanish into English and English into Spanish was provided at all plenary sessions, with all committee reports and report backs available in the two official languages.

In a number of sessions spanning the WSM’s five days, one delegate from each country provided service highlights from their country or zone. These included brief A.A. histories of the countries and information on current structures and activities. In addition, delegates heard reports from the Zonal Service Meetings, gatherings of the general service structures of whole sections of the globe held in off-years when there is not a World Service Meeting. Zonal meetings have proven to be particularly helpful for emerging countries beginning to get involved in A.A. beyond their own borders, and countries are encouraged to participate in zonal meetings before applying to participate in the World Service Meeting.

The four World Service Meeting committees (Agenda, Literature/Publishing, Policy/Admissions/Finance and Working with Others) met during the week, and their conclusions were reported to the body, which deliberated and voted on their recommendations. World Service Meeting recommendations set policy for the WSM itself, and are not binding on any participating country.

In addition to committee meetings and Country Service Highlights, the five days of the meeting were packed with presentations on topics ranging from the ongoing relevance of anonymity and the role of new media technologies in carrying the A.A. message, to the inclusion and safety of vulnerable members and minorities in A.A.

Greg T., general manager of the General Service Office U.S./Canada, reported on the International Literature Fund, which was established at the 11th World Service Meeting to provide start-up literature for those countries unable to finance their own translations and acquisitions. “In the last few years we have provided complimentary copies of books and other literature to A.A.s in places such as Albania, Bolivia, Macedonia, Mongolia, Nicaragua, Sri Lanka, Trinidad, Uganda and Uruguay,” said Greg. “And we want to do more, and for that we need your participation and involvement — so we ask you to communicate with us through the International desk at G.S.O. with indications of your needs.

“Around the world,” shared Greg, “about 20 translations or re-translations of the Big Book are currently underway, and during the past few years translations of the Big Book have been completed in Twi (Ghana) and Rarotongan (Cook Islands). Four years ago, a new Arabic translation was completed. Arabic is particularly heartwarming because this newly printed Big Book includes local personal stories, which were curated by the members of the Middle East Regional Committee for Alcoholics Anonymous (MERCAA).”

Adding to the discussion on the publishing of international literature, David R., A.A.W.S. publishing director, provided an overview of the process and procedures for the translation and licensing of A.A.W.S. copyrighted materials and met individually with interested delegates to review specific circumstances and situations faced in different countries.

In addition to the sharing during the presentations, delegates met in three designated workshops. They discussed the topics: “How to use the Internet wisely,” “Country-to-country sponsorship,” and “Leadership in A.A.”

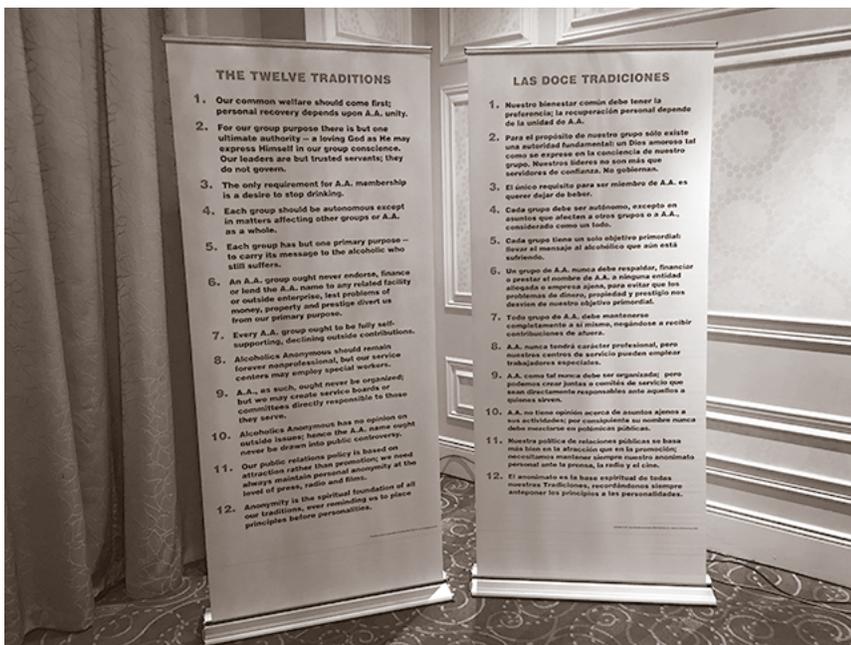
Between sessions, delegates could be seen clustered around tables in the hotel, coffee or teacups on the table, sharing A.A.-style, one-on-one, with many delegates noting that this informal, individual sharing was as vital to their WSM experience as the formal sessions were.

With such a unique gathering of delegates from around the world, travel concerns were bound to materialize, and some

difficulties did indeed conspire to delay the arrival of the two delegates from Iran. Due to a clerical error on their visas, they were unable to get to the meeting on time, but when they did finally walk into the meeting room (two days later) they were greeted with a standing ovation from their peers. So honored and grateful by the welcome they received, as related by Zenaída Medina, one of the staff workers from GSO New York, “They came over to me right after to give me Iran’s first Seventh Tradition contribution to the International Literature Fund.”

As the meeting neared its end, delegates shared freely in general sessions, expressing their gratitude for the entire experience of the World Service Meeting, with many remarking on how important it is to work with other countries in developing service structures and practices that work, while at the same time continuing to carry the message in their own countries.

Providing some closing thoughts for the





proceedings, Frank V. noted, “So much has stood out for me over this week. I have heard that no matter where we come from, we all seem to have the same challenges. The fact that we can share our experience in handling those challenges, and be in a position to perhaps help some other country is surely one of the great benefits of the World Service Meeting.”

The meeting officially came to a close with delegates reciting the Serenity Prayer one by one in each of the languages spoken in participating countries — a moving display of A.A.’s global reach. With the formal portion of the meeting concluded, delegates began to turn their thoughts to the journey home following a final festive dinner featuring Indian and Zulu dancers.

Having made new friends and strengthened A.A.’s worldwide connections, as delegates left the hotel and the meeting rooms behind, the words of a Zulu greeting noted by Bill W. in “The Far Reaches,” an October 1961 Grapevine article, would have seemed most appropriate: “Hamba gahle, hlala gahle.” As Bill wrote, “These are Zulu greetings and mean ‘travel in peace’ and ‘abide in peace’....”

“Surely, we of A.A. can identify with these words... For is this not exactly what we ourselves have been seeking — first as active alcoholics, and then as A.A. members? We have always wanted to go out from the place where we were, to a place where there would be peace. The story of A.A. is the story of our own travels together, in the quest for better things.”

With the 25th World Service Meeting at an end, attention turns to the year 2020, when delegates will again come together at the 26th World Service Meeting, to be held in

October 2020 in New York, with the theme “The Purpose of Our Service: Sobriety within Everyone’s Reach.” Scheduled to feature presentations on “The Importance of the Group Conscience Process,” “Encouraging Women into General Service,” “Young People in A.A.,” “Anonymity,” “Safety in A.A.” and “The International Literature Fund,” the sharing that awaits in two years’ time is certain to enrich A.A. yet again and to further extend the hand of A.A.’s truly worldwide Fellowship.

Welcoming Address

Good afternoon everybody — and welcome to Africa! My name is Frank, and I am an alcoholic. As chairperson of the board of Alcoholics Anonymous South Africa, it gives me great pleasure to meet and greet you here in Durban, one of the top seaside resort cities in our wonderful country. A.A. members throughout South Africa join me in welcoming you with open arms. We trust that your stay will be both fruitful and enjoyable. We also hope that some, if not many, of you have chosen to linger a little longer and look around after this World Service Meeting — to experience the hospitality, and some of the attractions, of South Africa. Not least, our treasured wildlife.

For A.A. South Africa, it is both an honor and a privilege to host this milestone 25th World Service Meeting of our beloved Fellowship. It is equally an honor and a privilege for me to serve as chairperson. This is the first time that this key event on the A.A. worldwide calendar is being hosted on the African continent. And probably the first time that some of you have set foot here. You are visiting us during an exciting phase of the rollout of South Africa’s democracy and future development — with our new president Cyril Ramaphosa at the helm. We are a country with a spring in its step right now, in spite of some of the challenges we face.

I am delighted to be here among men and women who want to make a difference. Among people who unselfishly serve our beloved Fellowship across the globe. People who help to ensure that the doors of Alcoholics Anonymous worldwide will always be open to those who suffer from alcoholism.

Ladies and gentlemen, A.A. exists today in a modern world. It is a world virtually governed and driven by the phenomenon of social media. A world that provides, at the tap of a keyboard, instant access to information, as well as the capacity to share it in a heartbeat. An almost alarmingly fast-moving world. Against that background, are our Traditions still vital? Still relevant? Still spiritual? Still as important as ever?

Do the lessons learned, and shared, by Bill W., Dr. Bob and other founding fathers still have the same resonance and traction today? Or have we come to ignore them in this prevailing new and modernistic world? If so, will it be at our own peril and that of our Fellowship? That is precisely why the theme for this World Service Meeting is “Our Twelve Traditions: A.A.’s Future in the Modern World.” It is a theme that gives the delegates an opportunity to reexamine, on behalf of all A.A. members worldwide, the relevance of our Twelve Traditions. They remain our primary set of tools to secure unity — and even our very existence — in this ever-changing and fast-unfolding modern world.

The Twelve Traditions were developed by our founders as their best attempt to ensure that future members of A.A. would not make the same mistakes that had hindered them in



Keynote Address

Good morning. My name is Lubomir and I am an alcoholic. I am very grateful to be here as a 2nd term delegate from Slovakia. I am super excited to see all the familiar faces and I am really looking forward to meeting all of the new delegates. I know we are going to have another wonderful World Service Meeting.

When I came to A.A. all I wanted was for you to tell me how not to drink. Preferably in a very few sentences. Just tell me what to do and I will be on my way. I had no desire to keep coming back. You know, I was a very busy person. I do not think anyone appreciated my busy schedule, though, because all they kept telling me was to “Keep coming back.” *When will they tell me the A.A. secret, I was wondering? How is going to meetings every day going to help me?* I was ready not to drink

but I did not want to change anything about my life. I was convinced that when it came to success in life I had that under control, thank you very much. The only thing getting in the way of my greatness was my drinking. I knew that was a potential problem.

I kept going to meetings every day, which kept me sober during the first year. And then I relapsed. Then back to meetings and a few months later, another relapse. This kept repeating itself for the next few years. I started to wonder if perhaps there was something wrong with this program. It sure could use an update to cover cases such as mine. I was able to get through Steps One, Two and Three and that was it. The rest of the Steps were for the really sick, I thought. It took me a very long time to realize that I had completely failed to grow along spiritual lines. And since this a spiritual program of recovery it was an important aspect I had somehow overlooked.

It took me many relapses until I finally gave up the fight. I was willing to accept help and willing to do anything to recover. Enough was enough. Even my ego agreed with me for the first time. I got a sponsor. Of course, I warned him that I had been going to meetings for about three years now. That strategy did not seem to be working, though. Then he said something revolutionary: “Why don’t you try everything this program has to offer?” He took me through the Steps and I got involved in service right away. That seemed to do the trick. I was finally able to rely on the program of recovery. It was an amazing feeling to realize that I could finally have what many of you already enjoyed.

I was willing to continue to grow along spiritual lines. However, I was not sure exactly how I was supposed to do that. My sponsor told me once again something revolutionary: “Why don’t you use the Twelve Steps as a guide.” This was a relief because that was something concrete I could use. And that worked for me. As a result of this I have changed. I see things differently and I have a new set of beliefs.

developing the structure and purpose of the Fellowship. The Traditions apply to the life of the Fellowship itself. They outline the means by which A.A. maintains its unity and relates itself to the world around it — the way it lives and grows. So, it is obvious that part of the purpose of delegates gathered here in Durban will be to find common ground on whether the Twelve Traditions are still meeting their intended purpose in today’s modern social media-driven world. Whichever way you look at it, the Twelve Traditions are still as vital, spiritual, and important as ever. We need to see them as our primary tool to preserve the effectiveness and survival of Alcoholics Anonymous. So much so that the board of trustees has been appointed as the custodian of our Traditions.

The question is simple: Why should the young, modern world, with all its advanced technology, know-how, and, at times, spiritual skepticism, have the right to make demands on our Twelve Traditions...in the context of recovery from alcoholism in A.A.? Perhaps an answer to that question will emerge from your deliberations.

To quote Bill W: “Our Traditions are set down on paper. But they were written first in our hearts. For each of us knows, instinctively, I think, that A.A. is not ours to do with as we please. We are but caretakers to preserve the spiritual quality of our Fellowship; keep it whole for those who will come after us and have need of what has so generously been given to us.”

On that note, I thank you all, on behalf of A.A South Africa and its members, for being here; for the support and service you deliver to the Fellowship — both here and around the world. I trust that this World Service Meeting will be a great success; that A.A. groups and members around the world will be all the better for it, and that you leave South Africa with fond memories. May God bless and keep you always.

*Frank V., chairperson,
General Service Board — South Africa*

I often heard that we were all guardians of A.A. principles. But it meant nothing to me — once again, in my mind it was someone else’s job. Today it is absolutely clear to me why it is necessary for us to be the guardians. Not only the *why*, but now I have the tools necessary to help me with the *how*.

I was told that our principles go hand in hand. They guide us and help us to grow. But are we willing to grow and let the principles guide us? Or do we think we have outgrown the need to follow these principles because now we have been sober for a while, or better yet, because we live in a different world? During my recovery, I only tried to pick the Steps I was willing to work with. This of course didn’t work. Just as it wouldn’t work for us to pick only a few Traditions and expect our A.A. to stay the same in the future.

Our Traditions, amongst other topics, talk about anonymity, humility, unity and tolerance. How can I be a guardian of such principles if I fail to exhibit them on a personal level? I can’t possibly do this as a selfish, self-seeking person who still runs on self-will. This makes me believe that if we want A.A. to stay the same, we need to be doing what our A.A. members before us did.

Through sponsorship we need to encourage people to carry the message of A.A.’s Three Legacies — Recovery, Unity and Service. Show people everything that A.A. has to offer, not just bits and pieces. Lead by example and live by A.A.’s code of patience, love and tolerance. This way we ensure that every individual in A.A. will have the tools necessary to guard the A.A. principles at all times, regardless of what the world may look like in the future. Why? Because they will see that it works.

We think we live in a modern world today — as did the people during the political and economic revolutions of the late 1700s and during the transformation of the world during the 1800s. They all thought they lived in the modern age, just as

we think we live in a modern world today. Technology might be new, processes and buildings. However, the human DNA has not changed. Individuals who run on self-will will probably run into the same emotional roadblocks as they always have, regardless of the century they live in. We are spiritual beings, not defined by technological tools of any era. And luckily, A.A. is a spiritual program.

Humility and tolerance transcend what we call the modern world. Whether it is a new gadget or a new social media platform. These are just communication tools that will come and go. I don’t know what the future world will look like. Social platforms and the biggest brands on the market might not exist in the future, but I believe A.A. will. Today I know that A.A. principles work, and we need to continue to carry the same message A.A. has always carried. No matter what technological advances the future world might bring us.

Actually, I believe that we have an opportunity to grow and strengthen our Fellowship faster than ever before. We just need to realize that behind all this technology are still fragile human beings very much in need of love and care. And as long as we are willing to be guided by our principles, we are on the right path. However, if we lose this willingness it won’t matter what principles we’ll have in place.

Our principles guide us, but ultimately, we are the ones responsible for carrying them out. The modern world — or, as I call it, the present world — comes with its challenges. If anything, more people are in a need of spiritual help than ever before. It is our duty to make sure they will have a place to come to when they get sick and tired of being sick and tired.

Thank you for listening and I look forward to working with you during these upcoming days.

Lubomir B. — Slovakia



Presentations



International Literature Fund

This World Service Meeting (WSM) marks 28 years since the 11th World Service Meeting, in 1990, recommended that the WSM secretary “write to all participating countries for the specific purpose of seeking cooperation in the task of raising funds for the current problem of providing start-up literature for those countries unable to finance their own translations and acquisitions.” Since that time, the response from countries around our A.A. world has been — and continues to be — positive, productive and most gratifying.

In 1992, the Literature/Publishing Committee of the World Service Meeting reported that the committee had agreed that the International Literature Fund should be under the purview of the World Service Meeting Literature/Publishing Committee. The Committee also suggested that “A.A. World Services (A.A.W.S.) use proceeds of (the) International Literature Fund to offset A.A.W.S.’s expenditures for foreign literature assistance, and to reimburse similar expenses incurred by other overseas A.A. offices or boards.”

The Committee stated: “A.A.W.S. should have the latitude to prioritize the use of these monies based on the need as expressed by each GSO and World Service delegate.” The Committee also asked that “A.A.W.S. provide World Service Meetings with an accounting of the receipts and disbursements of these monies.” I would like to now offer you that accounting.

We have a spreadsheet that has been distributed to show the contributions to the International Literature Fund, by individual country/zone and year, as well as annual totals and a running total as of September 30, 2018. Since the last World Service Meeting, we are happy to report that a total of 23 countries have participated.

Over the past several years we have shown a significant

cost savings with expenses that have been consistently within the \$50,000 per year range. This is compared to \$94,000 per year as reported in 2012. It appears the health of our fund is keeping pace with the global economy’s slow recovery. Still, some of you continue to face difficult choices daily, and our Fellowship in the U.S. and Canada is certainly not exempt from today’s financial uncertainty. In the face of that, I must share with you that the International Literature Fund is one aspect of A.A.W.S.’s many responsibilities to A.A.’s worldwide community that actually brings us joy to administer. That is because this is a place where we get to see A.A. love in action.

Each contribution to the fund helps to defray the cost of translations and literature assistance.

Since 1991, A.A.W.S.’s international literature assistance expenditures to emerging countries in Europe, Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Oceania and the Americas total over US \$2.7 million. In the last few years we have provided complimentary copies of books and other literature to A.A.s in places such as Albania, Bolivia, Macedonia, Mongolia, Nicaragua, Sri Lanka, Trinidad, Uganda and Uruguay. And we want to do more, and for that we need your participation and involvement — so we ask you to communicate with us through the International desk at GSO with indications of your needs. Also, please place orders through our Publishing Department as you always do and discuss what you need regarding shipping costs and other expenses that may be covered by the International Literature Fund.

Around the world, nearly 20 translations and retranslations of *Alcoholics Anonymous* are under way, and during the past few years translations of the Big Book have been completed in Twi (Ghana), and Rarotongan (Cook Islands). Four years ago, a new Arabic translation was completed. Arabic is particularly heartwarming because this newly printed Big Book includes

local personal stories, which were curated by the members of the Middle East Regional Committee for Alcoholics Anonymous (MERCAA). Now, with momentum established, and with MERCAA members' assistance, additional projects are in progress for the Arabic-speaking communities, including new translations of *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* and *Living Sober*. Portions of each have received favorable reviews and are moving forward.

Since we last met, A.A. books and pamphlets have been published in a variety of languages including Thai, Polish, Twi, and Ukrainian. Just within the past few months, the Big Book has been translated and distributed in the Navajo Native American language. David R., Publishing Director, will have much more to report on translations and licensing, and he is available to meet with you regarding your country's needs in these areas.

Our co-founder Bill W. wrote in 1968 about the importance of the preparation of a standard literature, beginning with the Big Book. "This volume," he said, "plus the other books and many pamphlets since written, made A.A. available all over

the globe. In consequence, the A.A. message could not be garbled. Thus, we began our first effort to cement A.A.'s unity and functional effectiveness." It is with grateful hearts that the directors of the Alcoholics Anonymous World Services Board and the trustees of the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous, U.S. and Canada, express their collective appreciation for your many "sacrifices in the basket" which help carry A.A.'s message of hope around the world, strengthening A.A.'s unity and safeguarding our future.

And once our Conference-approved literature, in whatever language, has been published, we are all responsible to help ensure its widest possible distribution.

Today, we celebrate A.A.'s presence in over 180 countries, with translations of our Big Book now in 71 languages (including the original English). None of this would be possible without the continued support of A.A. groups worldwide — both monetarily and spiritually.

Our deepest gratitude for your service to A.A.

Greg T. — GSO General Manager, U.S./Canada

INTERNATIONAL LITERATURE FUND RECEIPTS

As of
10/01/2018

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Australia		\$6,132			\$6,384		\$3,390		\$2,688
Belgium (Dutch-speaking)				\$269	\$266	\$212	\$1,748	\$6,414	
Belgium (Flemish-speaking)	\$2,672	\$2,797	\$3,998	\$2,464		\$2,800			
Brazil	\$2,000	\$2,000	\$1,965	\$2,000	\$2,000	\$2,000	\$1,958	\$1,954	
Central America Northern Zone	\$300		\$300		\$300				
Colombia	\$312		\$1,405		\$1,018		\$862		
Czech Republic	\$1,696	\$550				\$1,000			
Denmark			\$7,119	\$1,832	\$27,759	\$7,169	\$12,937		\$10,603
Ecuador						\$100		\$200	
Finland		\$1,302					\$1,583		\$1,740
French-speaking Europe					\$324	\$1,060	\$559	\$1,949	\$467
German-speaking Europe		\$8,479		\$7,828	\$7,468	\$6,615	\$8,679	\$6,093	\$7,034
Great Britain				\$7,579	\$8,124	\$7,547	\$6,869	\$12,200	\$20,457
Iceland		\$980		\$1,010		\$1,010		\$1,020	
Ireland	\$102,785	\$27,913							
Italy	\$2,543			\$2,583	\$1,220		\$2,108	\$2,209	
Japan	\$1,763	\$1,908	\$2,936	\$2,380	\$826	\$389	\$2,984	\$3,000	
Latvia				\$100			\$165	\$208	
Lithuania	\$300		\$100	\$778	\$388	\$876	\$2,078	\$1,140	
Mexico		\$1,000	\$1,000	\$282	\$1,332	\$215		\$7,551	
Netherlands							\$712		
New Zealand			\$367	\$777	\$649		\$4,532	\$1,541	
Norway	\$6,105	\$6,879	\$6,841						\$2,178
Peru	\$100							\$360	\$345
Poland	\$500	\$1,500	\$750		\$1,000	\$2,014	\$1,000	\$1,000	
Portugal								\$114	
Romania	\$405			\$300			\$200		
Russia			\$84	\$150		\$20			
Spain	\$7,737	\$2,160		\$2,027	\$4,262		\$3,745	\$2,262	
Sweden		\$10,989		\$3,676	\$3,740	\$2,847	\$6,533	\$13,906	
Switzerland	\$100		\$7,601		\$4,217	\$8,835	\$242	\$6,936	\$5,575
Turkey									
Ukraine	\$200		\$200		\$200				
Uruguay			\$200	\$100	\$100	\$100			
A.A Online				\$95					
ANNUAL TOTAL	\$129,518	\$74,588	\$34,865	\$36,229	\$71,578	\$44,808	62,885	\$70,055	\$51,087
TOTAL SINCE INCEPTION	\$1,319,991	\$1,394,579	\$1,429,444	\$1,465,673	\$1,537,251	\$1,582,059	\$1,644,944	\$1,714,999	\$1,766,086

Our Global Publishing Partnership: A.A. Literature for Today and Tomorrow

My name is David R., and I am an alcoholic. I currently serve in a professional capacity as the publishing director of A.A. World Services, Inc. They call me “the publishing guy.” I have served in this role since July of 2016, and prior to that, I began my tenure at the office in the publishing department in March 2014 as licensing manager.

I joined the A.A.W.S. team after having spent a three-decades-long professional career in a variety of academic, trade, membership-based, for-profit and nonprofit publishing venues. How lucky I am now to be able to work hand-in-hand with fellow A.A. members the world over, helping to share A.A.’s message.

The hand of A.A. literally and figuratively reached out to me when I was deep in the throes of active alcoholism. Who can say for certain, really, how it came to pass, after a series of “unfortunate” events and having lost not one but two publishing posts, I dropped into a lunchtime A.A. meeting being held in a Catholic church on the very same street where I live in New Jersey. My very first A.A. meeting in that church felt like a book club to me, so I liked it. The book under discussion was *Daily Reflections*. This “book club” spent a lot of time on one passage from that book, and when this curious bookish meeting was over, a fellow from across the room hightailed it over and asked me, “Are you new? What’s your name?” The hand of A.A. was thus extended to me, directly — and offered freely in that hand, a copy of *Alcoholics Anonymous*, the Big Book, the softcover edition, in the 23rd printing, to be exact.

The Big Book, now with about 38 million copies of the English-language edition distributed to date, thereby fell into this very beaten-down book-lover’s hands. Thus began my A.A. journey, with one alcoholic helping another, and with A.A. literature playing a prominent role.

Bill W. wrote that “good translations of A.A. literature are ever more needed. But able helpers have always turned up to meet that need.” (*A.A. Comes of Age*, 1957) We gather here today, a circle of “able helpers,” and we join hands. Just as folks did in my first A.A. meeting. Our efforts move forward projects for the sharing of A.A.’s profound spiritual message, and together we achieve real, tangible results. Whether we are working on new or revised translations, executing permissions and license documents, exchanging print-ready master digital files or ready-to-broadcast PSAs, we are working together on a profound shared sacred task: sharing A.A.’s vital message of hope the world over.

Today I’m going to share a bit on how we work to preserve the integrity of A.A.’s message. I will also provide a look at how our work together is taking great strides forward in making Alcoholics Anonymous more accessible for today’s audiences.

The integrity of A.A.’s message: A.A.’s co-founder Bill W. often called the influence of A.A. literature “incalculable.” He wrote the following passage in 1964: “Suppose for instance, that during the last twenty-five years A.A. had never published any standard literature... no books, no pamphlets. We need little imagination to see that by now our message would be hopelessly garbled...” (*The Language of the Heart*, p. 348)

In *A.A. Comes of Age*, Bill describes that “every piece of lit-

erature written and produced by A.A. including use of its very name is owned and controlled by the fellowship itself, only in this way can the integrity of the A.A. message be preserved.”

Alcoholics Anonymous World Service, Inc. (A.A.W.S.), our principal service/publishing corporation, has been assigned the deep moral and spiritual responsibility for preserving and protecting the integrity of our literature, most importantly by retaining our essential ownership of what Bill called “our best assets” — our A.A. literature.

To help avoid A.A.’s message being tampered with and becoming “garbled,” A.A.W.S., Inc., has established policies and procedures regarding the reproduction and distribution of our content. These policies and procedures include the administration of an established set of routine licensing and permissions activities. Our efforts aim to prevent misuse, and these policies work to prohibit, for example, folks from taking the contents of A.A.’s message out of context. We strive to prevent misrepresentations of the message, and misuses may bring about unwanted implied affiliations, endorsements and suggestions of co-ownership, all of which our Sixth Tradition safeguards.

Copyrights are “held in trust” for the Fellowship: Currently A.A.W.S., Inc., owns more than 1,300 copyrights registered with the U.S. Copyright Office. A.A.W.S., Inc., retains all copyrights for all “approved” translations of our literature. In 1997, the A.A.W.S. Board approved the following resolution:

Resolved: That the A.A.W.S. Board recognizes its responsibility to preserve and protect the copyrights held in trust for all of A.A., both here in U.S./Canada and throughout the world. The A.A.W.S. Board further recognizes that unchallenged infringement of our copyrighted literature seriously impacts the future growth of A.A. overseas. (A.A.W.S., Inc., 1997)

Translation and licensing process: Each translation submission from an international committee, workgroup or team is shepherded by the licensing administrator to be reviewed by an outside professional, through an independent translation-evaluation service. The linguist reports back with a critique of the translation’s clarity and adherence to the sense, spirit, tone and passion — the overall integrity — of the original English work. Suggestions for improvement often may arise. This process and policy is posted on aa.org, in the Terms of Use section, copies available in English, French and Spanish.

I am delighted we are here together, face-to-face, and I will be available throughout this week to personally meet with all individual delegates and representatives who wish to help move your language translation projects and licenses to print and distribute forward.

A summary of current licensing activity

For more than seven or eight years running, the A.A. World Services Publishing Department has seen a steady surge in translation and licensing activity, worldwide.

Languages: To date, approved A.A.W.S., Inc., copyrighted work is translated in 102 languages.

The Big Book: The Big Book is translated into 70 languages in addition to the original English, with the latest new Big Book language being the Navajo, or Diné in its spoken language, completed in a newly available 14-CD set after decades

of local group and committee translation work. There are 22 non-English languages of the Big Book in process, and 15 new ones *pending* and seven revisions in progress.

Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions: There are 44 current languages available of the “Twelve and Twelve.” This represents 43 translations plus the original English.

What’s new at A.A.W.S., Inc., Publishing

Accessibility and attraction: As we know, we seek to remove barriers hindering access for anyone anywhere to Alcoholics Anonymous. A helpful new pamphlet, “Access to A.A.,” is now in its second revision and has replaced “A.A. for Alcoholics with Special Needs.”

We are focusing on our items of A.A. literature with an eye toward making our publications more contemporary, accessible and attractive. With encouragement from the A.A.W.S. board and trustee committees of the General Service Board, we are actively engaged in reviewing our literature in light of its effectiveness in language and style and tone, in general, and we are implementing new cover designs to refresh and contemporize our pamphlets, in particular.

As far as the *content*, ongoing efforts are moving forward to include more representative sharing from today’s A.A. members and to update the texts themselves. A few highlights: New and “hot off the press” are these revised pamphlets: “Women in A.A.” and “LGBTQ Alcoholics in A.A.,” and the much-awaited new pamphlet “A.A. for Alcoholics with Mental Health Issues.”

New! Mini-catalog of new and revised items of A.A. literature: I am happy to announce that we have crafted a mini-catalog of new and revised items of A.A. literature, which we will be able to share electronically, and this will be updated annually.

A new book: The 68th General Service Conference approved publishing an exciting new book, whose content emerged out of a multiyear, painstaking G.S.O. Archives project of transcribing audiotapes that had never before been put into print form. The result is a book collecting Bill W.’s talks to the A.A. General Service Conference (U.S./Canada), which had only previously been accessible on audiotapes listened to by archivists and researchers.

This new book, *Our Great Responsibility: A Selection of Bill W.’s General Service Conference Talks, 1951–1970*, collects in one volume for the first time a treasure trove of talks, which address many often-asked questions, such as: What did Bill really say about the origins of the Twelve Steps and the Twelve Traditions? The Third Tradition and inclusiveness? How about A.A. know-it-alls? ... and even wonderful specifics such as, How do you handle not getting your way in a group conscience?!

What comes across throughout is Bill’s enduring wisdom, his surprising sense of humor, his easygoing humility — and Bill W.’s willingness to entertain the broad, long view of Alcoholics Anonymous, open to change and growth, his ceaseless quest for imagining and re-imagining of A.A. in the Modern World!

Here’s an excerpt from *Our Great Responsibility: A Selection of Bill W.’s General Service Conference Talks, 1951–1970* (“Variations in Form of the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions,” 1953).

Anybody who thinks that those of us who prepared that [Big Book] were people running around glowing with

inspiration and clothed in white robes is very, very much mistaken. I won’t deny that we were very high, and enthusiastic and excited, and certainly we must’ve been somewhat inspired.

Audio, video and more: Still inspired, today we are exploring future-forward production and distribution formats and channels, and we are eager to discover new opportunities for reaching all audiences for A.A. information. Stay tuned.

In conclusion, back to Bill W.’s “Message” of 1964 (*The Language of the Heart*, p. 348):

Millions of our pamphlets and hundreds of thousands of our books are today in circulation. A.A.’s message can never be garbled; anyone at all can find out about us with ease. What the dividends of this single project in world communication have been, only God knows.

Today I celebrate with you my utter enthusiasm and awe for our shared publishing work. I honor its vital role in fulfilling our great responsibility. The true measure of this, our astonishing global publishing program? Incalculable.

David R. — Publishing Director, A.A. World Services, Inc.

Old Values for a Modern A.A.

Is Anonymity Still Relevant Today?

My name is Pat D., I am an alcoholic from Ireland, and it’s an honor for me to share with you today on the relevance of anonymity in my life. My occupation is as an electrician. I’m not a journalist, nor do I work in the news media in any capacity. My reason for sharing that with you is simple; all I have to offer is my experience of how anonymity has affected, and continues to affect, my daily life.

With the assistance of my sponsor and by reading A.A. literature, I truly recognize the difference between *anonymous* and *anonymity*. Let me explain in simple terms my understanding of that difference and its relevance to me today. Being anonymous means staying out of the limelight, remaining in the background. These two traits are in direct conflict with how I lived as an active alcoholic.

A.A. is not anonymous — in fact, it is our responsibility to ensure that the public is informed of our existence by every means available to us. This is where our structure comes into play: Public Information — contact with the medical profession and other agencies, hopefully with the single purpose of informing “the still-suffering alcoholic” that we have a solution to their dilemma — is our responsibility.

In Ireland, our structures are working well, constantly evolving to meet the changing face of modern communications. Our Public Information comes under the umbrella of our national PI committee, which is representative of our Fellowship nationwide. The board has the responsibility to ensure that correct oversight is maintained. The work of our nonalcoholic trustees cannot be overstated in this regard.

My family, friends, work colleagues and my medical team are all aware that I am a member of A.A. It was my responsibility to inform them of the fact that my membership in A.A. was the sole reason that I have achieved, and maintained, sobriety. It is a program of attraction rather than promotion. Note that



I stated that my membership in A.A. was responsible, thereby making them aware of its existence and the benefits that I have gained from being a member.

To me, *anonymity* means giving of myself unconditionally, and not taking credit, to benefit others. It means staying out of conflict both inside and outside of the Fellowship. It also means not seeking recognition or plaudits for any perceived good deeds that I may perform. Our Traditions and Concepts are self-explanatory in relation to the necessity to remain within the confines of anonymity. Bill Wilson makes reference to it in his writings, particularly in *As Bill Sees It*.

When I entered A.A., the telephone was the sole means of communication with another person, other than face-to-face. Today, social media in all its forms has brought communication to a level that could quite easily infringe on my ability to retain my anonymity. I will give you a simple example of this happening to me:

About a year ago, as I strolled through the Internet, I came across a site that caught my attention. It was a “sobriety site.” After reading through it and then revisiting it over a period of a few weeks, I found myself forming opinions of other people’s perception of our Fellowship and, in particular, some of the views about what needed to be changed in our Fellowship. And yes, the inevitable happened: I started to comment. I found myself defending A.A. and boasting about my length of sobriety, among other things; the list continued. Without my taking a drink, my character defects quickly returned. I became egotistical, arrogant, and an expert on what was best for others and for A.A. as a whole.

God, my Higher Power, was being replaced by the Great Me, the same Great Me who had been dying in the mire of alcoholism prior to being rescued by A.A. Thankfully, I spoke to a dear friend in the Fellowship, explained what had hap-

pened, and carried out his suggestions about the action I needed to take.

I removed myself from the sobriety site, went to a meeting and shared my experience. The feedback was helpful, and I discovered that I was not alone in my behavior. I had learned an important lesson — it is vital that I adhere to the Traditions and continue to practice anonymity. My life quickly returned to the calm, relaxed state that it had been in prior to getting involved in something which, had I continued, could have endangered my sobriety.

If I choose to buy a meal for a hungry new member, but then decide to announce the event on social media, my ego is the only thing that I am trying to feed. The same thinking must be applied to everything I do in A.A., as well as in my daily life outside of the Fellowship. I cannot take any of the Steps, Traditions or Concepts in isolation. My dependence on a Higher Power is the thread that links the entire program and struc-

ture together, and it is my experience — as I have tried to outline earlier — my anonymity and my continued practice of the same that is essential to maintaining my sobriety and the continued survival and growth of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Patrick D. — Ireland

Attraction vs. Promotion in an Internet World

For most of us who are in Alcoholics Anonymous, A.A. has meant the difference between life and death. We are living in the 21st century and our A.A. Traditions continue to be non-negotiable. “Therefore, no society of men and women ever had a more urgent *need* for continuous effectiveness and permanent unity. We alcoholics realize that we need to work together and remain united, or otherwise most of us will perish. The Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous are, we A.A.s believe, the best answers that our experience has yet given to those ever-urgent questions: ‘How can A.A. best function?’ and, ‘How can A.A. best stay whole and so survive?’”

In November 1960, our visionary co-founder, Bill W., wrote in the Grapevine: “A vast communications net now covers the earth, even to its remotest reaches. ... Therefore, nothing can matter more to the future welfare of A.A. than the manner in which we use this colossus of communication. Used unselfishly and well, the results can surpass our present imagination.” Do you think our pioneers were ashamed and thus came up with our anonymity traditions? Times have surely changed — there are new technologies, we are living in modern times — but, the point I’m trying to bring to your attention is this: Has human nature also changed? I think not. The Traditions were

written to ensure we could live together in harmony and survive. Anonymity is the most important principle we have in A.A. It is the other half of our name; it requires further study and a better application. The protection of anonymity has been broadened to include television, and currently the Internet, a mass medium. I would not question the benefits of the Internet, which the world utilizes in various ways: email (communication), websites (static content) and social media (linked dynamic content). Having become integrated into our lives and being a regular means of communication, email is now ubiquitous, and social media have pulled us closer together. We have become able to break down global barriers and share our experience with A.A. members around the world. The most evident advantage is the lack of geographical limitations. We are now able to stay in touch with anybody, anywhere in the world.

For my own survival and that of the Fellowship, it is essential that I do not use A.A. to become the center of attention. Anonymity for me is a way of practicing humility. Since pride is one of my most dangerous defects, practicing humility is one of the best ways to overcome it. The A.A. Fellowship is gaining worldwide recognition for its various methods of publicizing its principles and its work, not because its members are using publicity on an individual basis to draw attention to themselves. The attraction generated by my attitude change and my altruism contributes much more to the welfare of A.A. than would my personal promotion.

Attraction, not promotion: "While I was drinking, I reacted with anger, self-pity and defiance against anyone who wanted to change me. All I wanted then was to be accepted by another human simply as I was and, curiously, that is what I found in A.A. I became the custodian of this concept of attraction, which is the principle of our Fellowship's public relations. It is by attraction that I can best reach the alcoholic who still suffers.

"I thank God for having given me the attraction of a well-planned and established program of Steps and Traditions. Through humility and the support of my fellow sober members, I have been able to practice the A.A. way of life through attraction, not promotion."

The spiritual message is something that should never be distorted. Therefore, mass media should be our great allies, so that society anywhere in the world can receive this life-giving message, and this message, in turn, should bring hope to the alcoholic who still suffers. But in A.A.'s case, we need to abide by the principles and Working with Others committees so that we do not distort our God-given gift — that life-giving message. Misuse and abuse of the wonderful tool that is the Internet can lead to distortions and generate negative awareness about our A.A. program. We currently see many anonymity breaks and web pages that unwittingly distort the vision of our Fellowship. Perhaps there is no malice there, but rather a lack of knowledge of our traditional principles. By relying on personal views, these efforts undermine the image of A.A. vis-à-vis society.

In Brazil, our public outreach work has benefited greatly from all the new communications tools at our disposal. We have email addresses available for internal and external communications. In order to carry our message to all types of audiences, our service structure relies on various modern forms of communication, such as the "Anonymous Friend" (bot) in

Messenger, which we launched in 2017 to celebrate our 70th A.A. anniversary. The attraction of the message of Alcoholics Anonymous will always be right insofar as we adhere to our principles, and provided we all make an honest effort to go back to basics, as laid out in the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*.

The kingdom of the spirit has no borders. We are now the keepers of the flame. With the help of a loving God, we will keep it alive and pure for as long as an alcoholic needs it, so the spirit may never become extinct. Thank you for letting me share these thoughts with you. May God bless our World Service Meeting project, which is to carry the life-saving message to the alcoholic who still suffers, wherever he or she may be.

Márcio A. dos S. M. — Brazil

Traditions in the Mass Media

The Traditions represent and define the relationship style upon which A.A. has been built and has developed, both internally (members and groups) as well as externally (society in general). This style of relationship, which originated in an analysis of the mistakes and difficulties of A.A.'s first years, serves as the supporting framework of the entire apparatus of the Twelve Step recovery program. The Traditions demonstrate that in A.A. there is no cause or purpose other than recovery from the problems associated with the consumption of alcoholic beverages, that the relationship among the groups must be guided by the sense of unity, that the principles of action are above personalities, that in A.A. there exists an effective equality among all members and that no one can claim any special place or consideration within the Fellowship, that A.A. is a Fellowship open to society with a continuing willingness to cooperate in the recovery of people with alcohol problems, and that the members of the Fellowship assume the costs of their recovery from alcoholism and all activities designed to carry the message to the still-suffering alcoholic.

Doubtless the one characteristic that best defines A.A. is the tradition of anonymity, a principle of action that transcends persons in A.A., because when the A.A. message is carried (to another alcoholic or to the public in general), it is transmitted all of a piece: "It is A.A. that carries the message." The principle of anonymity properly carried out is the utmost expression of humility, of unity in A.A. and of generosity in service, through which we expressly renounce attaching special importance or prominence to our person, in order that the effectiveness of the recovery program, the importance of the Fellowship and the actions of all A.A. may prevail. It can be said that the Traditions make possible the presentation of A.A. as a whole.

The Traditions also make it clear that A.A. must be a Fellowship open to the world and especially to the media. From the very beginning, it has been an essential relationship, both for acquainting the public with our Fellowship and for developing the recovery program and implementing our Traditions. In this relationship, we've always been conscious of our Eleventh Tradition with regard to public relations, based on attraction rather than promotion, preserving anonymity. Often, I have asked myself, "What are A.A.'s elements of attraction and how can we make them known to those in need of help?" I recognize the difficulties of attraction when, on many occasions, A.A. appears accompanied by negatives, as a Fellowship of "don'ts":

- We don't accept outside contributions.
- We don't support or lend our name to other causes.
- We don't keep membership records or try to control our members.
- We don't impose conditions on those who want to join the Fellowship, other than their desire to stop drinking.
- We don't give our full names or show pictures of ourselves.
- We don't have other aims apart from our recovery and carrying the message to the still-suffering alcoholic.
- We don't advertise ourselves.
- We don't provide lodging, or work, or money, or food.

If we want to be a help and believe that A.A. can be, we must make an effort to see that those elements that served to attract us to the Fellowship serve also to attract others who seek the same help. The ways and manners and means we use to translate for others our way of acting, guided by the Traditions, must allow this attraction to develop. If we don't see possible errors, we will be fueling indifference toward A.A. and, what would be worse, rejection. Our friends in the media have been an essential support for the Fellowship, and nothing makes us think that this will not continue. We have to act intelligently in the new fields of information and communication technology. The new forms of communication that the Internet and broadcast technology (blogs, the web, social networks, email, SMS, etc.) have developed provide new opportunities to carry the A.A. message — following a detailed study undertaken by responsible members to make sure that the personal and individual sharing of the message doesn't disappear, and that the proliferation of content doesn't corrupt or destroy the essence of the message: the better is not always the best, and we must not lose sight of the fact that many people need us. The application of our Traditions clearly expresses the ways in which the Fellowship should become involved with these new technologies so as not to endanger our sense of unity, which has brought us so many benefits.

For this reason, I believe it's important that we reflect on A.A.'s elements or points of attraction and on what we need to do to see that these elements reach those who need them. We are a Fellowship that doesn't shy from difficulties; rather the opposite, difficulties have been a spur for us, a motivation to improve. The perception of stagnation and lack of growth in A.A. must make us question what we are not doing well, how and where we are going wrong, making mistakes in our activities designed to carry the message. In this regard, I'd like to share the following reflections.

Self-support: Almost all of us feel that this Tradition is an aspect of A.A. that the majority of people find attractive and respect. At the same time, however, it may cause the impression that A.A. is an arrogant fellowship that will not accept financial aid or support from anyone, out of a concern to maintain its independence. We must make an effort to convey the positive aspect that we, as alcoholics, assume the costs and the financial consequences of our recovery. Because to attain it is not necessary to acquire property, or money; it is rather a question of responsibility, to make the right decisions that enable us to stay sober. To do this, little money is required.

Not supporting outside causes: We are happy to be able to state that, individually, each member can support, collaborate with, or adhere to the cause or belief that he or she

wishes to, but never as a representative of A.A. But this also may create the impression that A.A. is an exclusive Fellowship, unsupportive of other groups or entities that will not support the efforts of other organizations in the field of alcoholism because it is solely concerned about its own members or of carrying the message to prospective A.A. members. We must make an effort to convey the fact that for A.A., support of, involvement in, or dedication to other causes (religious, political, social, commercial or any other) might endanger and impede its ability to attend to and attain its goal of recovery and of carrying the message. At the same time, we must try to explain that thanks to this Tradition, there is a place in the Fellowship for all sorts of people, because each member, as an individual, can support any cause he or she sees fit to.

Lack of membership records and control over its members: All one needs to be an A.A. member is a desire to stop drinking. Nothing to do with a name, or a biography or a belief. Anyone who wants to solve a drinking problem can always find help in A.A. We should reflect on how we might convey to the media and the general public an image of A.A. as a fellowship that is not uninterested in who wants to become a member and indifferent to the development and evolution of the problem of alcoholism in each and every member.

Anonymity: This is the principle of action that best defines us in our relationship to society in general. But it could also create an impression that A.A. is an *anonymous, secret* and *shady* fellowship. We must convey the fact that anonymity is for the members, not for the Fellowship, which is transparent and open to society, with its various traits and peculiarities. We need to show the positive aspects of anonymity, emphasizing its positive effects on the recovery of so many alcoholics in the world:

- The aspect of protection and responsibility: Anonymity in A.A. creates the conditions necessary for the protection of new members and for gaining their confidence, protection of personal information and personal history and biography. The aspect of responsibility toward others, protection and reduction of the possible damage that might be caused in the world (family, social, workplace) of the A.A. member trying to stay sober. And finally, the responsibility of each member to all of his or her fellow A.A. members and to the Fellowship as a whole, since as people who have a drinking problem, many of us know that a slip — a relapse into drinking — is a real possibility, and an anonymity break publicized in the press, radio, TV or the Internet may cause collateral damage to the rest of the members and to the Fellowship itself.
- The aspect of humility: Anonymity is a true exercise of personal renunciation. Anonymity makes it possible for each member to keep under control all desire for fame, prestige and recognition in the mass media. This renunciation carries with it enormous benefits of serenity, tranquility and emotional balance. Someone once said, "Anyone who risks an appearance in the public sphere runs the risk of public ridicule."
- The aspect of honesty: Recovery must have only one goal — getting sober and modifying all elements of the personality that might occasion a slip, a loss of sobriety. And on the road to recovery, too often we combine many goals, many activities and many desires. The road to

recovery should have only the one objective of staying sober through personal change and sharing this experience with whoever asks for help.

The media in its classic forms of press, radio and TV, as well as in the new information and communications technologies of the Internet and its related functions of email, social networks and various platforms of communication, can continue to be our best allies in our efforts to reach the still-suffering alcoholic.

I want to thank the A.A. Fellowship for offering me this opportunity to share my concerns.

Joaquín Á. — Spain

Service: Investing in A.A.'s Future

Service: Don't Tell Me — Show Me

Service is an essential part of recovery. My home group has a custom of guiding newcomers to sobriety by encouraging them to accept service assignments. In the beginning, older group members take newcomers with them in service so the newcomers can get along with the idea of service in a safe environment: Practice is shown by older group fellows' own example. This method works well in Finland, as historically we Finns are said to be led from the front, not from the cabinets. Service terms in my home group are for a calendar year and so the group is leading the newcomer through the entire year, passing different seasons, holidays, etc. I shall now enlighten some practical examples of how I got the wake-up call to serve our A.A. Fellowship. These lessons I have tried to follow and continue in my turn with newcomers today.

When I first came to A.A., I felt I had come to the right place. But, as I had pride left, I believed I wouldn't need as much care as the others — I'll just show up every now and then when possible. I didn't care about service, it was nothing for me... maybe others but not me, a busy man! As we all know, half measures availed us nothing and I let alcohol humiliate me several times during the first two years. At my turning point, I had to start to break my pride and look after humbleness. An older group brother had noticed that my sobriety was shaky and came to me and said: "This may not be very nice, but start making coffee." This was rather more an order than a persuasive proposal, but it hit my pride and resistance mode well. My head was finally starting to bend and I signed on for this first service. Previous newcomers, who had

gained sobriety through coffee-making, advised me that this was the best service job in the group. "You'll be the only one every participant in the meeting will talk to — the minimum being yes or no for the cup of coffee — and so you'll get to know everybody," they said. And so, "Rarely have we seen a person fail, who has made coffee for one year..." seems to be a valid slogan still! After this first service task, I was friendly but decisively guided to other service assignments like group chairman, reader, etc.

Five, six times a year my home group shares experience and puts on A.A. information meetings at municipal detoxification centers. After my first month sober, I was advised to take this commitment as well. *How can I share anything, as my own wounds are still bleeding?* I thought. "It will do good for you," I was told, and so an older group fellow took me with him the first time to show me how it works. The next time I was alone and there were five detox center patients present to listen to my short story. However, I was the only one who said "I'm an alcoholic" — all the other five present said they had ended up in the detox center due to different unhappy coincidences! I was almost in a panic: how can I manage the info meeting as they don't admit that they are powerless over alcohol? After a while I realized that I was facing the true nature of alcoholism: it denies itself until the bitter end. There were five old Juhas sitting in front of me with numerous excuses!

Another Twelfth Step service my home group does every now and then is on-call duty at the A.A. telephone helpline. From the very beginning of my sobriety I was invited to join older group members for this service and there we sat for four hours answering the phone — and between calls sharing personal experiences and talking about sobriety and A.A. This was a perfect way to show me and other newcomers what Twelfth Step work means for our recovery and helping to make friends with group mates.

After a few years of sobriety, I was complaining to an older group member in general about the low interest in service. Her answer was clear: "It might be that less than 5% of A.A. members are serving, but remember — you serve in order to maintain your sobriety!"



Once, our group faced a new need for service: we had been requested to clean and mop the room floor after each meeting. Volunteers were asked for this not-so-fascinating job and immediately a member at 16 years' sobriety lifted her hand. This gave me a signal: why shouldn't I also sign up as a cleaner if an older member could do so, and I did. Her example reminded me that humility is a continuous request for us alcoholics, regardless of the length of sobriety.

Some years later an older mate in our group retired. He volunteered to participate in group service to ensure his sobriety. What a great way to teach us youngsters that significant changes or turning points in our lives are always potential risks for us alcoholics. Yet service is a great way to strengthen our safety belts in A.A. and protect our sobriety in advance.

After some more sober years I was encouraged to accept first regional and then national delegate service. The older ones described their own delegate paths and advised that this would be a good way to learn about and understand our Fellowship more deeply and to show gratitude.

Older A.A. fellows have guided me to service by showing their own example, not by shouting from ivory towers. It was and still is my duty to do my own part to ensure that A.A. remains strong and vital, to welcome newcomers as it was when I needed it.

Juha I. — Finland

The Seventh Tradition — Supporting Our Services

My dear fellow A.A. members and all in attendance, receive warm greetings from the General Service Boards of the countries that make up the Northern Zone of Central America (Guatemala, Honduras, Belize and El Salvador). I would first like to thank God, as I understand Him, for the opportunity to be here and for the presence of each and every one of you, the representatives of the countries that make up the 25th World Service Meeting. Thank you for your help in letting me share with you my views on the Seventh Tradition, which makes it possible for us to support our services.

When we first come to an A.A. group, we arrive not knowing anything about how A.A. works from a financial standpoint. We wonder whether there may be dues or contributions of any kind, and we hear for the first time about *self-support* and the term *Seventh Tradition*. More experienced A.A. members tell us that the group is self-supporting through its own contributions, which are used to defray the costs of maintaining the group: rent, utility bills, coffee, snacks, etc., and for the first time we see a hat or a bag being passed around to collect money from meeting attendees. At first, all of this looks very enigmatic, and we wonder what could possibly be behind it. Soon enough, however, we become aware of the need for each A.A. member in recovery to contribute toward the expenses incurred in order to have our daily meetings. We become familiar with the treasurer, who, from time to time, stresses the importance of these contributions and encourages us to be generous. After a while we also become aware of the need to carry our message. We are told that carrying the message will ensure that we do not drink again.

Our Twelfth Step says "carrying the message is the basic service that the A.A. Fellowship gives; this is our principal aim

and the main reason for our existence. Therefore, A.A. is more than a set of principles; it is a society of alcoholics in action. We must carry the message, else we ourselves can wither and those who haven't been given the truth may die.

"Hence, an A.A. service is anything whatever that helps us to reach a fellow sufferer — ranging all the way from the Twelfth Step itself to a ten-cent phone call and a cup of coffee, and to A.A.'s General Service Office for national and international action. The sum total of all these services is our Third Legacy of Service.

"Services include meeting places, hospital cooperation and intergroup offices; they mean pamphlets, books and good publicity of almost every description. They call for committees, delegates, trustees and conferences. And, not to be forgotten, they need voluntary money contributions from within the Fellowship." (*The A.A. Service Manual*, A.A.'s Legacy of Service, by Bill W.) As A.A. grows in terms of members and services, the need for our contributions becomes more apparent, and we come to value them even more as we tackle work beyond the scope of our group's endeavors.

"The most vital, yet least understood, group of services that A.A. has are those that enable us to function as a whole, namely: the General Service Office, A.A. World Services, Inc., the A.A. Grapevine, Inc., and our board of trustees, known legally as the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous. Our worldwide unity and much of our growth since early times are directly traceable to this cluster of live-giving activities."

About money, the Seventh Tradition reads, "Every A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions." The Eighth Tradition says, "Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever non-professional, but our service centers may employ special workers."

"These few words pack immense meaning. They are the outcome of the huge controversies and struggles of our pioneering time when we knew that A.A. would have to come up with a sound and workable money policy or else face endless ineffectiveness and possible collapse. If ever a matter was taken seriously, it was the question of money."

The need to get money has always been a problem from the time our Fellowship was born because, practically from the beginning, there has always been a shortfall regarding member and group contributions. However, by stressing that each contribution is an investment that allows us to carry out our Twelfth Step work, some A.A. members believe that Seventh Tradition contributions are also part of service, allowing us to strengthen our sobriety in an indirect way.

Money has a role in our affairs and we have made a commitment to use it prudently. "As our A.A. membership does not depend on fees or dues, we can always 'take our special facilities or leave them alone.' These services must always serve us well or go out of business. Because no one is compelled to support them, they can never dictate, nor can they stray from the main body of A.A. tradition for very long."

Once irresponsible alcoholics have now become responsible: "Yes, we A.A.s were once a burden on everybody. We were 'takers.' Now we are sober, and by the grace of God have become responsible citizens of the world, why shouldn't we now about-face and become 'thankful givers'! Yes, it is high time we did!" ("On the Seventh Tradition," *The Language of the Heart*, June 1948)

For all these reasons, from the moment they are established,

A.A. groups should always take into account their contribution plans to support their service offices, thus fulfilling our primary purpose, which will be in place for as long as God needs us.

Francisco de J. R. G.
— Central America Northern Zone

Literature and Its Place in an Internet Environment

E-books — How They Affect A.A. Funding

My name is Ingmar. I am an alcoholic, and I serve our Fellowship as a World Service delegate and represent the German-speaking countries (Austria, Switzerland and Germany) in Europe. I am living in Germany/Bavaria and am happy to have the honor to share with you some thoughts and experience on the subject “E-books — How They Affect A.A. Funding,” and I will be happy to learn more about this topic and others within the next couple of days.

We are living in the 21st century, which can also be called the age of technology. German-speaking A.A.s began to look in the direction of this new technology some years ago. At that time, we thought about additional channels for enabling us to share our message with disabled people, and we thought about using a medium that would be convenient as well. The idea of using a medium to store sounds (in other words, a compact disc) was born. Isn't it a beauty listening to a nice voice sharing our lovely message? Saying this, we produced two books on CDs: *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* and *Living Sober*. Now, time is passing, people are setting trends with new techniques and communication channels. You may want to say, “Yes, this is awesome.” However, we in the organization of A.A. aren't trendsetters, are we?

That's Correct, We Aren't!

Nonetheless, knowing that our principal duty is to spread our message to our friends, those who are still suffering, we thought it would be worthwhile to think about new (and not substitute) ways in our modern world to reach out. The magic word is *e-book*.

What actually is an e-book? “An electronic book is a text- and image-based publication in digital form, produced on, published by, and readable on computers or other digital devices.” These are books that we have access to on our mobile phones and tablets, and we can find them on websites like ePub, iBooks store, and many more. E-books don't require printing, binding, warehousing, shipping or wholesaling. As a result, a significant financial investment isn't necessary to produce them, compared to printed books. Well, it's been proven that one of our most famous pieces of literature is still the Big Book. So naturally we shot for the production of the Big Book as our first e-book version in the German language.

Facts Based on Sales Figures

After saying this, we did start selling the Big Book in May 2017 in e-book format. (Just a note: As it takes a lot to design the correct electronic format, we are glad that the prework was done by a friend of our Fellowship at this time.)

Sold Paper Books vs. E-books May 2017 to May 2018 YTD	
Hardcover	1,686 / 58%
Paperback	937 / 32%
e-books	299 / 10%
Trend Big Book total sold 2016 – 2018 YTD	
Total sold May 2016 to May 2017	2,621
Total sold May 2017 to May 2018	2,922
Increase	11.5%

The data is showing an upward trend. However, the sample rate is too small to give us a solid statement. So, we need to gather more data within the next couple of years. We are looking forward to publishing *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* as our next e-book. Right now, we have to wait for the license in order to proceed.

German-speaking A.A. has been using the following channels for selling:

SHOP	May 2017-May 2018
Amazon Kindle	192
Apple	36
Tolino	42
Google Play Books	12
epubli	8
Skoobe	3
Kobo	2
Paper C	1
Ciando	1
Readfy	1
Barnes and Noble	1

Despite the growing technology our world can offer, it is statistically proven that 90 percent of all people are still reading printed books. In addition, reading printed books can help long-term memory because readers are open to the opportunities to physically highlight these texts and such. E-book readers can gain information immediately by downloading the file online, and the electronic versions take up less physical space compared to printed books because the file can be accessed with our gadgets. Rather than having to travel to a bookstore to buy a book, it is easier to buy an e-book online and download it. Ever since e-books arrived on the scene, year after year, forecasters have said that it's only a matter of time before they ultimately edge print books out altogether. Now, however, some seem to think the opposite may be true, that the e-book market might be slowing down — or even drying up! — and print books may “win the war” after all.

Of course, print books never actually stopped leading the charge, considering that e-book sales have never made up more than a third of all book sales. And although they rose to that number extremely quickly — for reference, Amazon just introduced the Kindle in 2007 — the majority of all books sold have been print. The underlying issue in all of this, however, is the idea that e-books and print books are in some sort of fierce battle to the death with each other, and the only outcome is

total dominance. So often people seem to assume either that e-books will soon drive their dinosaur-like cousin to extinction, or that print books will outlast e-books and prove them to be nothing but a flashy, inferior imitation. In reality, of course, neither of these outcomes is likely, and both misrepresent what actually appears to be happening with books today.

Conclusion

Our experience has shown us that e-books are a complementary selling line to our traditional literature. The reality is that there is absolutely no reason that print and e-books cannot coexist in book publishing. Coexistence really does seem to be what's happening, at least for now. Even if e-books are more convenient, they can affect your privacy. With many e-book platforms, the company that sold you the book could have the capacity to track your actions within the book and could even use the annotations you add to the text for other purposes, such as marketing. Reading e-books could be encouraged more in our Fellowship because it not only helps our environment, but it can also benefit people because of the inherent conveniences, like using less physical space, that come with it. Both products have relative benefits and drawbacks; both have people who enjoy them. Some people even enjoy both.

Thanks so much for your attention, in loving fellowship.

Ingmar E. — German-speaking Europe

The Future of Our National Magazines

My fellow delegates to the 25th World Service Meeting, my name is Miquey and I'm an alcoholic. I bring you fraternal and respectful greetings from the Mexican structure that I represent today. I have been asked to share on the topic, "The Future of Our National Magazines."

Alcoholics Anonymous began in Mexico in 1946. During the early years, the pioneer members focused their energies on group growth. Shortly thereafter, during the 1960s, attention turned to the creation of a service structure. The Central Mexicana de Servicios Generales de Alcohólicos Anónimos A.C., the legal name of Alcoholics Anonymous in Mexico, was born in 1969.

Background of the national magazine: During the earliest days of the service structure, there were several publications that carried the message of recovery. One of these publications was called *Chit Chat*; it was published in Chicago, but was distributed in several Latin American countries. Another was entitled *La Gaceta del Alcohólico (The Alcoholic Gazette)*. Yet another was called *Mis Hojas (My Pages)*. These publications were extremely popular among the A.A.s of that time, but they didn't last long. On the other hand, we had knowledge of magazines published in other countries, AA Grapevine in the United States, *El Mensaje (The Message)* in Colombia, and others in other countries.

La Revista Plenitud A.A.: As Alcoholics Anonymous continued to grow in Mexico, the trusted servants of the time came to believe that our country was ready to have its own magazine and began to work on publishing one. After several attempts and having overcome a number of obstacles, the first issue of *Plenitud A.A.*, the national magazine of A.A. in Mexico, was published on May 20, 1977.

In the light of past experience, we can say today that it was worth waiting until Mexico had consolidated its service structure before publishing its own magazine. *Plenitud A.A.* was born with the backing of the Administrative Council (today the General Service Board) of the Central Mexicana and the XI Mexican Assembly (today Conference). This support has been one of the magazine's great strengths, because from the very start, it had the support of the national conscience. In May 2018, our magazine celebrated 41 years of publication.

Since the beginning, *Plenitud A.A.* has had the support of the majority of our trustees and Conference delegates, as well as that of most of the other trusted servants of our structure. A good proportion of area, district and group service workers not only subscribe to the magazine, which serves to finance publication, but also use the magazine to gain better knowledge of the program, to spread the message, to share their experiences, to acquire new allies in the professional world and for other general service purposes and tasks.

The subsequent editors of *Plenitud A.A.* have long focused attention on the example provided by our neighbors and older siblings at AA Grapevine. From them, for example, they learned that our magazine could be seen as a meeting in print or perhaps a magic carpet that could transport its readers to many different places and circumstances; as an extremely useful tool for carrying the message, for the education of new service workers and for the growth of our Fellowship. This has led also to dedicating considerable time and care to the content of our publication.

Plenitud magazine grows: As a result of the support of the service structure, the example of more experienced fellow members and the dedication of its staff, *Plenitud* has become a well-established publication that will soon be publishing its 237th issue. It began as a quarterly magazine with a print run of 2,500 copies with a slow early growth of distribution. But today, thanks to the efforts of many trusted servants and the support of the collective conscience, the magazine now prints 60,000 copies every 45 days.

The Collections: In 1987, ten years after its launch, the magazine started periodically publishing collections of the best articles that had appeared in previous issues. Every 18 issues, a selection entitled "The Best of *Plenitud* magazine" is created based on the opinions and comments and many participating members. This year, 2018, the Twelfth Collection was published with articles from issues 199 to 216.

Other products: Around 1993, a concern began to be expressed and addressed related to meeting the needs of our members who are blind, as well as those who cannot read or don't enjoy reading, which led to the production of a series of audios based on articles from the magazine. Thus was born a project known today as *The Voice of Plenitud*: a collection of audios that have been taped by radio professionals. At present, it is likely that the ten current volumes will be included in a single USB. Since 1999, the *Plenitud* office has been producing and distributing, through contributions, a series of special products: a calendar, a pocket agenda, an executive agenda, a meeting log and a Winning Allies kit. These items have been well received because they were produced in response to a request by members and service workers from all over the country and are useful in helping members schedule their activities and hold their meetings.

Digital encyclopedia: Our first web page went up in 2003, and three years later, when the trend toward digitizing publications and documents was growing ever stronger, the Mexican General Service Conference approved a proposal that the *Plenitud* office create a digital encyclopedia that involved producing a series of compact discs that hold all the issues of the magazine from the first to the present.

Digital *Plenitud*: Technological change and the decision of the Mexican Conference to use technology as a tool to more effectively accomplish the sole and primary purpose of Alcoholics Anonymous have led to an increase of digitization for the benefit of our Fellowship and the still-suffering alcoholics to come. These conditions next led to the launch in 2014 of the latest and most important project we are carrying out, which is called Digital *Plenitud*. It started with a new presentation for the print magazine in electronic digitized format, with the advances that technology has provided, and it now offers tools that the printed version could not. Along with text and images, there are now audio and video. This electronic magazine is available to all the Fellowship at an annual subscription price of less than 300 pesos; with this contribution, a subscriber receives six issues of the magazine in electronic format, which, for personal protection, only he or she can read or hear in audio. It cannot be downloaded, copied or reproduced.

The *Plenitud* digital archive: Since it began in 2014, Digital *Plenitud* has been growing and, starting in 2016, the magazine's office staff has been working on a digital archive, with the intention of making available to all subscribers all over the world the entire collection of *Plenitud* published to date. As earlier occurred with the *Voice of Plenitud* and other similar projects, it will create in the immediate future new possibilities to carry the message to alcoholics who have not yet joined our Fellowship, above all, young people who are more engaged

with technology because they handle it with greater ease. And this innovation will make it possible for those of us who are members of A.A. to better know and practice our program.

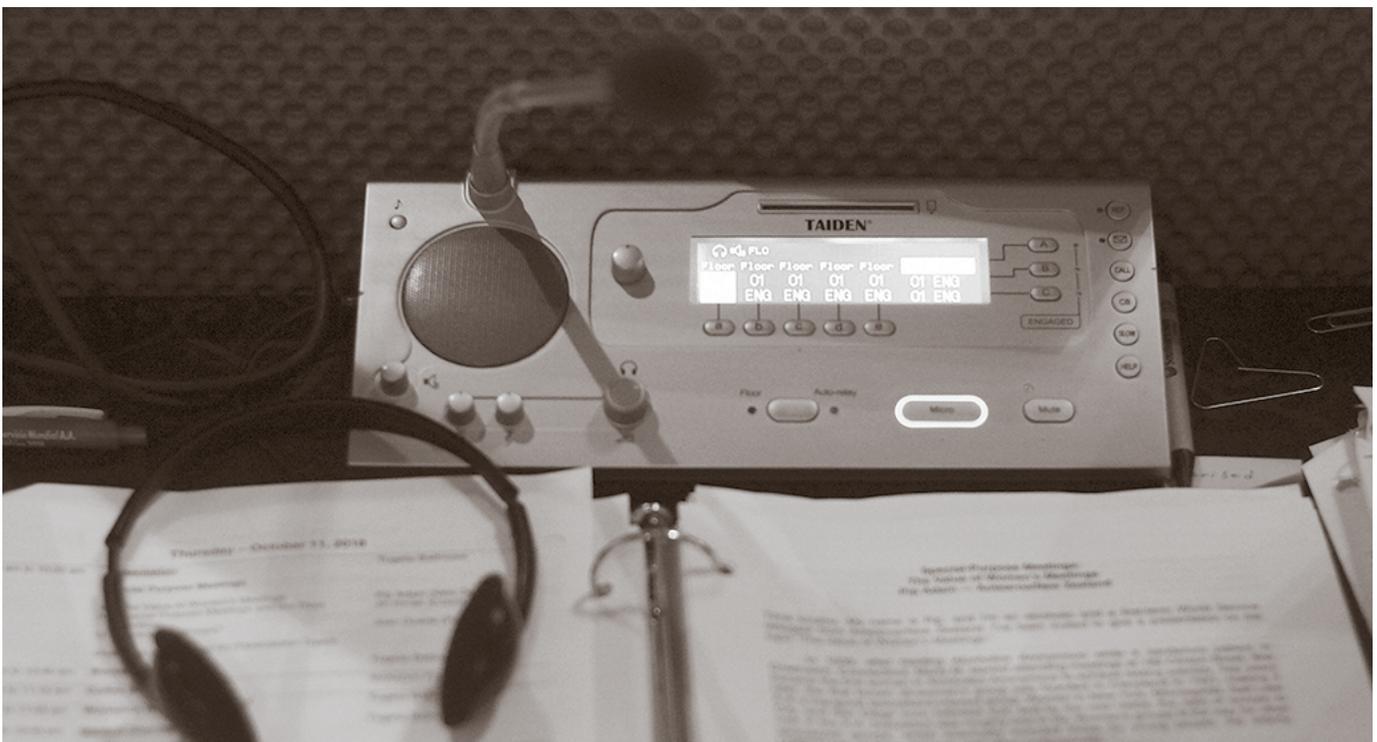
Facing the technological advances of the present age, the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous will not remain inactive or be left behind; nor will we allow the spiritual value of the "meeting in print" to be diminished. On the contrary, in Mexico, this service corporation has a vision of making use of these modern technological tools to grow and to keep pace with the changing world. Thus, the future of our magazine will be assured for years to come and more, because most of the prospective members of our Fellowship are young people who make virtually constant use of these new technological tools.

Today we can say what many alcoholics used to say to us when we joined a group: "The best years of your life are ahead of you." We hope that in ensuring the future of A.A. we can say the same for *Plenitud* magazine in Mexico.

Miquey C. — Mexico

A.A. Literature — A Picture Tells a Thousand Words

A.A. literature — "a picture tells a thousand words." Similar phrases are also used. Its alleged originator, an American journalist who in the early 1900s included an image in his article, stated after publication, "A picture paints a thousand words." Other sources have used "A picture is worth a thousand words." All these are English-language idioms, an idiom being a commonly used expression whose meaning does not relate to the literal meaning of its words. And in this case, it refers to the notion that a complex idea can be conveyed with just a single still image, or that an image of a subject conveys its meaning or essence more effectively than a description does.



These phrases describe how powerful an image is in terms of capturing information, at being able to evoke emotions and ideas, at being able to compute, compare or recall, and is therefore vital to human intelligence. However, images can only store limited information, and they are not efficient in representing abstract ideas. This could be a limiting factor in representing various abstract terms in A.A. literature.

In A.A., paintings, photos, drawings, cartoons and computer-generated still images all aim to convey the A.A. message of recovery. These we process through visual representation. We capture them through our eyes as visual mental images in different forms and process them in what is the largest and most active area of our brain. Images are far more effective at grabbing our attention than the written word because we are immediately drawn to them, particularly bright colors, because our brains are wired to react to the colors in them and do so 60,000 times faster than processing written text.

Images in their many forms facilitate the learning process, especially for those with learning difficulties and those whose mother tongue is not in the language of any supporting text. Images help tell a story, help us to become involved, and help contribute to the storytelling process that can make A.A. literature more engaging. In doing so, they grab the attention in carrying the A.A. message, persuading a person, both mentally and emotionally, either to reject the life they find themselves in, or, for existing members, to increase their experience.

Whether hard copy or electronic, A.A. images serve different purposes. There are those that portray the abuse of alcohol and, by implication, the illness of alcoholism, as in some PI posters. And there are those that convey the message of recovery as peaceful landscapes, portrayed in our many national magazines. There are also photos, purposefully out of focus, and computer-generated silhouettes, plus the historical full portraits that evoke the evolution of A.A., as in *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*.

A.A. images can capture emotions that might take many sentences to describe. For instance, the morning-after image on a poster depicting an empty bottle next to a person in the depths of desperation from alcoholism, or the smile of the Rev. Sam Shoemaker or the welcoming demeanor of Sister Ignatia. These are all expressions that are worth many emotional words.

In this fast-moving world, when we have the A.A. message to convey to the still-suffering alcoholic who may not have the time or inclination to concentrate and read a paragraph or more, a relevant image can capture the intended A.A. message. This image might be supported by a paragraph or phrase when placed in the appropriate location, creating a good chance that lives can be saved from the addiction to alcohol.

Publications are now being printed with images on front covers that convey, to a degree, the content of the pamphlet. The Grapevine publication "AA in the Military" has on its front cover a rear-view photo of a line of uniformed service personnel. The photo is taken at shoulder height. This approach to a photographic image not only provides the potential reader with identification as to what information is contained within, but in A.A. terms, maintains our most fundamental spiritual principle of anonymity, especially where photographs are concerned.

National conferences produce many forms of their own A.A. literature containing images, but these may not be rele-

vant to another country, as different cultures may have varying understanding of the same image. A PI poster with a picture of a park bench with snow on it, overwritten with the caption "You don't have to live here to join us," might be irrelevant to a culture that never sees snow or has park benches. This is where each national service conference puts resources into the type and content of an image that is most effective in carrying the A.A. message within its culture, and may use idioms from their culture that convey the relevance and meaning of that image. But across cultures, misinterpretation of some images might be a risk.

Three A.A. World Services publications, *A.A. Comes of Age*, *'Pass It On'* and *Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers* do contain full-face photographic images that are limited by policy to our founders, plus certain other nonalcoholics and friends of A.A. These images are both factual and historical in nature. They help us recall the people and the essence of their work. They seek to engage the reader as to their roles and provide us with visual memories of them. Together with the accompanying text, they seek to inform and educate the reader as to what the early timers had to go through to create and then fulfill A.A.'s primary purpose.

Many other A.A. World Services books do not contain pictorial images but, in many instances, do contain image-based phrases. This is a literary device that creates a visual for the reader by drawing on one or more of our human senses, creating a meaningful and relevant image, particularly of an abstract A.A. concept. For example, in "Bill's Story" (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, page 14), Bill provides a text-based image by writing, "I felt lifted up, as though the great clean wind of a mountain top blew through and through." This writing device, apart from informing a reader, is important in creating a mental image for those with sight problems who use audiobooks. In a wider sense, it also supports the universality of the A.A. message across all cultures of the world, as A.A. World Services, with the voluntary financial support of many countries, translates the text-based image into that of another language.

Through the passage of time, national conferences may decide to change images in their publications. In this instance, the image depicting the illness of alcoholism was deemed to be inappropriate for its intended audience. Great Britain used a pamphlet entitled "A Message for Young People." It was a threefold A4 page with a yellow cover, and contained a black-and-white cartoon strip, each frame being supported by a couple of lines of relevant text. It was distributed mostly during A.A. visits to secondary schools. Gradually, over a period of two years, several parents of children who received this pamphlet rang up and complained about the nature of the images. One frame of the cartoon depicted a parent verbally abusing a child in what these parents felt was a very threatening manner. After consideration, Great Britain withdrew the pamphlet. The cartoons were removed, but the text retained and formatted as sequential bullet points into a different pamphlet that is now circulated in schools without complaint, indicating that continuous, relevant and prudent consideration as to the use of A.A. images is important.

In alternative forms of A.A. literature, convention flyers are an example of infographs, as they give information in text form coupled with some form of image that may be in the foreground or background. A literature catalog may carry im-

ages of each piece of literature on sale, enabling buyers to visualize the piece of literature they are purchasing as opposed to choosing a publication purely on its title.

Some countries conduct internal A.A. surveys on an anonymous basis. The resultant data can be formatted into graphs or bar charts for publication. These images simplify what, at times, can be complicated issues using eye-catching colors, informing a national conference about various aspects of A.A. within its area.

In all the A.A. images that have been mentioned, relevant text very often accompanies the image, but there is one A.A. image that has been said not to need any form of supporting text. This compelling universal image tells more than a thousand words and yet can convey the A.A. message in a most powerful way. The full-color painting of *The Man on the Bed* first appeared as a Grapevine center spread in the December 1955 issue. It proved so popular that four-color prints were made available separately. The artist, Robert M., was a volunteer illustrator for Grapevine, and in 1956 he presented the painting to A.A. co-founder Bill W. In his thank-you letter, Bill wrote, "Your representation of *The Man on the Bed* hangs in my studio at Bedford Hills.... The whole heart and essence of A.A. can be seen by just looking at it." (*Box 4-5-9*, Vol. 58, No. 1, Spring 2012)

Jonathan P. — Great Britain

Safety of the Vulnerable Member

A Society of Equals

Hi, I am Christer, and I am an alcoholic. Today I have a wonderful life because I have had the grace of being a member of this fantastic A.A. program for over 30 years. I was born and raised in Stockholm, Sweden. My father was an alcoholic, so I also ended up in the same misery. After 25 years of varying between light and heavy drinking, I finally put a stop to it, and by the grace of God ended up in the A.A. Fellowship. Enough about me.

I have received a loving invitation to talk a little about "Safety of the Vulnerable Member" with a focus on "A Society of Equals." Others will speak of "Recognizing the Vulnerable," but I have chosen some categories of A.A. members and future members who I think are particularly vulnerable. Take for example women, LGBTQ and criminals. There also are members that, because of the political environment in their country, have difficulty expressing their illness of alcoholism. And then we have all the newcomers to A.A. How hard it must be to feel accepted in the beginning! What is it that is so difficult?

We members of A.A. have, all of us, had our struggles and issues. When I came to A.A., I learned to focus on the solution and not the problem. But I am a man, hetero, and thankfully not a convicted criminal — but that does not mean that I have not stolen, driven under the influence of alcohol, or hit someone. I also live in a country that accepts alcoholism as an illness.

But then how is it for the others? In the A.A. groups in Sweden, there are generally fairly few women in the meetings (with the exception of meetings for women, of course). Many

women see it as shameful to be an alcoholic and, therefore, rarely seek help. It's important for us men to remember that women who come to A.A. may have had bad experiences with men because of the vulnerability this illness causes. A.A. is a loving program, but I, as a man, must approach these women in a neutral manner, and not immediately give them a hug or anything similar so that I don't create misunderstandings. This same approach can also apply to the other aforementioned vulnerable groups.

In my experience, alcoholic women don't get taken seriously, and when they come to A.A., there are only a few role models, both in the meetings and in service. This is despite the fact that every single meeting starts with reading the Preamble, which says that A.A. is a fellowship of both men and women. In the Preamble we also read that A.A. includes everyone and excludes no one.

How can I, as an A.A. member, live up to these promises? By being available, speaking to everyone who participates, and not hiding among my group of close A.A. friends. I think it is very important that everyone who comes to an A.A. meeting is treated as an equal — newcomers and oldtimers, women and men, including people from other places with different cultures. We all are suffering from the same illness — alcoholism — and it is that illness that we've found a remedy for in the Fellowship of A.A. and the Big Book.

It is these basic facts that are the foundation for how each one of us — you and I — fulfill our primary purpose to carry A.A.'s message to the alcoholic who still suffers. And I need to remember that I was still suffering from this illness a long time after I became a part of the A.A. Fellowship, even though I was no longer drinking alcohol. It is this message I need to pass on when I speak at my A.A. meetings: how it was for me in the beginning and what I can do about my problems to get a manageable life in the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Christer M. — Sweden

Recognizing the Vulnerable

My dear friends, my name is Paweł. I am an alcoholic and a second-term delegate from Poland. Warm greetings from all the fellow A.A. members in my country. It is a great privilege for me tonight to give my presentation on the topic "Recognizing the Vulnerable." In my email response to Mary, I expressed my gratitude for the loving invitation to speak on this topic, which I consider to be very challenging. But if there is a will, there is a way.

Here I am with you after long and fruitful discussions with my fellow A.A. members who have participated thoroughly in the Twelve Step recovery program, and discussions with those who have just started their journey in A.A. I spoke to my non-alcoholic friends, addiction psychologists and therapists, ordinary people, my family and with myself, thinking deeply on the subject. I am not a researcher who asked individuals to fill a survey questionnaire. I only listened to their personal stories. And I listened to mine. I also read several articles and scientific papers on the topic.

Who is a vulnerable person? By definition, by its very nature, a vulnerable person is any individual who can be easily hurt, influenced, abused or attacked physically, emotionally or mentally; a person who is completely open, helpless, en-

dangered, unsafe and unguarded, at risk of abuse or neglect, and in need of support or protection. A vulnerable person is one who is believed to be suffering physical, psychological and emotional abuse.

Paweł, 16 years sober, says, “Emotional abuse is normally to be found in my relationship with other people — recipients of my job. It occurs when my developmental need for affection, approval, consistency and security is not met. I want to be understood, appreciated and loved for the great (that’s my opinion) job I did, and if it is not approved, I feel disappointed.”

My wife adds, “Remember, Paweł, there are always people who want to, have to, or just love to kick others, for the sake of envy. Harsh, unpleasant and unfair things happen to everyone. Don’t be too sensitive — if you expect a positive assessment of your job from others and you hear only unpleasant and harsh words of criticism like ‘Pride does come before the fall,’ you may feel hurt. Why? You made yourself vulnerable because you trusted too much in yourself and you forgot to accept the things you cannot change: other people with their defects of character and shortcomings.”

In fact, I was bitter because my belief in my abilities was greater than my skills. I made myself completely vulnerable by my own admission.

Wlodek, A.A., 18 years sober, shares my feelings completely. “I experienced the same. People did not care about me. I expected them to do so.”

Are you the one who can identify with me, or with any emotionally vulnerable person who is said to be not emotionally stable enough to sustain a healthy relationship? Of course, you are the one to determine whether you have this vulnerability and to work out how to overcome it. If you believe yourself to be vulnerable, pay attention to the following signs: falling for anyone who shows the slightest hint of kindness, not opening up easily, worrying too much about offending people and constantly apologizing, questioning whether people truly like you, changing your mood at any time, constantly worrying over what others think of you, letting good and bad things affect you in the same way with the same force, getting jealous over the silliest things, thinking that every bad thing is about you, having imaginary arguments in your head. You always stress about something; you want everyone to like you, even animals. You need validation to keep your confidence up, enabling the ones you love to hold complete power over you, being happy when they’re happy, being sad when they’re sad.

Or maybe you grew up with alcoholism in the home, and as an adult child of an alcoholic, you tend to be like Michał, who is 29 years sober, and you have buried your feelings since childhood and are not able to feel or express emotions easily. Ultimately, you fear all powerful emotions and even fear positive emotions, like fun and joy. You fear people who are in authority and people who are angry, and you do not take personal criticism very well. Do you misinterpret assertiveness as anger? Are you constantly seeking the approval of others while losing your identity in the process?

Perhaps you are more vulnerable than others, a person who was targeted by older A.A. members with more years of sobriety for dates and sex, and you experienced “Thirteenth Step” behaviors and sexual harassment in A.A. meetings. Surveys among women show that a substantial percentage of the participants had at least occasionally experienced thirteenth stepping in coed groups. Or maybe you think you are different,

not the same as most A.A. members, and due to this, you are exposed to the possibility of not being accepted by a group and being harmed? Or maybe you want to feel vulnerable and be comforted by people?

Let me remind you of the pamphlet “Do You Think You’re Different?” with its lovely personal stories of men and women of different races, sexual orientations, nationalities, religious beliefs and backgrounds who came to A.A. with uncertainty and fear of being excluded. They were vulnerable to loneliness and isolation. Did you feel like them at the start of your A.A. journey? How are you feeling today? Have you found help, friends with whom you could identify? Did your negative thoughts about your otherness make you feel like a vulnerable person?

Mirka, A.A., 22 years sober, told me, “Until I built my self-confidence and self-esteem on the basis of the recovery program with a loving God as I understood him, I was vulnerable to criticism, and thus to injury. But this criticism only appeared in my negative projections and imagination, not in the words spoken by others and their behavior. It was me, who wanted to be loved and adored, and that was my request — that everyone say good things about me and receive me well, and if I did not hear it and did not see it, I felt hurt and upset. I made myself vulnerable by my negative projections. It was only when I identified my vulnerabilities and learned to deal with them through self-understanding instead of denial or swaggering to hide them that I became much stronger, more resilient and less vulnerable to stress and criticism. Rarely can I be hurt today.”

Lesław, A.A., 25 years sober, added, “If people in recovery programs focus solely on their dependencies, they are only scraping the surface of the problem. The A.A. recovery program has to be worked thoroughly. It is also necessary to *settle accounts with the past* so you can face the future with greater confidence.”

The stronger you become in your self-confidence and self-worth, the harder it is to be vulnerable at lower levels of trust, because your vulnerabilities will become smaller and you’ll be less vulnerable. No one is perfect or not vulnerable, but some people become amazingly resilient and able to put themselves out there in complete or near-complete vulnerability with very little trust in place. This is very helpful on many levels, not the least of which is that if you and the other people in relationships are all failing, that means that even highly trusted friends are still likely to break the trust or do harmful things. So our ability to forgive, pick our battles and be resilient help make the vulnerability more accessible.

Finally, what if you really are a vulnerable person? You do not have to be a strong person to avoid being vulnerable. The fact is that everybody has vulnerabilities, and people deal with them in different ways. Do not be afraid of being vulnerable. Help others to show they are vulnerable. Vulnerability is simply saying, “I have my strengths, but I also have my weaknesses. I have successes, and I have my failures. I have achievements, and I have struggles. I am courageous, and I have fears and anxieties.”

Brene Brown, PhD, LMSW, in her book writes, “How the courage to be vulnerable transforms the way we live, love, parent and lead” describes vulnerability as the core of all emotions. In no case is vulnerability our weakness. Just the opposite: being vulnerable connects us with others. It opens us up to love, joy, creativity, and empathy.



Vulnerability is the “human” part of building that trust. Trust allows us to work together and to share our experience, strength and hope. Trust allows us to be vulnerable, which allows us to find refuge, friendship, companionship and someone to confide in. It is important and healthy to build trust, and the vulnerability over time will lessen with sufficient respect for balancing the potential for trust against the risk of injury. Being vulnerable isn’t the choice we have to make. The choice is how we respond when the elements of vulnerability greet us: uncertainty, risk and emotional exposure.

Barbara, an addiction psychiatrist, told me, “We hurt ourselves much more than anyone can hurt us. We are vulnerable to stress and criticism to the extent to which we allow other people to dictate our course and hurt us. We have to lay down the hard lines.” And, she added, quoting Mahatma Gandhi, “Nobody can hurt us without our permission.” Thank you for your attention.

Pawel W. — Poland

Including Minorities in A.A.

I first really paid attention to the word *minority* when I moved to the United States from Canada. It struck me, and I thought to myself, *Why are people using this word?* In Canada, the word may have been used, but it did not catch my attention, perhaps because I was a minority myself. In Ukraine, where I now live, I have never heard the word used as it is in the United States, but the general concept does exist.

According to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* definition, a minority is a part of a population differing from others in some characteristics and often subjected to differential treatment. In my experience, as it pertains to our Fellowship, that can mean an ethnic minority; women, young people or seniors; gays; rural population; special populations, such as Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing, or those with developmental disabilities; homeless; those who are or were incarcerated; and likely some others.

In the United States where I got sober, I was aware that there were different racial and cultural groups, and that men and women, young and old, attended A.A. meetings. But I did not immediately pay attention to them as possible sub-groups or minorities. It was only when I participated in my home group’s inventory about 12 years ago that I finally became aware that we indeed do have minorities in A.A. Not that these groups necessarily face discrimination, which, in my experience, I have not seen. But the fact is that they do exist. I first became aware of this upon reading question three in the A.A. group inventory section of the pamphlet “The A.A. Group... where it all begins,” which asks: “Is our group attracting alcoholics from different backgrounds? Are we seeing a good cross section of our community, including those with special needs?”

From my experience in working with individuals outside A.A., when people speak about minority groups, it’s in order to single them out for some special reason. And it can be for a positive reason, while also negative. I believe that we in A.A. will always choose the former, the positive. So, the first thing I asked myself, as did other group members, was: *Why were we not seeing more Spanish-speaking people at our home group*, given that there was a large Spanish-speaking population living in our town. And we took action. We purchased additional supplies of Spanish-language literature and made sure that it was available in several medical clinics, the local police station, and courthouse. We also reached out to the pastor of the local Catholic church where many of the parishioners were Spanish-speaking, and where on Sundays one mass was celebrated in the Spanish language. An offshoot of our effort was that a Spanish-speaking A.A. meeting was started in town. When I last checked this August, that meeting was still in existence.

In central New Jersey, where I got sober, there were also women’s meetings, a gay A.A. meeting, and other Spanish-speaking meetings. Today there is also a Polish-speaking meeting. Most meetings are wheelchair-accessible, and a few have translators for the hearing-impaired. In Ukraine, where I am

now in my sixth year sober and my third year as international delegate and member of the General Service Board, I became aware of minority populations in A.A. by noticing “who seemed to be missing.” I believe this was easier for me, having arrived from another country, as well as having some awareness of the concept of minorities.

The rural population in Ukraine, which I see as an important minority, is vastly underrepresented in Alcoholics Anonymous. While in the United States and Canada there are A.A. meetings almost anywhere you turn — even in less-populated areas — in Ukraine, it’s different. Meetings in rural areas are nonexistent. And the fact that most people rely on public transportation (which is grossly inadequate in terms of getting passengers to their destinations quickly and efficiently) makes it quite challenging, even for people living near a large city that has meetings. Buses also stop running early, so even if someone does make the hour-and-a-half or two-hour trip to get to a meeting, there’s little likelihood they will make it home that day.

While A.A. statistics in the United States and Canada show that there are more men than women in A.A., about a 2:1 ratio, in Ukraine, women are definitely a minority. I believe that stigma certainly plays a role in this. In addition, there’s the cultural bias in that any references to an alcoholic is to the male gender. It’s always *he* — the out-of-control male alcoholic. While there is certainly an awareness that a woman can also be alcoholic, most, if not all, talk is about the alcoholic male.

While in the United States and Canada it’s rare to attend a regular A.A. meeting where there aren’t any women in attendance, with the exception of men’s meetings, in Ukraine that is more prevalent. I do not have an approximate percentage of female A.A. members in Ukraine, but I have often attended meetings where there were only men, or perhaps one or two women. Although there are a few women’s A.A. meetings in Ukraine, often a woman wishing to attend an A.A. meeting will find herself the sole female there. I am not sure, but this might keep some from returning, not wishing to face the prospect of opening up to a roomful of men. This may not seem a significant problem to some, but it can be a serious barrier to the recovery of women who have been traumatized, assaulted, abused and stigmatized.

The question raised here is how can the A.A. Fellowship address this barrier, which seems to stand in the way of offering women a clear path to recovery? Going back to our previous example — the rural population in Ukraine — we are confronted with a similar question: What more can A.A. members in Ukraine do to reach out to and help the still-suffering alcoholics living in Ukraine’s rural areas? What about the homeless, the special-needs populations and the incarcerated? What about these minorities?

When I was living in the U.S., I sometimes heard negative remarks about A.A. members who lived in shelters, or those with mental health problems. In Ukraine, there seems to be more stereotyping, prejudice and judgment. My sample is small, yet I have heard individuals from shelters or rehabilitation centers be referred to as “those people,” as if they were a different or a lower class of A.A. member.

I also want to mention here another “minority” present within our Fellowship, though not necessarily of it: the recovering addict. Because there aren’t that many meetings of other twelve-step fellowships, it’s not unusual for nonalcoholics to not only attend A.A. meetings, but also to participate and/

or expect to participate in them on par with an A.A. member. While our Traditions are clear on this matter, that A.A. membership is for individuals having a “desire to stop drinking,” this minority of non-A.A.’s can often throw the A.A. group off its course. Well-meaning or not, this does run counter to our Traditions and affects the well-being of our program.

A.A.s in Ukraine are mostly Ukrainian- or Russian-speaking with many fluent in both languages. And although Ukrainian again became Ukraine’s official language in 1989 after the breakup of the Soviet Union, for many years A.A. literature in the Russian language greatly outnumbered Ukrainian-language translations, making Ukrainian-speaking A.A.s appear to be a minority. That has since changed, with much more literature now available in Ukrainian, largely because Ukraine A.A.’s General Service Conference Literature Committee has translated about a dozen brochures into Ukrainian in the past five years. Earlier there was a handful of brochures, plus the Big Book, the “Twelve and Twelve” and *Living Sober* available in Ukrainian. The Russian-language literature was either purchased from A.A. in Russia or reprinted with permission from A.A.W.S. in New York, which automatically gave A.A. Ukraine access to a vast array of A.A. literature.

Recently I was speaking to several A.A. colleagues in Ukraine about minorities in A.A., and they all said that the concept of “minority” doesn’t enter into the thinking of A.A.s in Ukraine. “Women in A.A. are not a minority,” said one. “There are just fewer of them.” The same was said about alcoholics from rural areas. While there’s an acknowledgment that few attend A.A., there’s no plan to address that or to take A.A. to the country. “We just carry the message, without any thought about whether there are minorities or not,” said a member from Ukraine A.A.’s Lutsk region. “And we don’t do that as well as we should.”

Meanwhile, there’s an English-speaking meeting in Kyiv, started for English-speaking visitors or short-term English-speaking residents. And that’s certainly acknowledging and responding to the need of a minority group. There was a Polish-speaking group in Lviv, but it currently does not meet. So, what’s the challenge for us?

In my estimation, the challenge lies in becoming more aware of and actually fulfilling our Twelfth Step responsibility of carrying the message and, in the course of doing so, responding positively to question three of the proposed group inventory in the home group brochure: “Are we attracting alcoholics from different backgrounds? And, are we seeing a good cross section of our community, including those with special needs?”

If we become aware of and take up this responsibility, and fulfill it to the best of our ability, we are sure to make progress. And taking the message to the still-suffering alcoholic in rural areas would be a good place to start. I’m not sure how the situation with minorities presents itself in other parts of the world, but I suspect that there would be many similarities. And I also believe that the answer would be similar. Keeping it simple, getting active, and fulfilling our A.A. Responsibility Pledge:

“I am responsible...

When anyone, anywhere,
reaches out for help, I want
the hand of A.A. always to be there.

And for that: I am responsible.”

Yury T. — Ukraine

Share the Value of Tradition Four

Freedom or Chaos?

Hello, everyone, my name is Dmitry, and I am an alcoholic. I have been an active member of the A.A. community in Russia for 15 years now and have a deep sense of its uniqueness. The A.A. Traditions are one of the expressions of this uniqueness. I never cease to be amazed at their wisdom, love and concern, not only for each individual member of A.A., but also for the Fellowship as a whole. Of course, you can always brandish the stick at the Traditions, refer to them as the law, or interpret them in your own way. You can even ignore them, or instead look for some sacred hidden meaning in them, trying to apply them to a specific area of your life, work or relationships, rather than practicing the principles in all your affairs (as it says in the second part of Step Twelve). There are many ways of relating to them. But when all is said and done, the Traditions are the cornerstone of the life-sustaining activity of all A.A. groups, "... where it all begins...." The Traditions are as important for the group's survival as the Steps are for maintaining the sobriety of each and every A.A. member.

While Tradition One ("Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity") talks about unity among A.A. members, Tradition Four ("Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole") explains the essence of unity among A.A. groups. And it is quite obvious that just as an alcoholic cannot survive on his own, so an A.A. group cannot lead its own life without interacting with other groups in the spirit of equality, love, support and mutual understanding. And this unity can only exist in harmony with the freedom of choice of each group member and each group in a particular district.

Freedom in an A.A. group can be expressed in different ways: strict sponsorship in the group (unconditional fulfilment of a sponsor's instructions); only the group's trusted servants have the right to vote; propaganda in the group is the only way to true recovery; the Steps can only be practiced by following a single method. There are times when a group carries out aggressive advertising on A.A. websites, emphasizing its exclusivity (for example, showing films about the treatment and prevention of alcoholism); inviting "hotshot sponsors," particularly from abroad; holding events with the participation of A.A. members (sports competitions, trivia games with prizes for those most knowledgeable about A.A., camping trips, etc.).

Such groups are guided by the first part of Tradition Four in their work, while forgetting entirely about its second part. In this case, the interests of other groups in a particular district, or of A.A. as a whole, are not taken into account. For example, they schedule meetings that are only convenient for their group or hold events within the framework of Tradition Five without coordinating their action with other groups in the same district. This shows that the group is guided by "money, property and prestige," and is a harbinger of chaos — that is, that group follows a policy of "anything goes." Freedom at the group level not only means each group taking responsibility for its own members, but also taking responsibility for A.A. as a whole.

The topic "Freedom or Chaos?" is very pertinent in my country today, because this is precisely what is happening in

the Russian A.A. service structure. Groups hold the ultimate responsibility for the service structure in their district. So, in my opinion, the emergence of a "parallel service structure" (FOAA, unofficial) in Russian A.A. is the manifestation of chaos in the activity of groups that believe authoritative representatives (leaders) will decide this question for them, as well as the question of unity in the service structures — even though these leaders are not using their authority to serve, but to supervise.

This can only happen when anonymous alcoholics, so-called children of chaos, do not want to be free, but want to depend on some human power (leaders-sponsors). It is easier to shun all responsibility for your own recovery and pass the buck to another alcoholic. This shunning of responsibility is happening at the group level and will only lead to chaos. The leaders of such groups are supervising in strict ways without taking into account anyone else's opinion apart from their own! There is no need to talk about democracy in this case. Another tool the leaders of groups and structures use in their supervision is to apply the A.A. Traditions and Concepts to specific situations at home, work or in their relationships, etc., instead of "...practicing these principles in all our affairs" (Step Twelve). By holding such seminars, the group creates the illusion that its members can resolve all of their family, work, sexual and social relations in A.A., without resorting to professional help. But A.A. is a nonprofessional organization!!! And when I talk about this, I hear in response, "But my sponsor said...."

In order to support the parallel structure (FOAA), these members are elevating the sponsor to the rank of a direct intermediary of God on earth for the anonymous alcoholic. It often happens that a sponsor comes up with a variety of plausible reasons for why his sponsee should not participate in service work: "It's too early; you might relapse..."; "such service is only a way to gratify your own ambitions..."; or "they are not proper alcoholics (group); there is no point in serving there..." etc. When I hear such talk, I see the members of this group as not being free. I see a group that has forgotten its true foundation — the triangle of "Unity, Recovery and Service."

What I have mentioned above describes what is going on in Russian A.A. and why there is a parallel (unofficial) service structure with its own A.A. service foundation. And you would not believe the lengths these leaders and groups go to in order to prove their exclusivity, even though they are in the minority (fewer than one out of seven groups throughout the whole of Russian A.A.). They believe that their service structures express the hopes and wishes of all groups in Russian A.A. and that their office (the A.A. Service Foundation-FOAA) is the national one. This is despite the fact that this structure has minimum representation in the regional service structures; that is, this structure consists of groups, a delegate assembly (conference), and council and foundation members. The representatives of this structure do not want to look the truth in the eye and admit that their office is mainly used as a store, where not only A.A.-approved literature can be bought (which their A.A. Service Foundation-FOAA publishes without a license), but also souvenirs, brochures and handbooks that are not approved by the A.A. Conference. If these groups were free, they would be trying to do everything in their power to ensure that a united service structure is restored in Russian A.A.

There are groups that are trying to "keep a foot in both camps." Their representatives participate in the work of the



official service structure while also taking part in the annual conferences of the parallel structure (FOAA). This cannot be called freedom. The groups do not understand that they are the ones creating the structure, those committees that serve them. The question of unity cannot be resolved in committees or foundations. Responsibility lies with the groups, which are at the very top of our pyramid. And true freedom means making a choice.

Unfortunately, our international friends are also making their contribution to this difficult situation of chaos by recognizing that other structure (A.A. Service Foundation-FOAA) as official and the foundation as the national office. This organization is printing A.A. literature without a license and supplying information about the number of groups in Russian A.A. that does not correspond to reality. Representatives of the unofficial (parallel) service structure (FOAA) of Russian A.A. are invited to various events abroad. This is causing additional difficulties in our country and adding even more chaos to the situation. And although Tradition Four proclaims that every group has full autonomy and the right to be wrong, the group should never take any action that might greatly affect the Fellowship as a whole.

Dmitry T. — Russia

How Does It Support Unity?

“Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.”

In order to realize the importance of the Fourth Tradition and to see how willing I am to practice it in its entirety, I first need to reflect on it a bit. The first sentence of Tradition Four guarantees each A.A. group local autonomy. With respect to its own affairs, the group may make any decisions. No authority in Alcoholics Anonymous should challenge this primary privilege, even though the group might sometimes act with indifference to our Traditions, as the Tradition itself points out, “Thus it was that under Tradition Four an A.A. group had exercised its right to be wrong. Moreover, it had performed a

great service for Alcoholics Anonymous, because it had been humbly willing to apply the lessons it learned.”

Though such an absurd procedure would be miles outside our Tradition, the group’s “right to be wrong” would be held inviolate. We are sure that each group can be granted — and safely granted — these most extreme privileges. We know that our familiar process of trial and error would summarily eliminate any missteps that may divert us from the guiding light of our Traditions. Our experience teaches us that “growing pains which invariably follow any radical departure from A.A. Tradition can be absolutely relied upon to bring an erring group back into line.”

“An A.A. group need not be coerced by any human government over and above its own members. Their own experience plus A.A. opinion in surrounding groups, plus God’s prompting in their group conscience would be sufficient.... Hence we may confidently say to each group, ‘You should be responsible to no other authority than your own conscience.’”

But we should always remember that such extreme liberty of thought and action applies only to *the group’s own affairs*. Rightly enough, this Tradition goes on to say, “But when its plans concern the welfare of neighboring groups also, those groups ought to be consulted.” Obviously, if any individual, group or regional committee could take an action that might seriously affect the welfare of Alcoholics Anonymous as a whole or seriously disturb surrounding groups, this would not be liberty at all. It would be sheer license; it would be anarchy, not democracy, and it would clearly affect A.A. unity.

“Therefore, we A.A.s have universally adopted the principle of consultation. This means that if a single A.A. group wishes to take any action that might affect surrounding groups, it consults them” or its district or area. Likewise, if any service entity wishes to take any action that might affect A.A. as a whole, it consults the trustees of our General Service Board, who are, in effect, charged with safeguarding our Traditions. This idea is clearly summarized in the last sentence of Tradition Four (Long Form), which observes, ‘On such issues our common welfare is paramount.’”

By respecting and practicing this Tradition, we can avoid conflict and division that may affect our unity. It will be the best way of protecting our unity. "So long as the ties which bind us together prove far stronger than those forces which would divide us if they could, all will be well. We shall be secure as a movement; our essential unity will remain a certainty.... Unity is so vital to us A.A.s that we cannot risk those attitudes and practices which have sometimes demoralized other forms of human society.... May we never forget that without permanent unity we can offer little lasting relief to those scores of thousands yet to join us in their quest for freedom."

Juan H. L. V. — Peru

Attracting Members Into Service

Service Sponsorship

Dear friends, my name is Sune. I am an alcoholic and am serving my second term as a delegate from Denmark. I have the pleasure of giving a presentation about the subject "Sponsorship in Service." Sponsorship in service is each time I am ready to share experience, strength, and hope in A.A., under my own responsibility. This responsibility includes my willingness to show the path for other members. The A.A. pamphlet "Questions and Answers on Sponsorship" describes the various aspects of service in A.A. The Second Tradition says: "For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority — a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern." I think it's very important we remember that we are just servants for A.A.

It is possible to read and learn about A.A.'s Three Legacies in the book *A.A. Comes of Age*. Bill W. gave three speeches about the legacies Unity, Recovery and Service. Each of them is connected with the others.

In the beginning of my own recovery in A.A.'s program, it was only my needs that were important. Nowadays I am trying to focus more on *we*. I can't keep the idea and the program if I don't pass it on to other people. Sponsorship in service includes the way I act as an example, in the local group, region and/or country. We share our experiences in service with one another, whether it is at the individual or at the group level. According to the literature, the responsibility starts in the group and ends in the group. I have a personal perspective to add: It starts with me and ends with me. I meet the needs of giving up my own ambitions everywhere in A.A.'s program.

I remember one evening many years ago when I lived in Sweden. I was a newcomer, and a man took me home in his car after the meeting. I told him that I would like to pay for the petrol, but he said it was free. He said that I could do the same favor if I had the chance in the future. Well, at that time, I didn't think he was so clever. But several years later, I understood the meaning, to do things without expectations of getting something back. The benefit for me is a nice feeling when I give from the heart.

The First Tradition says, "Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity."

There are many jobs to do in a service structure, and it

seems that every part is important. We need to make more members interested in service in Denmark. Many years ago, observers were allowed to participate at the National Service Conference in Denmark. Today it is only the guests who have received an invitation who can be there. I think we have to discuss and investigate ways we can create new possibilities to make people interested in service. It's my own opinion that most members take responsibility for some functions in their local group, but no further. When it comes to questions about the work in representation of the group, in the region, or interested members in the General Service Board, it is more difficult, as there are not enough interested members.

The principles of rotation make sure that prestige and personal influence stay away. But it is very difficult to rotate if there is no one among us who responds to our needs. I remember the Toronto declaration being read at the WSM 2016 in New York; I was very touched by it. At the General Service Board, I suggested that we read the Toronto declaration at the end of each General Service Board meeting. We still do.

"I am responsible. When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A. always to be there. And for that: I am responsible." (Toronto declaration, 1965)

Sune H.-S. — Denmark

The Rewards of Doing Service

Dear friends, thank you for the opportunity to let me share my experience and thoughts on the rewards of being in service. When I first came into A.A., the idea of being sober seemed like a good one. And although I did like a lot of things in A.A., there were certain words that kept popping up that I wasn't so keen on. Words like *god*, *responsibility* and *humility* — just to name a few. And, of course, the word *service*, which my sponsor seemed to be particularly fond of. So, when my sponsor told me to go into service, I remember thinking, *What?! I am not staff. I am the patient here*. But being smart, I did not say those words out loud, but said something like, "Well I'm not very good at that. There are other people much better qualified than me to do that." But I quickly learned that sort of sound reasoning does not seem to work in A.A. Instead, my sponsor pointed out to me that if I wanted to stay sober, I had to be in service. He referred me to a certain text in the A.A. book which started to make sense to me later, and I will come back to in a moment.

So, reluctantly, I started to make the coffee. And then just as I was getting good at that, I was given another job that I was seriously underqualified to do. But, of course, I learned. I took on the responsibility and I slowly understood what the importance of service meant. And my experience has been a bit like that ever since. At this point, we should define service in A.A. In the "Twelve and Twelve" it says (*Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, page 110): any task that makes "good Twelfth Step work possible" is "Twelfth Step work in the very best sense of the word"... be it making coffee or serving on A.A. committees.

So, what exactly are the benefits of being in service in A.A.? Of course, being sober is the fundamental issue, but are there other benefits? Let's look at some of the things that are stated in our literature: In the good book it says, "Faith without work is dead." And it goes on to elaborate that without work being

manifested in the form of service, the alcoholic will drink again and die. This is often the “stick” that drives newcomers into service, but I would like to focus more on the “carrots.” One of my favorite promises in our good book is that we will be able to face life again. That may not sound like such a big promise. But, actually, it is a huge one for us alcoholics. For, as the A.A. book warns, sober life will have its ups and downs; both will often drive the normal alcoholic to drink again as that is their hardwired response.

At the end of our good book (page 178) we are promised that God will show us more and more. In the beginning, I took that as a personal threat, but I have since come to understand that God will show us more and more how to live and enjoy life. In fact, “the most satisfactory years of your existence lie ahead” (page 166).

One of the key elements for this to happen is to develop a certain amount of *responsibility*, although at first that word seemed very unattractive to me. However, I learned the meaning of it is actually to be “response-able,” which makes it seem less threatening. And with this ability to be responsible or “response-able” comes all kinds of rewards, such as a steady job, developing relationships and closer family bonds, true friends, piece of mind, confidence and any number of exciting possibilities. The value of such rewards means that the individual feels part of a greater whole, takes their place in society and develops a clear identity. You become a small piece in a much bigger jigsaw puzzle. All this stems from being “response-able.”

When these gifts and benefits started kicking in, a fellow A.A. member gave me this sound advice: “Don’t let the gifts of A.A. take you away from A.A.” That in turn ensures that these gifts and benefits keep on coming. Not only do we receive these benefits and more, but there are a lot of things that we lose: “You will find release from care, boredom and worry” (page 166) — also the perception of impending doom, that everything may fall apart or crash and burn. We gain the conviction that everything will be okay.

Looking back over my 15 years in A.A., I can see that I have had a certain reluctance to share all the benefits I have received, in case it would look like I was bragging and showing a lack of humility. And perhaps I was worried that it might have been understood that I was promising something that I had personally received but might not materialize for other people. But it is my conclusion now that although it might seem that way to some, as long as I am careful to show my gratitude to A.A., and emphasize that all these things are gifts and side products that I have received for taking simple directions in how to stay sober, then it is my responsibility to not keep these benefits a secret from newcomers. But instead to emphasize that there are great rewards possible, and to encourage suffering alcoholics to go into service, thereby helping them on their path to sobriety. (However, I refrain from doing so on social media as that is not in accordance with our Eleventh Tradition.)

At the end of our good book, this path is described as “the Road of hHappy Destiny” (page 179). So, we should spread this message. To quote another good book, which summed this up some 2,000 years ago, “And no man, when he has lit a lamp, covers it with a vessel, or puts it under a bed; but puts it on a stand, so that they that enter in may see the light” (Matthew 5: 14–15).

I would like to end by thanking you for your attention and I

thank A.A. and my higher power for giving me a new life. A life so much richer and fulfilling than I ever could have dreamt of.

Grimur G. — Iceland

Participating in Service Beyond the Group

My name is Brian and I am an alcoholic. My home group is the Brisbane Traditions Group in Queensland, which is the North Eastern Region of Alcoholics Anonymous Australia. My sobriety date is June 20, 1977.

Over the last 41 years, I have been actively involved in all Three Legacies of the Fellowship. My journey began when I was taken through the Twelve Steps of A.A. by my sponsor, the late John R. Using the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*, John assisted me greatly in my introduction to A.A.’s First Legacy of Recovery. Through this process, I learned the importance of one alcoholic working with another, how it was one of the main requirements for a continual sobriety.

When I was approximately nine months sober, I went around to John’s house for coffee following a Sunday morning A.A. meeting. After some general discussion, John started to talk about the A.A. Group and how groups such as my own had started. He asked me to consider this: “Do you think your group and the other A.A. groups you attend just happen? Did they set themselves up just by a magic click of the fingers?” Of course, I knew that somebody had started these groups at some point, but I had not really given it much thought until this morning conversation with John so long ago. The point John was making to me was that if that “someone” did not take the action to set up the groups I attended, I may not have been able to stay sober and I would not have met all the sober people in the rooms who, by sharing with me, contributed to my desire to move forward with the A.A. program. Without these groups I would, most likely, have been lost. It was the significance of this realization that got me thinking of not just looking at the trees but the vista of the forest. John’s words stayed with me as I started to think outside the square, so to speak, about service beyond the bounds of my home group.

My first home group was the Queanbeyan Group in New South Wales. It had approximately 30 members and its format was based on discussion about the Twelve Steps. It was in this group that I took on my first service position, which was to collect the group’s mail from the postbox at the local post office once a week. The post office box was a revelation to me, as we received all information from Alcoholics Anonymous Australia and the rest of the world via that box. The box number was 602. That is the same number that I had as a prisoner some four years before. It was ironic that this number now represented something far more positive in my life!

In early 1978, Australia held its national convention in my home city of Canberra. Canberra is the national capitol of Australia and is within the state of the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). My home group in Queanbeyan is on the New South Wales side of the ACT border. At this convention, I had the privilege of meeting two A.A. members from the United States. They were Wesley P. from Florida and Bob P., who was the office manager of the U.S./Canada General Service Office (GSO), in New York. Both men, who were keynote speakers at



the convention, talked about the Three Legacies of Alcoholics Anonymous: Recovery, Unity and Service. Each Legacy was dependent on the others, just like a three-legged stool: without one of these Legacies, A.A. could not stand on its own. A.A. could not survive! I recall how they impressed upon me the idea that it all starts with the Home Group. Without the Home Group, these Three Legacies would not exist!

A short time after the convention, I was elected as the General Service Representative (GSR) for my group, and it was then that I really appreciated that Twelfth Step work of one alcoholic talking with another took on multiple dimensions. I saw that “carrying the message” could be done in a number of ways complementary to the “one-to-one” guide outlined in Chapter Seven of the Big Book. It was kind of a metaphor: “Don’t just give a man a fish. Teach him how to fish!” With this in mind, my new GSR job opened up the world of service outside the group on the pillars of the Twelve Traditions and Twelve Concepts of World Service.

As a GSR, I recall one of the first projects in which I became involved was a public information (PI) campaign with the insertion of advertisements in the local newspapers. Like the collaborative process in my home group, I participated in a “group conscience” at the local district level to determine how best we could deliver information about A.A. to the general public. We were able to decide what needed to be done, such as the wording for the PI ad, who was to write it, who was to approach the newspapers to make the arrangements and how we were going to pay for the ads. Other details decided on for the advertisement included the phone number of the local Intergroup Office — an office, by the way, staffed by A.A. members doing their voluntary “service” by being there to answer the phone from troubled callers who had read our ad.

Some years later, after I had moved to Southern Victoria and was working in a small rural town, I had just finished reading the most unpopular book in the Fellowship, according to Wesley, called *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, and was fascinated by the ripple effect that the Rockefeller dinner had in the early days of the Fellowship. I was again involved with service work outside my new home group when I was approached by a local woman who pointed out that the professional folk who work with alcoholics in the community knew very little about A.A. She suggested that perhaps we could do something to improve our communication with these professionals.

I followed up on this idea at the next A.A. district meeting, and after some robust discussion, the district decided to host a dinner for the professional people in the local community who had anything to do with treating or dealing with alcoholism. As a district, we hired a venue and arranged catering for the dinner accordingly. Among the 23 professionals who attended were two senior police officers, two school principals, two psychologists and two drug and alcohol counsellors. At each guest’s table, we placed a small package of A.A. literature that was specifically selected for the profession of that guest. Also attending were 20 “recovered” A.A. members who were strategically seated next to each professional guest. These 20 members were requested to read the pamphlet, “Speaking at Non-A.A. Meetings” before attending the dinner.

The event began with a couple of A.A. members giving a talk about the program of A.A. and how it changed their lives. After the speakers finished, the meal was served. This gave an opportunity for the other 20 A.A. members to chat and perhaps elaborate on some points about A.A. with their guests. I believe we were successful in getting the message across to these professionals that we were a valuable, yet free, community resource for them to utilize when trying to help the sick alcoholic. There was a definite knock-on effect following the dinner. In that community, I observed our numbers to swell in A.A. meetings with a lot of people being able to attain a solid and continuous sobriety. The success of this event was further testimony to the value of service work done on a structured basis within our Fellowship!

As I write this in Brisbane, 30 years later, we are continuing with this successful formula of hosting dinners for professionals in the local community. In late November this year, we will be holding a luncheon for the decision makers within the Queensland Corrective Services. It is my hope, should my A.A. area agree, this will become an annual event.

If there is one area of concern that I would like to speak of here, it is about my country’s attitude toward “rotation” of our service positions. Based on my own observation and experience, there is the mindset that one rotates “off” a position rather than rotating “on.” It is common practice for a member whose time is up in a service position to automatically rotate off the position irrespective of whether it is filled by another member or not. Even when there is an elected replacement for the position, there is very little support for him or her from the previous holder of the position. The incumbent is commonly left on their own to work through an unnecessarily steep learning curve for the job.

I give you an aspect of this mindset with the following example. I recall a member who was doing PI on a national level, who would not pass on information of any contacts that were gained in the position on the basis of confidentiality. This

person took the view that such information was provided to him/her personally rather than as a result of the PI position she/he was doing. This situation left the incumbent to start all over again, setting back our efforts as a Fellowship. This distortion of A.A. principles, in my view, is not uncommon. There seems to be a lack of building on the experience of one's predecessors — something I find unique to Australian A.A.

In the 41 years of my sobriety, I have always been active at the group level through sponsorship as well as being engaged with various service positions within the general service structure of Alcoholics Anonymous. As well as being a GSR in a number of groups, I have held the position of district committee member (DCM). I have also had the great privilege to serve on the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous Australia as a regional trustee.

All A.A. service starts at the home group level, and for the group to survive such service work must extend beyond the group. Our Book states: "Practical experience shows that nothing will so much insure immunity from drinking as intensive work with other alcoholics. It works when other activities fail..." This is an A.A. truism that cannot be questioned. However, the meaning of that quote translates into many ways to "intensively" carry the message of A.A. It is my experience that service beyond the A.A. group is a necessary and rewarding way to carry our message. Although my efforts are minuscule when seen within the Fellowship as a whole, those efforts have provided me with joyful and unforgettable memories. Like the three-legged stool analogy, the Twelve Steps, the Twelve Traditions and the Twelve Concepts of World Service are the three pillars of guidance to effectively carry A.A.'s wonderful message of recovery to the sick and suffering alcoholic.

In closing, I would like to relate to a relatively minor incident that had a major impact on me when I initially came into contact with A.A. John R., who became my first sponsor, was the man who came to my house on a Twelfth Step call. I was somewhat skeptical and negative in my attitude as John was doing his best to make conversation with me. While he was sharing his story with me, my 14-month-old daughter came into the room and called out "catch" as she threw a plastic toy egg his way. He failed to catch the toy. Instead it hit him in the head. He quickly bent down and picked the toy up and said to my daughter, "Here love." My mood with the family was that of an angry bear — I would not have been so cheerful if the toy had hit *me* in the head. However, John's reaction impressed me so much that at that moment I yearned for what he had and agreed to go to a meeting with him at his home group.

Over 41 years later, my daughter is at my side typing this presentation up for me!

Brian S. — Australia

Special-Purpose Meetings

Meetings or Groups?

My dear fellow A.A.s, my name is Juan. I am an alcoholic and the second-term delegate from Paraguay. I have been asked to speak about the topic "Meetings or Groups." It is an honor for

me to try to convey my experience on this matter.

The first point of contact most of us have with the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous is when we set foot in an A.A. group. We are given the message at the time when we are hitting bottom. It is the first manifestation of our Higher Power and where we encounter the spirituality of the A.A. program. We enter a corner of the world where A.A. members begin passing on their life-giving hope, and that is reason enough to stay and to believe in them. At each meeting, day by day, a gradual transformation took place inside of me. Today, I understand that it was thanks to the group's existence and the fact that they kept their doors open that I was able to save my life, and so it was with many others. We continue enjoying the gift of recovery in accordance with the principles of our Fellowship. I came to realize that Alcoholics Anonymous was a fellowship and, as such, it allowed me to learn from other members' experiences, in other groups. While the principles were the same, each person had his or her own experience and interpretation of the part of the program that enabled them to find precious sobriety.

The way we experience our first A.A. meeting at an A.A. group, the contacts we make as members of A.A., the way our lives develop after we get to that first group are a true watershed, dividing our lives into "before" and "after." We come to appreciate the spirituality of the A.A. program even more.

I did not know anything about the A.A. Fellowship until I went to my first meeting. Many of us have no idea what this is about when we first come around. This may have been due to a failure to communicate what our program is about. But most importantly, I did know there was a place where people who had a problem with alcohol could be treated.

A meeting happens when two or more people get together to develop, understand and learn about a specific topic or topics having to do with the program of Alcoholics Anonymous. For me, it was the first time in my life that I met people who were not asking anything of me, but only cared about my welfare. Today, after a long time, I know for sure that what I felt at those first meetings was selfless love, coming from people who did not know me, and this was what made me stay. I was attracted by what they had. What I saw in those meetings and in this particular group gave me peace, the peace I had been looking for, for so long.

Our Fellowship and the program have many types of meetings. The most common formats are open meetings, closed meetings and topic meetings. As we know, many of these meetings help us deepen the knowledge that comes from our principles. Some of these topic meetings, for instance, helped me to understand even more deeply the meaning of the Concepts for World Service.

Being surrounded by A.A. members who had various service positions, and, especially by our trustees, helped me learn what the Concepts were about. I remember many oldtimers sharing humbly and quietly the essence of service to the Fellowship, and how important it was to understand what they were saying.

There were meetings with oldtimers that allowed me to see the other side, those things I had no understanding about because of my lack of experience or lack of knowledge regarding spiritual principles. These principles propel you to give back and to turn your life over to this Fellowship. As they say, the Fellowship does not ask much of you; it demands everything.



And this, I came to understand, required a complete emotional and spiritual surrender to this simple, yet immense, program.

Later on, I understood that there is no recovery without an A.A. group. It is at meetings where we learn and come to understand, step by step, how to live our recovery, which is a life-long process. At A.A. groups we hear people tell newcomers to keep coming back, that the key to sobriety and happiness will be revealed at the following meeting. This is helpful because those who are just beginning often start coming regularly to meetings, and this allows the program to enter slowly into their lives and enable a transformation.

The essence of the program is something we can feel at A.A. meetings. And whenever we stop to look at how our lives have evolved, we look back at the way we thought about A.A. principles at the beginning and how that has changed over time. It is truly a pleasant and life-giving experience to feel that difference and witness the amazing transformation.

My wonderful spiritual encounter with my Higher Power took place at a meeting where I felt and lived His presence, which allowed me to understand the true meaning of the spirituality of the A.A. program and what it means to live according to these principles. Drop by drop, as I attended one meeting after another at my home group, like drops of nectar becoming honey, my whole life became consumed with the sweetness of recovery, along a road illuminated by the light of God.

Lastly, an A.A. group is the physical place where two or more A.A. members get together to work toward a virtuous common goal, the recovery of the alcoholic who still suffers. And meetings are pleasant encounters where our message is passed on, to ensure that the wonderful principles that the A.A. Fellowship makes available to those inside and outside, and to those who are yet to come, are shared.

Juan D. — Paraguay

The Value of Women's Meetings

Tēnā koutou. My name is Pip, and I'm an alcoholic and a first-term World Service delegate from Aotearoa/New Zealand. I've been invited to give a presentation on the topic "The Value of Women's Meetings."

In 1939, after reading *Alcoholics Anonymous* while a sanitarium patient in Greenwich, Connecticut, Marty M. started attending meetings at 182 Clinton Street. She became the first woman in Alcoholics Anonymous to achieve lasting sobriety. Two years later, the first known all-women's group was founded in Cleveland in 1941, making it A.A.'s inaugural specialized-interest group. Women in New York, Minneapolis, Salt Lake City and San Diego soon followed suit, and by the mid-1940s, the ratio of women to men in the A.A. population was roughly one in six. Women's groups lit the way for other specialized groups, which eventually included those for young people, the elderly, LGBGTI folk, doctors, lawyers and other professionals.

The foreword to the third edition of *Alcoholics Anonymous* states, "Women now make up more than one-fourth of the membership; among newer members, the proportion is nearly one-third." In the 2014 membership survey of the United States and Canada, women made up 38 percent of the 6,000 members surveyed. This percentage seems similar to the United Kingdom's 2015 membership survey, where 40 percent of respondents identified as women.

I was unable to find results for any other countries, and I apologize for this. I realize that percentages will vary from country to country and culture to culture, and I'd be grateful if anyone has information about numbers of women members in their countries. What is clear, though, is that at least in the United States and Canada, there has been a steady growth of people who identify as women in the Fellowship of A.A. since Marty M. attended her first meeting in 1939. The ratio of men to women still falls below that of the general population,



where women age 24–54 make up around 50 percent of the U.S. population.

In 2016, almost 700 A.A. members from Aotearoa New Zealand participated in a survey of the Fellowship. Of those 700 members, 47 percent identified as women (women make up 50 percent of the Aotearoa New Zealand general population). Of the 489 weekly meetings registered with the New Zealand General Service Office, 11 are women's meetings.

In June this year, I set up an online survey called "The Value of Women's Meetings." Using my A.A. networks, I asked women to respond to the survey and pass it on to other women A.A. members. Sixty-five people responded. Out of those, 38 were currently attending women's meetings. Out of the 27 not currently attending women's meetings, 25 reported having attended women's meetings in the past. Respondents reported attending women's meetings in the United States, Italy, Aotearoa New Zealand, Slovenia, the United Kingdom, Australia, Singapore, the Netherlands and online. In addition to the survey, I received two emails from members who were attending women's meetings.

In the survey, I asked three questions: "What is the value of women's meetings to your sobriety?", "What is the value of women's meetings to the newcomer?" and "What is the value of women's meetings to the Fellowship as a whole?" In the questions concerning the value to individual members and newcomers, respondents identified three main benefits offered by women's meetings: safety, an ability to share women-specific experiences, and an opportunity to form friendships with other women.

When speaking about safety, respondents talked mainly about safety from sexual harassment and assault. Respondents reported personal and observed experience of sexual harassment or assault from men in meetings, primarily directed at newcomers. There were several comments about newcomers who had left A.A. after these incidents. One respondent identified women's meetings as "a safe place for women to inform the newcomer about sexual predators." A few respondents disagreed with this idea, commenting that women were as capable of sexual harassment as men and that "we need to leave it to God what people's paths are. We have to learn that the solution lies not in another person but our relationship with God, and sometimes those lessons are learnt painfully." On

the whole, however, most respondents saw women's meetings as having value as a place of safety from sexual harassment or assault.

Respondents also said women's meetings had value as a place of safety from the distraction of their own behaviors around men. One respondent commented that women's meetings were "a way to learn how to be oneself in recovery without the confusing personae of sexuality, of having to make a sexual partner your higher power." Respondents commented about the ability to share details about their drinking and sobriety, which they felt unsafe sharing in mixed meetings. One member commented, "Women's drinking is often different to men's; the things that happen to us are different. It's not possible to say these things in mixed meetings." Several

respondents spoke about women's meetings having particular value to women who had been assaulted by men in their past. Also expressed was the opposing view that "our book says we share in a general way at meetings. Personal stuff should be limited to sponsors, not meetings."

Respondents commented frequently about the value of women's meetings for developing and maintaining strong relationships with other women in A.A. "It can help to (re)connect women with women, as sometimes they have seen other women as rivals, or have not been able to relate well with them." One respondent described women's meetings as "a place to relate to other sober women and find a sponsor." Of interest to me was the comment that women's meetings were "very safe and necessary to overcome old thinking about self-loathing." Responses to the question concerning the value of women's meetings to the Fellowship as a whole talked about how many women's meetings focused on literature and had a strong A.A. message. For instance, "The women's meeting I went to for ten years was also a Steps and Traditions meeting, so I learned a lot and shared at other meetings directly from the Steps. Also, this was passed on to sponsees, who in turn had a quality sobriety that was shared at other meetings." Most respondents talked about the importance of going to meetings other than special-interest meetings and that the value of women's meetings was, in this way, shared with the Fellowship as whole. "Having women support women builds strength in sobriety that will ultimately be shared in open meetings."

Looking to the future, it will be interesting to see the extent to which women's meetings will continue to be valuable. In Aotearoa New Zealand there is a societal shift away from the gender binaries of men and women. This is reflected in the Fellowship, and although many gender nonconforming members feel comfortable at mixed and LGBTQI meetings, it seems important that women's meetings continue to welcome all members who identify as women. It will be interesting to see if the ratio of women to men in A.A. continues to grow (I attend many meetings now where women outnumber men) and whether more women in A.A. will make women's meetings unnecessary. Likewise, maybe one day, mixed meetings will feel safe for everyone.

Pip A. — Aotearoa/New Zealand

Special Purpose Meetings and the Third Tradition

My name is Jiri and I am an alcoholic. I'm also gay. And the adult child of two alcoholics. I have four brothers. My mother died when I was 17 and when she was 40. She died of cirrhosis of the liver. She deliberately overdosed herself with diazepam and alcohol. My father died in similar circumstances 14 years afterwards. All my life they had been emotionally disconnected from us and for me to understand who I am, accepting who I am, identifying myself with other people who have a similar fate and similar foundations was vital.

When I came to A.A. in 2012 and I said for the first time in my life that I was an alcoholic, I felt great relief. That's because I felt a sense of understanding and identification with other people who were with me at that meeting. But I also had a strong feeling of *dèjà vu*. The feeling of acceptance and relief of admitting who I am and also of admitting to people who were also alcoholics was the feeling I experienced during my 19th birthday when I first confessed to my classmates that I was gay.

This sense of identification with other alcoholics and their sharing was like a cleansing shower and started my healing process because the more I talk about my secrets and inner pains aloud, the more their power is lost. I begin to free myself from the bondage of myself and I begin to accept more and more. Because recovering to me is about being fully accepting of myself.

In the beginning, I would like to say that my recovery was based on "common" co-ed meetings. The Czech Republic is a very small country (10 million people) and therefore also a small A.A. Fellowship (60 groups). But we are so far in our development that we have special male and female meetings in addition to classical co-ed meetings. I was also looking for LGBT meetings (lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transsexuals), but in vain. I could not even find a single gay. People in the community told me that if I desired to recover, it does not matter what kind of meetings I'm attending. This is true, and also my recovery is not based on attending LGBT meetings, such as the ones that are widespread throughout the U.S., for instance. However, my desire to share my intimate things from the past in the sexual area with people who would understand got stronger. The break-even point occurred at the moment when I and my sponsor came to sexual inventories. At that time, I already had contacts through Facebook, where I found a secret Gay and Sober group (which today has almost 10,000 members) and there I found a sponsor who went with me through a sex inventory via Skype.

My sense of identification has multiplied since then. Finally, I can talk openly about everything. Sexual abuse of others and by others, prostitu-

tion, promiscuity with men and sex on drugs. It was out and it was communicated to someone who understood these things because he knew them.

Can you imagine sharing such a thing with a heterosexual man, who also believes that there is no space in A.A. for special purpose meetings and furthermore these meetings are against Traditions? That women's meetings are just excuses for not doing the program properly, conscientiously and honestly? Believe me, such men (and, of course, women) are still prevalent in A.A. all over the world. Their intolerance stems from ignorance, but above all from the fear that their image of a safe A.A. world will collapse.

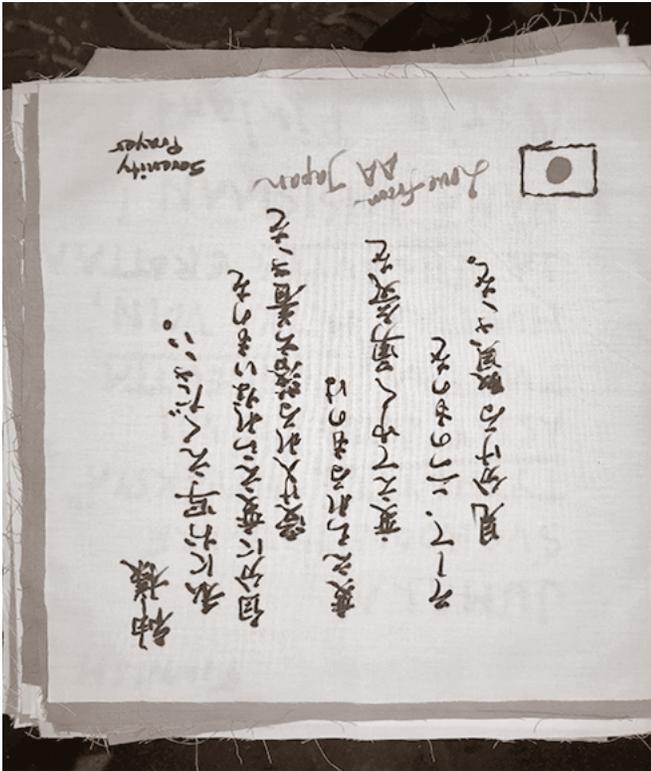
This is precisely what Bill W. writes about in his amazing book, *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, in a chapter on the Third Tradition that tells us in short version that the only requirement for A.A. membership is the desire to stop drinking:

'We were resolved to admit nobody to A.A. but that hypothetical class of people we termed "pure alcoholics." Except for their guzzling, and the unfortunate results thereof, they could have no other complications. So beggars, tramps, asylum inmates, prisoners, queers, plain crackpots, and fallen women were definitely out. Yes sir, we'd cater *only* to pure and respectable alcoholics! Any others would surely destroy us. Besides, if we took in those odd ones, what would decent people say about us? We built a fine-mesh fence right around A.A.

'Maybe this sounds comical now. Maybe you think we old-timers were pretty intolerant. But I can tell you there was nothing funny about the situation then. We were grim because we felt our lives and homes were threatened, and that was no laughing matter. Intolerant, you say? Well, we were frightened. Naturally, we began to act like most everybody does when afraid. After all, isn't fear the true basis of intolerance? Yes, we were intolerant.'

How could we then guess that all those fears were to prove groundless? How could we know that thousands of these sometimes frightening people were to make astonishing





recoveries and become our greatest workers and intimate friends? Was it credible that A.A. was to have a divorce rate far lower than average? Could we then foresee that troublesome people were to become our principle teachers of patience and tolerance? Could any then imagine a society which would include every conceivable kind of character, and cut across every barrier of race, creed, politics, and language with ease?

Why did A.A. finally drop all its membership regulations? Why did we leave it to each newcomer to decide himself whether he was an alcoholic and whether he should join us? Why did we dare say, contrary to the experience of society and government everywhere, that we would neither punish nor deprive any A.A. of membership, that we must never compel anyone to pay anything, believe anything, or conform to anything?

The answer, now seen in Tradition Three, was simplicity itself. At last experience taught us that to take away any alcoholic's full chance was sometimes to pronounce his death sentence, and often to condemn him to endless misery. Who dared to be judge, jury, and executioner of his own sick brother?

I admit that I do not know exactly what year these lines are from. However, they are at least 70 years old. Yet, in the Fellowship of A.A., there is still a certain kind of intolerance over meetings on a special topic. There are even countries that do not tolerate separate men's and women's meetings, let alone meetings of gays, lesbians, transgenders, pilots, doctors, black, black and gay, lawyers, agnostics, etc.

I have studied available literature, brochures, texts and pamphlets concerning the Third Tradition, and the conclusions are very simple: "Some A.A.'s come together as special-

ized A.A. groups — for men and women, young people, doctors, gays and others. If the members are alcoholics, and if they open the door to all alcoholics who seek help, regardless of profession, gender or other distinction, and meet all the other aspects defining an A.A. group, they may call themselves an A.A. group."

According to other texts (the whole wording of the Third Tradition and the Fifth Tradition), there are only two conditions: that the group is not associated with any other organization and that the group has only the primary purpose of sharing the message with an alcoholic who still suffers (meaning any alcoholic who wants to go to a meeting can't be refused from the meeting).

I made a simple questionnaire and sent it to the world through secret Facebook groups — YPAA groups, LGBT groups, Travelers in A.A., etc. — and I received very interesting answers from different parts of the world. One of the questions was: *Have you ever been rejected from any "special-purpose" meeting? And, Was that in conformity with a Third Tradition? How did it happen?*

None of the respondents replied that he or she had ever been rejected at any time from an A.A. meeting with a special topic without explanation or without offering another meeting at a similar time in the given place. One, for example, replied: "I turned up at a women's meeting in error. I was refused entry to the meeting. However, I was given clear directions to the nearby regular meeting of A.A." I think this is also a guide on how to have a special meeting while not breaking the Fifth Tradition.

Another woman who traveled the world answered:

Since I got sober at 20 (I am now 53), I have visited lots and lots of women's meetings, young people's meetings, LGBT meetings. I've been to meetings in Harlem with prominently black attendance but have never encountered a meeting for "Black people ONLY." I've always been mostly welcomed in those. I've listened in at "pilots' meetings" ("Birds of a Feather" these are called). I've also been to meetings on Indian reservations and "Artists in A.A." meetings. I've never been asked to leave. I haven't tried our local "Men's Sunday Big Book meeting" at noon here in Berlin, but why would I, since my home group, also a BB meeting meets at 12:30 a.m. and I am very much involved there. I am confident that these men would allow me to stay (or kindly and responsibly direct me to another meeting) if I were new and in danger of drinking. I have never been excluded from my any of those meetings nor have I ever seen anyone be excluded.

Another Spanish-speaking lady replied: "I accidentally walked into a men's meeting and was gently told so, but was not told that I couldn't stay if needed it — but there was a regular meeting afterwards so I waited outside for it."

At this point in my presentation, I would like to summarize my study: that special purpose meetings are in compliance with the Third Tradition unless the group/meeting violates the Fifth Tradition; that they are open to anyone who claims to be an alcoholic and wants to stop drinking.

I would like to rethink again why the meetings are important for the individuals, what brings them, why there are alcoholics with a need for such specific purpose meetings around the world?

From the questionnaires, the need is clear: identification and the feeling of safety. It is obvious that alcoholism is a disease of denial. It is a fairly common phenomenon that when an alcoholic is sober and begins to heal, that person wakes up from living in denial to reality. I met and heard about dozens of men and women who, after getting sober, realized their different sexual orientation or even a different gender. LGBT meetings help these men and women both in healing from alcoholism, but also in accepting their long-disputed differences.

At the last EURYPAA (European Young People A.A. Convention), which took place at the end of June 2018 in Vilnius, Lithuania, I visited the LGBT meeting. There were people from different corners of advanced Western Europe, but also from less developed Eastern Europe. There was, for example, a man who said that he had come to the program as an AI-Anon, but later on, through the attraction of the program, he got to the LGBT A.A. meeting and thanks to this, realized he was a woman in a male body, and became a transgender woman. Another Swedish lesbian said she couldn't relate with male or female meetings; she was unable to identify with sharing from both, but when she attends LGBT meetings, it feels like home. Another British lesbian said she feels bad for those of us in Eastern Europe who may not have so many special purpose meetings because she has LGBT meetings on every corner.

And I also love this from the lady I already mentioned:

It's not so much the specificity of those meetings that make a "good meeting." When the meetings are well structured, when recovery is spoken, when Traditions are honored, they are excellent meetings just like any other meetings. I feel that those "special purpose meetings" are very important. Women open up more easily, the identification is very high. Young people's meetings are beautiful as young people tend to have so much energy and power and enthusiasm, I love that specific power! LGBT meetings have a rare degree of honesty (sometimes) and openness, especially in sexual matters. The one "agnostic" meeting I attended in NYC was terrible for me because all the talk was about how terrible the God idea is. Hahahaha. To me, the two pilots'

meetings I attended were hilarious because it was all about what amazing planes these people had flown. The meeting on the Indian reservation was overwhelming, deep and beautiful, and the sage cleansing at the beginning of the meeting deeply moving. I was made very welcome!

Another gay man from Ohio in the U.S. wrote in my questionnaire:

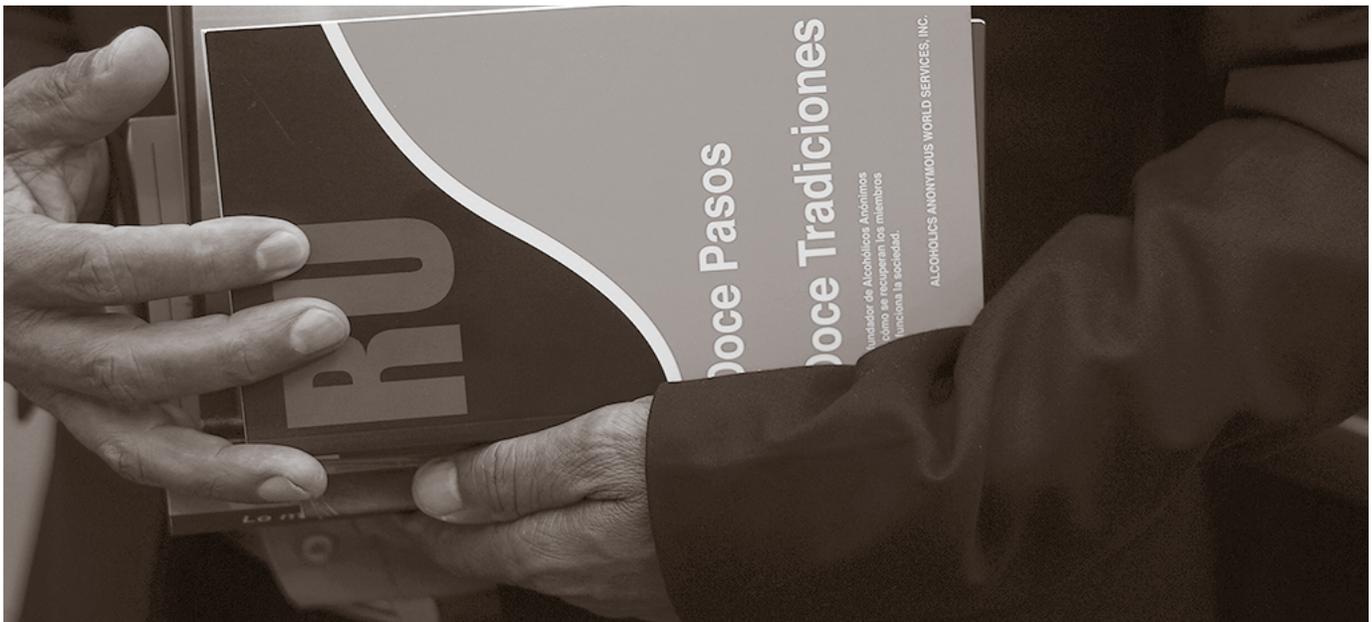
I could see that those who oppose such meetings, I do see their point — but only to a point — may feel that our identification at the level of our disease should be sufficient ground to address niche issues. However, in practice, when I was in early recovery, I found it difficult to share about such issues that profoundly affected my life — and as a corollary, my recovery. I hope that there may come a time when our society progresses to the point where special purpose meetings are obsolete. However, that time is not yet upon us.

This is, therefore, a message to those who are still intolerant of diversity in A.A. communities of any kind, even though it does not contradict any A.A. tradition: How do you want to attract more alcoholic women to the community when your mind does not accept any differences? How do you want to be closer to transgender alcoholics when you do not even allow women to talk about their specific problems at their meetings?

To me, A.A. is the Fellowship that connects all sorts of differences. And I think it's beautiful. There is definitely a place for diversity in a united A.A. simply because everyone suffers from alcoholism regardless of gender, skin color, religion, occupation, education, sexual orientation, social status, etc.

As I already have mentioned, there are even countries that do not recognize separate men and women meetings. But life is stronger than the intolerance of individuals or communities or nations. After all, it is a question of time, healing and spiritual growth not only of individuals but of nations and entire societies — growth from fear, threats and intolerance to tolerance, acceptance and love.

Jiri H. — Czech Republic



Country Service Highlights



Argentina: Respected world leaders of our spiritual fellowship, greetings in the name of all the anonymous alcoholics of my country! My name is Alberto, and I am an alcoholic. By the grace of God, I am no longer drinking, and I am living a life I never thought I could lead. A.A. gave me this new life, thanks to a loving God, in whom I did not formerly believe. In fact, I think that my faith is often attacked without mercy by my ego. Can the alcoholic ego be the cause making it impossible to develop A.A. and oneself?

Highlights of events taking place for the Fellowship in my country in recent years:

- Second chairman of A.A. Argentina, Class A trustee, non-alcoholic
- Formation of two boards of trustees (GSB and Publications)
- Development of the use of means of communication between officials (mail, WhatsApp, Internet)
- Agreements to cooperate free of affiliation with different sectors of society (health entities, the church, corrections, cultural activities, such as book fairs, etc.)
- Active participation in international service, attending the WSM, REDELA meeting, national conferences, forums, conventions and roundups in other structures
- Argentina, host of the 21st REDELA meeting, from September 29 to October 3 of 2019, "Serving Together to Meet our Goal"
- Uniting borders with neighboring countries and working together to carry the message
- First chair of the GSO, alcoholic for 21 years
- Moving GSO to a larger space in three phases of adjustment, the first having been completed and now undertaking the final step of the second phase
- Field work: board trips throughout Argentina to visit

groups, districts and areas, wherever requested

- More communication with and participation in board committees on the part of regional trustees
- Sponsorship between areas and within the entire structure
- Mexico's sponsorship of our structure
- Sponsorship activities for neighboring structures
- Board forms technology committee (in initial phase), which becomes the department of digital technology of the General Services Office
- Budgets for the 2018–2019 period of the international and regional committees
- Carrying out regional forums, three per year
- Tenth National Convention in 2022 to be held in the central region of the country, Córdoba
- Anniversary of the arrival of the message in Argentina, along with regional forums in strategic zones in the interior of the country
- United States, Mexico and Colombia are invited to our Conference for the first time
- Extend our Conference by two workdays
- Board auditing committee project to get contract for external auditing services
- Contract programmers to create digital communication and maintain web page
- Foster formation of leaders and starting new groups

These are some of the highlights of activities that A.A. Argentina is developing in order to fulfill a single purpose: that Alcoholics Anonymous be present in every city, locality and corner of our country, saving lives today and in the future. So be it, if it be His will.

Carlos A. C.

Australia: The inaugural Australasian Convention of Alcoholics Anonymous, with Al-Anon participation, was held on the island of Fiji at Easter, and the event proved to be a huge success. The program began with a Public Information Day that ran from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and attracted 170 local visitors, many of whom were members of the Fijian professional community. These included the minister of health, a representative from the Fiji Society of Medical Practitioners, the minister of education, and a doctor from the World Health Organization, as well as representatives from correctional services and other local government agencies.

Many of the professionals in attendance had little or no prior knowledge of Alcoholics Anonymous and were impressed with the information presented to them. Along with the formal presentations, the day's program allowed plenty of time for A.A. members to interact with the professionals and members of the public who attended. There was a sit-down lunch and catered morning and afternoon tea breaks, where everyone shared food and fellowship. Many of the locals who attended were able to do so as the result of a fundraising drive held in the months leading up to the event. "Sponsor a Fijian" was generously supported by A.A. members and groups in Australia and raised the money needed to pay the travel costs for Fijians from outlying villages and islands to attend the Public Information Day.

The success of the Public Information Day was evidenced in the fact that many of those who attended returned for subsequent sessions of the convention and a lot of Twelfth Step work was done over coffee or in hotel rooms. The Al-Anon message was also well received, and a group of Fijians have committed to starting that program locally. For A.A. and Al-Anon members, the rest of the Convention was spent in meetings and fellowship, made all the more enjoyable by the knowledge that we had fulfilled our primary obligation to carry the A.A. message to "anyone, anywhere [who] reaches out"! The spiritual gift those in attendance got from the event was summed up by the chairman of the board in his closing speech when he said, "We came to give, and give we did!" There is no greater privilege in A.A.

Over the past year, we have been back in contact with the Solomon Islands and see the starting of a group in Honiara [capital city of the Solomon Islands] and the holding of the groundwork of one group on the island of Malaita.

Brian S.

Belarus: This year, A.A. Belarus celebrated its 28th birthday.

This report represents the key aspects of our national service structure:

1. Publication of A.A. literature in Belarus
2. Service structure maintenance costs
3. Low group contributions and lack of trust in the service structure

From 2006 to 2014, we cooperated with the General Service Office of A.A. in Russia (RSO) and acquired literature from them. Then A.A. Belarus obtained a license from A.A.W.S., Inc., for publication and distribution of A.A. literature in Russian in the Republic of Belarus, and two years ago, we published our first 1,000 paperback copies of *Alcoholics Anonymous* and *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* in Russian. It is great progress for us.

Service costs are covered by group contributions and book sales. Donations come at irregular intervals, and not all groups contribute. Unfortunately, the rent and utility bills are so high that group contributions are not enough to cover all the costs. Due to a rent increase, we had to move our office to a cheaper room. In accordance with the legislation of the Republic of Belarus, our public association (which is the form of incorporation of our legal entity) has no right to sell books. Therefore, we had to register as a subsidiary licensed to sell A.A. literature. This created some additional costs. Now we are looking for possible ways out of the crisis.

Few A.A. members understand why they need the office, and most groups are not willing to contribute to the maintenance of the office. We have to recognize that we have not yet informed the groups and some individual members sufficiently well so that they understand the need for and the advantages of the office and its function, and the importance of the service as a whole. We plan to conduct some additional activities in order to raise awareness within the Fellowship. I believe that groups will change their opinion over time.

Aliaksei Y.

Dutch-speaking Belgium: The 338 registered groups and 410 meetings of the Dutch-speaking Belgian Fellowship have a well-organized structure. The General Service Board supports and encourages everyone in carrying out the resolutions of the General Service Conference.

The Aldinea-Bel Association is a registered and legally recognized nonprofit-making association that acts as a corporate body to represent and manage the business of A.A.; this is in accordance with Belgian legal requirements. The association is also responsible for the operation of our General Service Office. Our General Service Office, located in Antwerp, coordinates the central offices and is mainly an administrative unit. There is one salaried (nonalcoholic) staff member. All the other work is done by unpaid A.A. volunteers. The five provinces make contributions to the treasurer of the General Service Board. These funds come mainly from group contributions, the sale of literature, and our yearly convention.

Our 21st General Service Conference (two days) was held in March 2018. The theme was "A.A. in the Future." Sixty-one A.A. members took part in the Conference. The final Conference report goes to all groups. The 22nd Conference is scheduled for March 2020, with the theme "A.A. Can Make the Difference."

Our yearly national convention of 2018 took place in Genk (province Limburg) with the theme "An Open Mind." The aim of our national convention is to have a "get-together" feeling for all A.A. members, their families and their friends. There is always a spontaneous expression of happy sobriety and thankfulness. It is also a day of celebration and for meeting old friends. Our yearly convention rotates from province to province, and next year it is the turn of West Flanders, which has already presented the theme of "Sober — Happy — Helping."

The editorial board of our magazine *Five to Twelve* publishes ten issues a year, with a circulation of some 1,900 copies per issue. Our magazine is fully supported by texts that we receive from our members. We also have a Literature Committee responsible for the translation, development and updating of our literature, brochures and pamphlets. Our distribution center is responsible for disseminating A.A. literature and the

monthly magazine. A.A. Flanders has also recently developed an online webstore.

The Public Information Committee occupies an important place within our structure. The main task of this committee is to provide information about the A.A. recovery program to the general public and to those who are professionally involved with the problem of alcoholism. It is a busy and buoyant service that provides many information sessions, talks, contact meetings, etc. The service is constantly seeking up-to-date ways of communication to reach the right audience. They cannot use the A.A. language that is spoken among A.A. members, but they need to present the message in words and images that are understood by and attract the target group. Matters like these are discussed on a regular basis.

The Internet workgroup is responsible for the maintenance of our website and is also working on improvements like online registration for weekends, online web shopping, and a digital version of our magazine. There is also a private part for members only, where they can see all minutes of meetings.

What Are Our Challenges in 2018?

Today, people live fast and are more focused on their freedom as an individual. We face problems because in A.A., things do not change so fast, and it sometimes takes a long period before decisions are made.

Our services are understaffed. This is dangerous for proper functioning of A.A.

Eddy P. and Etienne M.

Bolivia: Thirteen delegates, five trustees, and the two staff members of the General Services Office attended the XXVII General Services Conference of 2018. It approved an Advisory Action that calls for the election of one-term and two-term delegates, as required in the Service Manual of the United States and Canada, which we have adapted. This prerequisite is related to the requirement that delegates participate in the Conference for two years and the plenary session be composed of two-thirds delegates in order to ensure continuity in the service tasks from one Conference to the next.

We are working on the Service Manual of Bolivia and modifying the statutes in order to adapt them to those of the United States and Canada. These will be referred for consideration to the collective conscience of the Special Conference on October 12 of this year. We hope that it will serve as the road map for all the servants of the structure and that, in the short term, we'll be able to get the General Service Conference to operate all year-round through the trusted servants and leaders of the country. With the manual now ratified, the legal procedure has to be carried out in order to update the statutes and legal framework in accord with the laws of the Multinational State of Bolivia. The 2020 Plan for Growth will also be discussed in forums, congresses and workshops at the national, regional and local levels. The discussion will be based on our Three Legacies for strengthening the spiritual growth of our members and proper functioning of groups and for greater participation, in a spirit of unity, in self-support and service activities.

The Conference committees are formed in accordance with the Service Manual of the United States and Canada and, since 2016, with the help of our sponsors from the Colombia

structure. We are working toward a better understanding of the tasks that need to be carried out in our structure so that its members more conscientiously take on the responsibilities and authority delegated to them by the Fellowship as a whole through the Conference. Quarterly meetings are not yet being held. The General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous of Bolivia (J.U.S.G.A.A.B., after its initials in Spanish) is made up of seven trustees: three Class A and three Class B trustees representing the regions and one Class B trustee from General Services. Currently, six trustees are active: four Class B and two Class A. The board of trustees meets three times a year. The board's permanent committees are in place but have yet to start the practice of meetings and joint work with the committees of the Conference.

Country-to-country sponsorship is bearing fruit. During 2017 and 2018, greater awareness was reached of the responsibilities of the standing committees of the Conference and the board prior to and following the Conferences, as well as the importance of joint meetings, all in order to carry out Advisory Actions and the running and development of the Fellowship as a whole. The experience gained through the participation of a delegate from Bolivia in the 54th Conference of the Colombia structure will also contribute to their implementation.

The General Services Office operates with two paid specialized workers, the director and the secretary, working on a full-time basis. The *Volver a Nacer (Born Again)* journal was approved by the 2018 Conference, and the recently published first issue was the responsibility of a Class B trustee. The boards called for in the Service Manual have not yet been put in place. The General Service Office has been implementing a new mode of operating since August of 2017. A new director and new secretary were appointed, and a new approach to its real owners, i.e., the groups, was set up. There are constant communication and up-to-date reports. This has brought good results, judging by the response of the members of the Fellowship. After 15 years of operations in a small space, in January of 2018, the office is working out of a larger and better-located place.

External auditing was conducted of the work of fiscal year 2017, and the resulting recommendations of the statutory auditor were implemented. Since January 2018, initial inventory has been taken of the existing assets, and an accounting system in line with standard accounting and auditing practices has been set up in which quarterly reports are made and are backed up by banking statements. The sources of income for operations are the following: voluntary contributions, literature sales and surplus income from A.A. events around the country. Improvement is necessary in all three means of acquiring income in order to keep growing and fulfilling all three of these assigned duties. At the present time, these revenues only cover the expense of salaries and maintenance of the office. They do not defray the cost of trips that the trustees should make as servants of the structure throughout the country and invitations to international A.A. meetings, such as REDELA and WSM, and by other structures. In many instances, the delegates themselves are obliged to cover the expenses themselves or find outside sponsors. We wish to express our gratitude to the organizers of this World Service Meeting and to Germany, whose sponsorship made Bolivia's presence here possible. Bolivian delegates took part in the 2007 Meeting of the Americas in Brazil, 2011 in El Salvador, 2013 in Salinas, Ecuador, 2015 in Mexico, and 2017 in Costa Rica.

We do not presently have a web page, which is such a valuable instrument of information and of carrying the A.A. message. We anticipate setting one up this year in order to meet this pressing need and implement the Advisory Action to that effect.
Eduardo R. V.

Brazil: Seventy years of A.A. in Brazil: The task of public information has benefited in large part from all the new tools of communication of our times. For instance, we created the “chatbot” character Anonymous Friend. We are trying to broaden the perspective of A.A. among the professional community and society as a whole, educating them about the unique role Alcoholics Anonymous can play in helping other alcoholics by sharing with them our experience in recovery from alcoholism through the practice of the spiritual principles of A.A.

The 41st and 42nd General Service Conferences (2017 and 2018): We have gained three new areas and now have 5,008 groups, 566 districts, 79 local services offices, 43 areas, six regions, and the General Service Office, which has been operating since August of 2015 in Tatuapé, capital of the state of São Paulo. This property has four floors, which means more space for the use of the board, the office and committees. It includes a hall for the historical archives. There are also 284 groups operating in institutions. The total number of members in Brazil is estimated at 100,000, but the Conference has recommended that an inventory be taken (via a survey) so that the whole Fellowship may know how many we really are. With every review and modification of the Service Manual, we get closer and closer to the model of the United States and Canada structure. We are taking inventory guided by that of the U.S./Canada Conference, with 48 questions. In 2017 and 2018, 32 of the questions were analyzed in four workshops. We will conclude with the study of the remaining 16 questions in 2019.

Country invited to the 41st Conference: Paraguay, Class B trustee-at-large, Juan G., WSM delegate.

Countries invited to the 42nd Conference: Paraguay, Class

B trustee-at-large, Pedro A., WSM delegate, and Mexico, Class B trustees-at-large, from the Southern Territory, Miquey C. R., second-term WSM delegate, and Jorge L. T., first-term WSM delegate, from the Northern Territory.

Literature and Publications: Up to now, we have published 20 books, 49 brochures and 10 pieces of service literature. In 2017, the text “Step by Step” was released, and another one, “Always Cooperate,” was edited and released. In 2018, the book *Home Group* was translated and released. We have a virtual store for the purchase of literature and the digital journal *Vivência*. The name of our journal, *Vivência*, means “life experience” in Portuguese, and it has now been in existence for 32 years. It is published every two months with a circulation of 8,000 copies, and it is mailed to all the subscribers. We have two periodicals (*JUNAAB Informs* and *Bob Mural*), which are published quarterly and are sent to all the groups through our local service offices.

International Events: Our two national delegates attended the XX REDELA (Meeting of the Americas), held in San José, Costa Rica, October 1–5, 2017, as well as the XXIII National Convention of Bolivia, held in Santa Cruz de la Sierra in 2017, and the XXV General Service Conference of Paraguay in 2018. We hosted the Three Frontiers Roundup (Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay) on April 8–9, 2017, in Foz do Iguazú in the state of Paraná, with 150 persons in attendance. We also participated in the seventh Three Frontiers Roundup on April 7–8, 2018, in Ciudad de Este, Paraguay, as well as the literature events in that country in 2017 and 2018. We usually make our contribution to the International Literature Fund in December, consisting of \$2,000 U.S. yearly.

Nivaldo G.

Central America Northern Zone: We continue to update the design for our Alcoholics Anonymous web page of the Northern Zone countries, which makes available current services and information. We have close ties of communication with the General Services Boards of Central America, especial-



ly with those of the Northern Zone: El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Belize, taking part through observers in the different Annual Conferences undertaken by those countries. Three countries of the Northern Zone — El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras — are sponsoring the structure of the Republic of Belize, which has made considerable strides, having already formed its own General Services Board. In May 2017, the Northern Zone meeting was held in the fraternal country of Belize, with the participation of three representatives each from Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and the host country, Belize, as well as that of the World Services delegate of the Northern Zone.

We are developing a census of A.A. groups and members in the countries making up the Northern Zone with a view to having more precise and updated information. We are developing a new adaptation of the service manuals of the Northern Zone countries to conform to that of the Service Manual of the United States and Canada.

Francisco R.

Central America Southern Zone: The Southern Zone of Central America is made up of the structures of Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Panama. First-term delegate representation to the WSM for the period 2018–2022 falls to Costa Rica. This responsibility is rotated every four years, in accordance with the statutes established by the conscience of the Southern Zone. Therefore, the following report contains the service highlights of all three structures.

Costa Rica: The 20th REDELA meeting was celebrated in October of 2017, bringing us a wonderful experience and allowing us to learn a great deal for the common good of A.A. The 38th Central America Convention was held March 29–31 of this year with the participation of many members, national as well as foreign. The sharing and learning of all the participants made the Convention a complete success.

We buy our literature from A.A. World Services, Inc., and the fraternal country of El Salvador. We put out our own *National Action Journal* every two months, as well as approximately 8,000 copies of the brochure *Breve Información*. In the upcoming months, we will have to edit the new general services manual, that, in earlier Conference meetings, it was decided, should follow the model of the United States and Canada manual as closely as possible. We are currently cooperating with the Restorative Justice program of the courts that consists of alternative measures for administering justice. Public Information is actively disseminated through radio stations. We created our own web page, aacostarrica.org, which carries A.A. information at the national level.

Nicaragua: At present, our structure is developing the following tasks:

- Carrying out public information aimed at society in general on the recovery program by circulating free of charge *Our Voice* magazine via radio stations;
- The Institutions Committee coordinates information services for institutional centers (prisons and hospitals), a task for which the area committees and the Intergroup/central offices are directly responsible;
- There are at least 22 institutional groups;
- The coordination of cooperation work with the courts and state institutions has improved; the work involves re-

ferred citizens who break the law under the influence of alcohol to groups;

- The resistance of some group members to receiving people sent by the courts has decreased;
- We are purchasing literature from A.A.W.S. of New York in order to distribute it to the Fellowship in our country;
- At the present time, we are taking advantage of technology (the Internet), securing a website to which interested members of the general public have access;
- We are developing communication of A.A. members with the GSO and different areas of the country through email and Whatsapp;
- We have started to work with professionals through the recently formed Cooperation with the Professional Community committee, which was well received by the country's universities and professionals.

Panama: Our structure is currently carrying out the following tasks:

- Developing public information on the recovery program, through the radio for society at large and through television for professionals;
- The Institutions Committee coordinates the provision of information services to the Addiction Treatment Center;
- The coordination of cooperation work with the courts and state institutions has improved; the work involves referring citizens who break the law under the influence of alcohol to groups;
- We are purchasing literature from A.A.W.S. of New York in order to distribute it to the A.A. Fellowship in our country;
- At the present time, we take advantage of technology (the Internet), securing a website to which interested members of the general public have access;
- We are developing communication of the A.A. members with the GSO and different areas of the country through email and Whatsapp.

Miguel M.

Chile: The Alcoholics Anonymous Fellowship of Chile has 100 groups and about 1,100 members. Our structure presently consists of two territories (North and South) covering the whole country without trustee representation, three service regions (A, B and C) with two regional trustees each, 10 service areas, and 10 districts. There are nine area Central Offices in operation. Our General Service Conference meets once a year in May in Santiago de Chile, site of our General Service Office. Servants are elected following the procedure set in our Service Manual. Our General Service Board is made up of 10 trustees, two of whom are Class A, two regional trustees, and six General Service trustees. Meetings take place once a month to attend to the business of the Fellowship as a whole and to discuss progress made, and projects and policies to be met. There are also three joint meetings every year to evaluate and/or address everything related to the progress made in the implementation of the Advisory Actions approved in the annual Conference meeting. Delegates from throughout the country assigned to the various Conference committees and the trustees in charge of the GSB permanent committees participate.

The management board of General Service has been operating under a set structure since 2012. It consists of three Class B trustees (one acts as chair of the board), three non-trustee members and the manager of the GSO. This management board is focused on working very closely with the GSB and lends strong support to the work of the trustees of the board, as well as the GSO. The paid personnel of the General Service Office include a secretary and a manager. The office serves as the information center for nonalcoholics and takes care of the administrative operation and information for groups and areas, as described in the Service Manual.

In the course of this year, we have made important strides with respect to committee work: contacts in the national Health and Justice ministries and on two television channels. The work of the new service trustees since May of 2018 promises to fulfill, most of all, Twelfth Step work, with well-organized committees for that purpose. We have a website (www.alcoholicosanimos.cl) that presents clear and precise information. In addition, through the site our Fellowship is kept well informed about activities and events going on all over the country. We have a 24-hour telephone line open, with members of the Ad Hoc Committee always in attendance to take calls. At present, the Chilean fraternity is being sponsored by the Mexican structure. They are advising us without fail and efficiently, which we think has set us on our way to development. Our Fellowship does not have many members and groups at this point, but our participation in REDELA since 2007, as well as in the WSM, has helped us start to incorporate the elements that have let A.A. grow in other countries, building a better service structure little by little. The A.A. community in Chile is numerically small when it comes to groups and members, which brings with it financial struggle, but we believe we are well planted, with roots in Bill W.'s manual. This tells us we will grow and will be able to reach the whole country. Finally, a fraternal salute to each person attending this meeting, and we'd like to express our appreciation to the organizers of the WSM throughout time, who, through the decisions they made and their acts of inclusion, made possible our participation as representatives of Chile A.A. now.

Sandra H.

Colombia: We continue to work under the national plan to strengthen the structure. It is operational throughout the 2014–2022 period with the one main objective of “taking the A.A. message to the still-suffering alcoholic.” The plan includes areas such as Strengthening Groups, Servants, Leaders, Self-Support, Presence of A.A. in the Community, and the journal *El Mensaje (The Message)*. We have a website, www.cnAA.org.co, and a corporate email address, corporacionAA@une.net.co, as well as a free helpline (018000510522); it takes requests for assistance from all 51 areas and the groups operating in the country.

We continue to work for the financing of the A.A. national corporation. Surplus money has enabled the modernization of the GSO space. We are still working on building up the prudent reserve of the corporation, the equivalent of one year's income. The prudent reserve was established in 2012, and by 2017 it had reached a total of \$54,000. The contributions come from savings from literature sales, accounting for 48 percent of the total, and donations, which account for 52 percent of the total.

We are now in the midst of preparing for the celebration of our XI National Convention, with the motto “An Experience for Growth in Love and Service.” It will take place June 22–24, 2019, in the city of Cali. We are also celebrating the 80th anniversary of the Big Book, 84 years of A.A. in the world, and the 55th year of existence of General Services in Colombia.

It is the policy of our management team to be present by visiting all the areas and groups of the country and drawing closer, encouraging and supporting the implementation of board policies.

Reinaldo de J. M. P.

Cuba: Among the country highlights in Cuba over the past few years was the celebration of our Fourth Convention with the participation of members from Cuba and several other countries. Mary C., who coordinates the International desk at GSO, represented the United States and Canada along with Scott H., the trustee-at-large/Canada. Also present was Edith L. who is in charge of the International desk at Central Mexicana.

In March at our XIX Conference, held in the province of Habana, new plans were made for regionalization, training and taking inventory at all levels of service. Events were held for professionals and plans were made to hold “Endless Sobriety” (marathon) events at the territorial level and to organize events at the area and district level.

We have strengthened our efforts in public information and in cooperation with the professional community; for 25 years, we have been working diligently to be legally recognized and are currently engaged in the restructuring of our Fellowship to conform with the laws of our country, never forgetting our Three Legacies. We now have email and a website.

Esmeralda F.

Czech Republic: There are currently 63 active A.A. groups in 46 cities in the Czech Republic. Membership counts approximately more than 600 members. Our General Service Conference is held annually. This year we invited foreign observers from Slovakia, Poland, Switzerland, Romania and the United States. Our aim is to develop sponsorship at a country-to-country level. The General Service Board (GSB) has nine members, usually from different parts of the country. Two of them are nonalcoholics.

We were facing an unpleasant issue in 2017. One of the trustees made errors in finance planning for the annual convention of Czech A.A., and he wasn't able to explain these errors and missing money. The board of trustees decided to dismiss him from the membership of the P.I. Committee, while he resigned from the board of trustees himself. It was a great lesson learned for Czech A.A.

In 2015 we established a new GSO headquarters and are starting to use it. It will serve as a literature warehouse as well. The Service Handbook Committee introduced the first printed version of the Service Manual during the GSC this year.

The Financial Committee was established at the beginning of 2017. Its main purpose is to create the financial budget for the coming fiscal year and support the board of trustees in making decisions related to unexpected expenses. The very first official budget for the fiscal year 2018 was prepared. Composition is: 60 percent from literature income, 40 percent from the Seventh Tradition.

New “collecting” bank accounts were opened in 2017 (nontransparent to ensure anonymity).

In the last year, Czech A.A. published:

- Licensed e-version of the Big Book
- Brochures “Speaking at non-A.A. meetings” and “Many Paths to Spirituality”

The Literature Committee is currently working on:

- *Came to Believe*
- *Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers*
- *Living Sober*
- “Understanding Anonymity”
- “Is A.A. for Me?”

We also got the license for the Big Book audio version, which is planned for the near future.

We have developed better cooperation with treatment facilities and doctors. Regular information meetings take place in rehab facilities and treatment centers (Prague). We have a regular presence at various professional addiction conferences. We have arranged several events for members of the clergy. There is long-term cooperation with a few high schools, and we have set up cooperation with two prisons.

In January, we announced a tender for a new external webmaster to make more frequent updates to our website and to give it a more appealing look.

Some of our members are regular attendees of foreign conventions and conferences. We also always invite members from other countries to our convention. This year, our delegate was invited to Portugal for its conference about service. He presented information about responsibilities of a national delegate and how the world service structure works in general.

We really appreciate the continuous support from A.A. Great Britain, ensuring our attendance at its General Service Conference and participation at the ESM and WSM.

Jan K.

Denmark: The A.A. service structure in Denmark is currently under revision. It is important to secure the fact that the groups form the majority at conference. At this year’s Conference, we began the discussion with a workshop, which gave some answers and indicated that further discussions were necessary. The years to come will show if we have succeeded in obtaining results. We are, so far, very satisfied with the process as well as the result. The General Service Board is going to hold a workshop this year in October. We have prepared our structure for engaging a Class A (nonalcoholic) trustee.

The number of A.A. meetings in Denmark is 439. This number has been almost unchanged for the past five years. We have eight meetings held in English in four different cities. Three meetings are conducted in Icelandic in three different cities; two meetings are held in Greenlandic, and two meetings are in Polish in two different cities. There are two Danish-speaking meetings in Spain and two in Thailand. There are two Internet meetings in Danish. There is no distinction between meetings and groups.

A.A. Denmark is divided into six regions. The groups elect group service representatives (GSRs) to meet at region service meetings. The regions nominate two trustees each to the General Service Board (GSB). Since January 2013, there have been



two trustees instead of one nominated to the GSB. The regions also appoint delegates to the General Service Conference; the number is determined by the number of meetings in the region.

The GSB ideally consists of 16 members. In addition to the 12 trustees nominated by the regions and approved by the General Service Conference, the GSB is composed of a chairperson, a vice-chairperson and a secretary, who are all elected by the General Service Conference for a period of four years (at the moment we have not been able to elect a chairman, but we hope to do so at the 2019 General Service Conference). The chairman of the General Service Conference is also a member of the GSB (without voting power). This means that at the moment, the GSB consists of 15 members. Two international delegates and two Nordic delegates are also elected by the General Service Conference and participate at the GSB but without membership. All members are obligated to meet or send a deputy. The office manager is appointed by the GSB. The board meets every three months at our General Service Office in Copenhagen.

The Danish General Service Conference is held each year on the island of Funen in the middle of Denmark. The 2018 conference had 75 participants, of whom 64 were voting delegates. One guest from Slovenia was present. All regional delegates are elected for a period of four successive years without option to be reelected at any time. The regional delegates must have two-thirds of the votes of the conference. Other members of the conference are: one representative from each of the standing committees, members of the General Service Board, international delegates (international and Nordic), chairman of the conference, and representatives from the national service office.

A large number of A.A. members are doing voluntary work in standing committees and service units. The standing committees are Literature Translation and Narration of Text and

Audio Books; *Box 334* (membership magazine); Telephone Service and Email Helpline, Finance, *Service Manual* and *Service Structure Manual*, National Public Information and Conference Committee. Chairpersons are appointed by the committees and approved by the GSB. The rotation period is four years. The service units are Literature Sales, Production (photocopying), A.A. Data (updating meeting lists, conference administration, home page, etc.), Bookkeeping and Finance. The jobs are done by unpaid A.A. members.

Denmark is in the process of strengthening the overall information effort. In order to coordinate the effort and make it more efficient, a national committee, made up of one member from each of the six regions, has been formed.

For many years, we have had a nationwide telephone service. The service has one telephone number covering all of Denmark, and the calls are routed to the member on duty (all participants in the telephone service have been provided with a mobile phone connected to the telephone number mentioned above exclusively). The service is available seven days a week from 8 a.m. to midnight.

Ole K.

Dominican Republic: Changes are underway in our structure in the Dominican Republic in how the A.A. message is being carried, thanks to the country-to-country sponsorship undertaken by the General Services Office of Central Mexicana.

Its recommendation to train officials has moved ahead. We have set the goal of achieving orderly and sustainable growth, and, with that end in mind, we are working on instilling awareness among the groups of the need to strengthen themselves through structuring.

As part of the training, board committees are organizing workshops on the service structure, encompassing areas, districts and groups throughout the country. The subjects taken up mainly include literature, the Big Book, self-support, and the Three Legacies. The support from servants has been enormous.

As part of the sexennial plan (2016–2022), following the suggestion of the Central Mexicana with the approval of our board, we have drawn up a contribution plan that will help to strengthen the GSO and allow us to hire the needed personnel as well as rent a new space for the General Services Office. This is already underway. We have initiated contacts in order to work out collaboration agreements with entities of the Dominican government, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, and the national Attorney General's office, as well as with town councils, work which is well advanced.

A.A.W.S., Inc., has authorized us to reproduce and distribute the *Alcoholics Anonymous* text in our country, and it has allowed us to adapt the U.S./Canada service manual to our circumstances. Up to this point, we have not had our own service manual and have been freely using the service manual either of the U.S./Canada or of Mexico.

Our quarterly journal, *COMPARTIR*, came out for national distribution in March of 2018. It addresses such subjects as the Three Legacies, women in A.A., institutions, professionals, and so on, and it includes members' stories as well as information on our structure and on the world community, among other topics.

We continue to transmit our radio programs and television and radio announcements (public service announcements) over the airwaves, and we are also installing billboards in different areas.

Literature sales have gone up as a result of the training workshops we are running. The last convention was held in the Santiago de los Caballeros region, taking place in the city of Pueblo Plata, September 1–2. It completely met our goals.

With all this, we are firmly moving forward toward sustained growth as a structure, sparking interest in continuing the work of developing organized services. This is the only way to enable the development of A.A. in the Dominican Republic. Hence the interest emerging since our reinsertion as a country in the 19th Meeting of the Americas (REDELA) and the following WSM and REDELA meetings in order to take advantage of the shared experience provided in these service meetings.

The structures represented here today will help us to gear our services toward the strengthening and growth of A.A. in the Dominican Republic.

Francisco R.B.

Ecuador: In order to continue adhering to the structure of the world Fellowship of A.A., of which we have been a member since 2001, and having sent our delegates regularly both to the REDELA meetings and the WSM since 2009, we attended the REDELA 2017 convocation. The meeting was held in Costa Rica, where our two delegates, Carlos I. and Alejandro A., put into practice all the recommendations put forth for subsequent review in our service areas. As soon as our WSM delegate, Arturo Z., who was in attendance in New York, informed us about all the work done by the committees, his report was reviewed and forwarded to the areas so that the officials could study each topic recommended for review and send their remarks. The Ecuador structure continues to carry out the sponsorship plan with the structure of Colombia, and the delegates from each country attended the others' conference.

An A.A. National Service Forum was held for the first time in our country in the city of Ibarra, with the participation of fellow members from Colombia and Peru. Areas throughout the country carried out all the planned Regional Forums, holding service workshops on the topics recommended in international meetings. At the present time, more work is being done in the regions through meetings coordinated by area trustees and delegates in order to put into practice ideas of great interest, such as unified leadership and those of the Big Book. We are thus returning to the basics. Implementing the recommendation to do a national A.A. survey in Ecuador, undertaken every four years, the results revealed that membership in our country has not grown much.

The General Services Conference is regularly held in the month of April with the attendance of delegates from the 12 active provinces. Other areas still need to be sponsored in order for them to participate in the annual meeting. At present, we have five regional service trustees (with one position vacant); two General Services trustees, one representing SENAAE (board of trustees) and the other representing the magazine; two Class A trustees (with one position to be filled); and the two territorial trustees at-large. We have begun to take measures to fill the vacancies as soon as possible in order to have them approved at the next Conference.

We continue to publish all the titles approved under license from A.A. World Services, Inc., with great emphasis on the Big Book, which is being used in workshops.

Jose D. C.

Finland: We have about 660 A.A. groups with almost 10,000 members, an indication that for a country of about 5 million inhabitants, we have a very active and large A.A. community. For example, in the Helsinki capital area, we have around 200 groups and more than 250 meetings weekly from 7:00 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. Nearly every town and village from the North Pole to the most southern parts of the country has its own A.A. group.

In 2017 we had two national conventions (spring and summer convention), and in 2018 we'll have three (spring, summer and autumn convention). Groups or A.A. regions are responsible for these conventions, and the Finnish A.A. Service approves the applications. The objective is to spread the conventions into different parts of the country. Each year, between 900 and 1,500 members gather at these meetings, where the primary purpose remains the same: Each group has but one primary purpose — to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers. We have A.A. Step meetings as well as special topic meetings to share experiences of recovery and service. There is also a Q/A session giving members a chance to meet trusted servants face to face.

One issue that A.A. in Finland is facing, as are other countries, is the aging challenge. It is highly important to make A.A. an attractive alternative for young people. We have an independent body, the Youth Committee, which is organized and led by young people in A.A. themselves. This committee is arranging meetings as part of the national A.A. conventions and has also twice organized the European Young People in A.A. (EURYPAA) convention in Helsinki, the latest one in 2017. The committee also coordinates trips to other YPAA conferences in Europe.

A.A. needs more newcomers, and we have renewed our leaflets with a special focus on newcomers and young people. In addition to the printed version of "What Is A.A.?" this leaflet can be downloaded from our A.A. website, which is up to date and easy to use. We must keep the threshold low enough for everyone searching for help and we have to create new channels into the Fellowship for different needs. In Finland, we have an ongoing discussion about social media and A.A. on the Internet. What do anonymity, attraction not promotion, self-support, non-affiliation and non-endorsement mean in this new environment?

Not to be forgotten, drinking problems among just-retired persons have heavily increased in Finland, and a newcomer can be and often is over 65 years old. Consequently, "Never Too Late" is the title of a new leaflet we have produced.

The members and groups also arrange several smaller local/area events in different regions. The groups do active Twelfth Step work through an A.A. phone helpline, and share experiences and A.A. information at municipal detoxification centers. This year, as part of the 70th anniversary of the Finnish A.A., we contacted a few private health care companies that are responsible for occupational health care. We provided information of A.A.'s alternative in recovery of alcoholics after an acute crisis. We cooperate closely with Al-Anon, and the relationship with N.A. is close. A large number of Finnish N.A. members take part in A.A. meetings regularly. The A.A. helpline, supported by the groups, covers the whole country and receives thousands of calls yearly. A monthly A.A. radio program — a direct one-hour broadcast — and all programs from the beginning to the present are available through our website.

The financial situation in our Fellowship has been stable and

good for many years, allowing us to concentrate on supporting groups in the Fifth Tradition. Currently two publications, *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* and the booklet "Welcome to AA," are also available in e-book form. We have outsourced storing, posting, and billing of literature. We are investigating ways to introduce mobile payments as an alternative for literature sales and contributing to the Seventh Tradition. From the beginning of this year, bookkeeping was also outsourced, allowing the General Service Office to concentrate more effectively in A.A. value-added work — serving members and groups.

The theme for 2017 was "A.A. — Language of the Heart" and for 2018, "Our Common Welfare."

This year Finnish A.A. celebrated its 70th anniversary. We published a short history of the Finnish A.A., and the bulletin *Ratkaisu (Grapevine)* had a special edition containing stories from all seven decades. The anniversary convention was held in April in Helsinki. Fifteen hundred A.A. members and friends gathered together to share the joy and happiness of recovery and show gratitude to the A.A. Fellowship. Finnish A.A. members greatly appreciated the presence of two guests from North America: Mary from the International Desk at GSO, and Newton, a trustee. The archbishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland was the key guest speaker and he, in many terms, touched on how grace becomes alive in A.A. life. The unforgettable anniversary meeting was ended by an A.A. member singing his own song. The name of the song summarized the experiences of all of us: "I Asked for a Day — Got an Entire Life!"
Juha I.

French-speaking Europe: French-speaking Europe consists of:

- Switzerland (AASRI — Alcoholics Anonymous of French- and Italian-speaking Switzerland) counts 57 groups and remains constant.
- French and German-speaking Belgium (CSGAA — Council of the General Services of Alcoholics Anonymous) counts 212 groups, which has been stationary over the past 25 years.
- France (UAA — Union of Alcoholics Anonymous) counts 561 groups. We have observed a concerning decrease in the number of groups at almost 10 percent over the past six years.

Our three General Service Boards consist of two Class A trustees in Switzerland, none in Belgium, and three in France; nine Class B trustees in Switzerland, eight in Belgium, and eight in France. Finances are healthy for the three countries. We have very close and privileged relations among our three countries. The CEFE (French-speaking European Crossroads of Exchange) is an entity of close collaboration. We meet at each of our conferences and have discussed the following topics since the last World Service Meeting:

- A joint project for a European French-speaking service forum is underway; a call for candidates to the service committee has been launched.
- The internal rules concerning the alternation of the two delegates among the three countries to WSM and their financing, which has been revised in order to let common sense prevail.
- A Belgian initiative has been discussed in our three conferences in 2018. It dates back almost 40 years and con-



larities and differences. The main issue we are facing in French-speaking Europe is the difficulty in finding trusted servants for service positions and the worrisome decrease in the number of groups in France.

Lotus A.

German-speaking Europe: In the European German-speaking zone there were a couple of highlights in the past two years. The 37th Joint Service Conference decided to establish a working group in order to review the cooperation between German-speaking countries in Europe. Following two previous initiatives in 2008 and 2012, this is the third attempt to get active.

The working group consists of seven members. Two A.A.s each from Germany, Austria and Switzerland as well as one nonalcoholic who is a member of the German A.A. association. The members of this working group have their backing in each of the three countries. So far, the working group has had four joint working meetings.

They now agree on the direction in which they want to work and what common goals exist. The guidelines of North American A.A. (U.S. and Canada) should serve as a basis for future cooperation and they are exploring where cooperation is important and where each country has to tackle its tasks individually. In addition, they agree that this should not be a rushed job. The presentation of the results and subsequent discussion with voting is therefore not to be expected until the 39th GDK in the spring of 2020.

Another highlight in 2017 was the A.A. Alpine Convention (ALT) which took place in the small university town of Leoben in the Steyermark in Austria. It is special that this friendship meeting was organized by the Austrian friends within a short timeframe, after the meeting in Lübeck/Germany had to be canceled at short notice because of considerable structural defects in the already reserved buildings (danger of collapse).

The Austrian friends organized an excellent meeting, which saw 566 people from A.A. and Al-Anon, who joined in spite of the short notice and the long journey. Thanks to the smaller numbers it was a very informal atmosphere. The common worship in the church was a special experience.

From May 11–13, the German A.A. Convention took place in Koblenz. The theme was “A Sense of Belonging.” Over three days, 120 meetings took place. At the opening meeting, the GSM Arena was almost full. There were 2,633 people registered for the event. Of these, 1,894 were A.A., 705 Al-Anon, 21 Alateen and 13 guests. The meeting lived up to its theme: It was a warm and friendly atmosphere. At the final meeting, the city of Oldenburg introduced itself in a fun way as the next venue of the friendship meeting, which will take place from May 1–3, 2019. The theme will be: “Nice to see YOU here.”

Toni (Anton) H.

cerns written French-speaking meetings based on the Loners meetings model. Created way before the Internet, the written meeting form is addressed to all the alcoholics who cannot attend a meeting. This joint project will be developed in our three structures this year, separately and in common. New technologies do not take away the usefulness of this meeting form. In the absence of new correspondents, it risks disappearing, which is not desirable.

- French-speaking Europe manages together a joint company for the publication of A.A. literature, copyright granted by A.A.W.S. We have adopted the name “French-speaking European A.A. Publishers” in order to underline more clearly the fact that this tool, which is responsible for managing the purchase, printing and distribution of A.A. literature, belongs to the three countries, with a view to achieving economies of scale

Our countries are fortunate to have access to the entire catalogue of A.A.W.S. and AA Grapevine in French, except for a few recent novelties that are not yet translated into French. We can therefore consider ourselves very lucky. We thank A.A.W.S. for its valuable collaboration concerning printed literature licensed in French-speaking Europe, and we hope the same spirit of collaboration will come from Grapevine. The French-speaking European A.A. Publishers have been permitted to sell our literature at a much lower price than if bought in the U.S., as transports and custom fees are significantly reduced.

The future concerns, in terms of French-speaking cooperation, will focus on social networks and the use of videoconferences. If the minds are ready, it will be discussed as to whether several annual committee meetings could be held via videoconferences in Belgium. Switzerland does not use this communication tool, as the geographic distances are small, while the French GSO has been using online service meetings for almost a year. This allows board members, national committee chairs and their committees to meet more often without incurring additional costs. This practice could be extended to the regions and adopted by the entity French-speaking Europe.

To conclude, we are one entity with common goals in A.A., and also three separate, autonomous structures with our simi-

Great Britain: The Great Britain service structure has approximately 5,000 groups within its 16 regions, and covers Great Britain and English-speaking meetings in Europe. One trustee from each region represents the General Service Board at regional meetings, and each region sends six delegates to the Great Britain National Conference. The GSB has at present two nonalcoholic trustees who represent A.A. at a public level, and the Fellowship is supported by the General Service Office in York as well as satellite offices in Glasgow and London, the latter being relocated in 2015. A.A. Great Britain hosts the European Service Center and held a successful European Service Meeting in 2017.

Having set our financial policy in line with Concept Twelve/Warranty Two, and thanks to the generosity of our groups, we are in the fortunate financial position of having reserves above our prudent reserve. This has created some different challenges for the GSB in continuing to carry A.A.'s message of recovery on a national and international basis. Many newcomers get in touch with A.A. through our website, and those who have further questions use either the email helpline or our Chat Now, where our online response teams will answer their queries. Our 2016 Conference agreed that online groups should be a part of our service structure. A new online intergroup has been formed as part of the Continental European Assembly and a number of online meetings have joined.

In Public Information, Intergroups and regions have run a number of campaigns on public transport. We support three parliamentary A.A. presentation events, at Holyrood in Scotland, Westminster in England, and the Senedd in Wales. A.A. had stands at 19 national conferences and exhibitions.

Two monthly magazines, *Share* (England and Wales) and *Roundabout* (Scotland), continue to provide a "meeting between meetings." And our quarterly *A.A. Service News*, which is circulated to all groups from GSO, offers the opportunity for members to share service experience.

Trusted servants have worked tirelessly over the past two years on behalf of all groups in the Great Britain service structure to ensure that the message of recovery is available and to keep Alcoholics Anonymous "anonymous but not invisible."

Nigel P.

Iceland: This Country Highlight addresses three topics mentioned in the Country Report from Iceland. The first topic is that A.A. in Iceland has been working on revising the Icelandic version of the Big Book, and much effort and work has been and is being put into that task with more than several hundred changes to the current version.

Second, A.A. in Iceland has been addressing the issue of sexual harassment and other safety issues in A.A., and a lot of talk and work have been going on the past year on how we can help everybody feel safe and secure at meetings and ways to address issues that come up. The Icelandic National Service Board has been studying some service material from the General Service Office, including "Safety and A.A.: Our Common Welfare," and will send a letter to all meetings in Iceland addressing the issue.

The third topic is the substantial growth of A.A. in Iceland, which has resulted in an increase in contributions from groups to the National Service Board and increased sales of the Big Book and other A.A. material. Thank you all very much for your time and attention.

Ágúst B. A.

India: India is a unique country, with a population of 1.3 billion and a considerable presence of A.A. With 29 states and seven union territories, 22 major spoken and written languages, and more than 20 minor languages and countless more dialects, India in itself is a mini United Nations. Thus, A.A. India not only has the challenge but also the opportunity to carry the lifesaving message of A.A. in a maximum number of languages to a highly and densely populated audience. Consequently, A.A. India as a Fellowship is not only one of the largest outside the United States and Canada (with more than 2,250 groups and an estimated 50,000 members) but it is also one of the most diverse Fellowships, with literature in 14 languages. Indian GSO publishes in a great number of languages: Big Books in ten languages, and pamphlets in 14 languages, excluding English. And going forward, the number of languages is bound to increase.

We have a healthy and robust service structure with the General Service Board being made up of 18 Class B trustees and nine Class A trustees. Though this may seem large, it was necessary in view of diversity of the country, where the dialect changes every 50 miles, and the language changes every 100 miles.

In the last five to six years, after achieving a reasonable reach in terms of numbers of groups as well as numbers doing service, our work is being concentrated to carry the message of A.A. as a resource to relieve alcoholism. Toward this end, concerted efforts are being made at the local, state and national levels, creating helplines all around in multiple languages so that the suffering alcoholic of any state, any language and any ethnic group gets the message of A.A.'s availability. Working with friends of alcoholics in medicine, public life, administration, and law enforcement, we are trying to reach out through various media—be it press, radio, television and outdoor media.

The recent airing of the program *Satyameva Jayathe* on a popular TV channel simultaneously aired on 10 channels. The resulting media blitz made A.A. and its helplines reach many homes in urban India. Likewise, the other regional language programs such as *Thamasoma Jyothirgamaya* and similar programs on the regional Telugu channels are working at the state level.

The Andhra Pradesh State Road Transport Corp. (APSRTC) sticker campaign involving 25,000 buses, 100,000 stickers, six help lines, and 10 million passengers' exposure every day, totaling an annual exposure of 3.65 billion people, was a real step forward in awareness creation. Likewise, possibly for the first time in the world, our state Civil Supplies Fair Price Shops poster campaign has enabled us to reach 17,000 fair price shops in 10,500 villages, towns, municipalities and cities across the State of Telangana without any exception. The A.A. message now covers India 100 percent, right down to the village level. We can humbly say that we have achieved carrying out the message of A.A.'s availability in each and every village of the state, perhaps, for the first time.

In the state of Andhra Pradesh, the chief of the state police gave us permission to display pamphlets, posters and stickers in all public places, both government and private (a total of 100,000 posters/stickers across the state), so that the message of A.A. and its helpline numbers reach the maximum number of people. All cities, towns and municipalities of AP are being inundated with messages now. The display of A.A. posters in the army cantonment area of Secunderabad has also

been permitted by the Indian army wing in Hyderabad city. One of the largest army cantonments in the country, it is now having regular meetings of A.A. as a resource for relief from alcoholism, and it has the A.A. helpline posters across the entire cantonment.

A recent article, "Cheers — Kalisi Maneddam," which means "Cheers — Let's Stop It Together," in a leading regional newspaper named *Andhra Jyothi* (*Light of Andhra*) has opened the door to reach out to many thousands of people. Alcoholics and families of alcoholics are calling helplines, and we are also able to carry the message to the suffering alcoholics through friends of A.A.

Our Vision: Every citizen of India should be able to define and describe Alcoholics Anonymous, and every problem drinker who wants to should be able to find the hand of A.A. within reach. We also want to offer services to neighboring countries in Asia, the way the U.S./Canada Fellowship is catering to the needs of the world.

Fellowship: The road ahead is tough, and our tasks often seem difficult. A.A. in India has only a few carriers of the message and many a suffering alcoholic waiting for the lifesaving message. Our GSC theme for 2018 is "Each One Reach One." To achieve this, we are encouraging every group to motivate the establishment of another group, eventually doubling the strength every year. As part of this initiative, we have started to reach out to nearby Andaman and Nicobar Islands by starting A.A. groups on those islands and supporting them by sending sufficient literature.

Though much is achieved, a lot needs to be done with the kind of population and the potentially suffering alcoholics we have, which will definitely be the largest number in the world. As it is said, "More shall be revealed" — by the grace of our Higher Power.

Krishna M. V.

Iran: A.A. continues to spread through Iran, as the Iranian government, faced with an increase in alcoholism and drug abuse, has tolerated the increase of more and more A.A. meetings. Now the good news is that anyone who suffers from alcoholism in Iran should be able to find a meeting and speak about his or her problem. We estimate that more than 700 A.A. groups are active in the country, at least one-third of which are linked to Iran's General Service Office, and more groups are linking together and to A.A. as a whole every month. These statistics are not completely accurate or exact since there are groups run by individuals or linked to *other local service structures*. Their main source of treasury has been generated by selling an illicit translation of A.A. literature with disrespect to the A.A. World Services' regulations, copyright laws and our Traditions. Unfortunately, this unauthorized literature trickled in all through A.A., and a huge amount of money affected our Fellowship as a whole, thus the structures became competitive! Yet we believe that our Fellowship will be united if we stick to our Twelve Steps, Traditions and Concepts. Thy will, not egos.

The General Service Office of Iran's Alcoholics Anonymous is linked to A.A.W.S. and has a small central office located in Karaj, which holds its service meetings every other month in Iran's capital, Tehran. There are nine trustees (seven alcoholics and two nonalcoholics) elected to serve as the General Service Board.

For several years, we tried to legally register with the name "Iran's Nameless Sobers" since the Iranian government was sensitive to the name "Alcoholics Anonymous" due to religious matters. But the controversies increased inside the Fellowship. The parallel structures started to make announcements in their meetings, exclaiming that nameless sobers are not A.A. Now our Fellowship runs its activities with the name "Iran's Alcoholics Anonymous" as suggested by A.A.W.S. Efforts to register this name are still in progress.

Our PI, H&I, and other committees have ongoing relationships with social departments pertaining to A.A., such as welfare state (Behzisti-e-Iran), religious centers, hospitals institutions, etc. Our newest committee is the Literature and Translation Committee, which tries to unify A.A. literature and put it all through the licensing procedure. Our GSO maintains an official A.A. website at the domain www.iranaa.org, which is developing more data. Note that we have invited all the A.A. groups in Iran to a forthcoming convention to obtain a brotherhood providing more love and unity.

And finally, an English-speaking A.A. group holds meetings once a week in Kerman (a southern city of Iran) with a service number from the A.A.W.S. records department. If you Google "English-speaking A.A. in Iran," you'll find it. We hope that more international meetings will be started in several parts of Iran. All fellow brothers and sisters are welcome to come and share.

Masood F.

Ireland: A.A. in Ireland is now in its 72nd year and continues to grow and carry the message of hope to alcoholics, with an estimated membership of approximately 15,000. There are 900 groups and meetings that can be found in most towns and villages throughout the country.

New members are encouraged to get involved in the service structure, first in their own group and then by attending area meetings. Each group appoints two general service representatives to attend area meetings, which, in turn, appoint four delegates to attend the Intergroup Meeting, and from Intergroup, four delegates are appointed to attend the Conference. All minutes from area, Intergroup and Conference meetings will soon be available on the website, thus ensuring that there is transparency at all levels of service in the Fellowship.

All the services such as Telephone, Public Information and Prison Service, are functioning well. Following an idea that emanated from the World Service Meeting in 2016, a Bottle Bank Poster Campaign has been tried out in one of our areas, with waterproof posters showing the A.A. telephone helpline being placed on bottle banks.

At the September 2015 Conference, a subcommittee was formed to look at PI in Ireland. A public information kit has been assembled, which is now available to PI committees throughout the country and should prove to be an invaluable resource in providing information about A.A. to areas such as social services, police, education, hospitals, and company human resource departments.

Over the past two to three years, there had been a concerning drop in contributions to GSO. However, the recent audited accounts show that this trend has been reversed; this is as a result of a concerted effort to reduce expenses as well as the generosity of the members of the Fellowship.

At the most recent Conference, there was much discus-

sion about getting members involved in service and the importance of member-to-member sponsorship and encouragement where the benefits of service are emphasized. To address this issue, service workshops are also being held by individual areas and at our conventions, where members share their experience in service and provide information to new members.

In conclusion, the Fellowship in Ireland is continuing to grow, and the message of recovery is being carried to anyone who reaches out for help.

Helen H.

Italy: Our 34th Conference was held in April 2018, and after a three-year cycle dedicated to our Fourth Step, this year the theme was “Refinding Our Identity.”

The growth of groups in Italy has been nominal for a number of years, and we are trying to find the reason why this happens. In Southern Italy, for example, the distance between one group and another is enormous; a few people are engaged in service, and carrying the A.A. message throughout the territory is a challenge. Still we invite media, doctors and clergy to our yearly seminars to listen and understand our message and sponsor new groups. A new group opened in Matera, which has been designated a European Capital of Culture 2019.

Our Class A trustee has the assignment of helping to organize these events. He is doing a great job taking part in the Public Information Committee to reinforce the taking of roots of A.A. into the territory. This year the seminars were held in June in St. Giovanni Rotondo for the Southern Italy Area, in Montesilvano for the Central Italy Area, with the participation of the mayor, the bishop and professionals of different fields, and, as we said, the theme was “Refinding Our Identity.” Turin hosted the Northwest Area Seminary with the theme “The Groups — Where It All Starts.” The Northeast Area Seminary was held in Vicenza in March with the presence of 250 persons and the participation of Alateen, Al-Anon and other twelve-step fellowships. A major city or a tourist site has been chosen for the Seminars, and our national secretary was present when possible.

This year, an important Italian newspaper and a weekly magazine published articles about A.A. in Italy. The A.A. national website is under renovation for easier and better use. Every area will have five pages, and other pages will be dedicated to professionals, media, literature and young people in A.A. An audio and video spot of A.A. is on national radio and TV, which is a true help for our toll-free number. A.A. Italy is working on a questionnaire for a survey to update the number of groups and members.

Statistics have shown that contributions are down, as are literature sales, and one consideration is that it is difficult to finance ongoing projects. A spending review is constantly monitored by our finance and budgetary trustee, as a good family father is supposed to do, and thanks to this we have reached, during the past two or three years, an even balance between contributions and expenses.

One of the most important projects that the Literature Committee has been involved with this year is the editing of *The History of A.A. Italy*. The book is now available; a project that today is reality. The pamphlet “Many Paths to Spirituality” has been translated from English into Italian and has been sent to A.A. World Services, Inc., for approval.

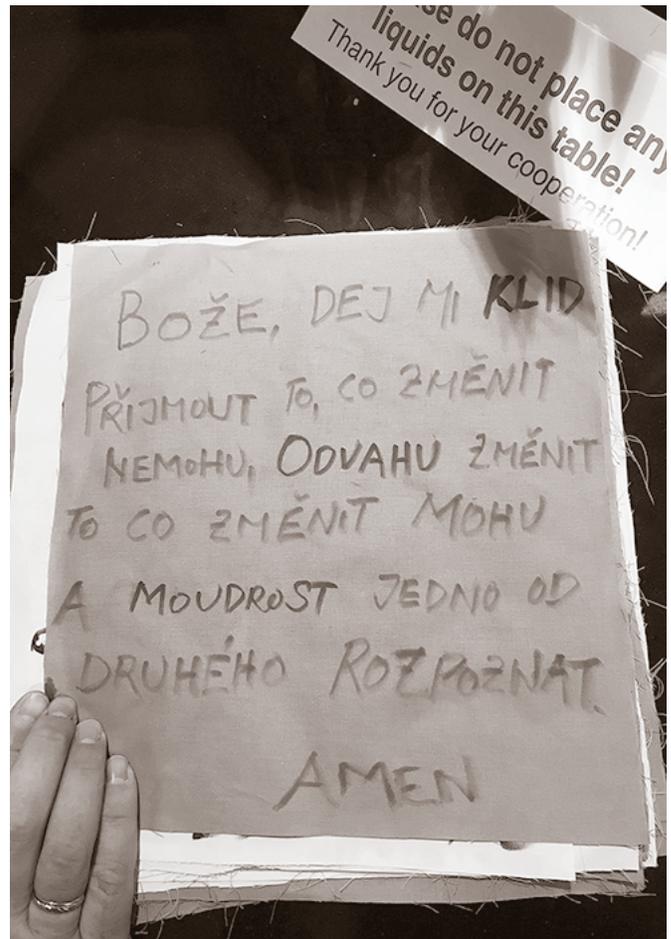
A.A. sees young people as a part of the population to be ap-

proached. They are the best vehicle to pass on our message to people of their same age. Their enthusiasm for A.A. and their sobriety is amazing, and it is growing throughout the world. ITALYPAA held its third convention in May 2018 in Milan. It was a success, and in 2019 the convention will probably take place in Vicenza. The concern of the Council is to carry their enthusiasm into the larger service structure of A.A. Italy as a whole.

Insieme in A.A. is our national magazine, and knowing that there are Italian alcoholics in many of your groups, our hope is that they would like to subscribe. Of course, we will be more than happy to send our magazine around the world. The committee is working on a project to publish *The Best of Insieme 2007–2017*. I am also hoping to exchange literature between countries, as we are trying to include a library with foreign literature in our General Service Office. Already we have received some, and for this A.A. Italy wishes to thank A.A. in Portugal, Ukraine, Romania and Russia. We are most grateful to you all for this contribution. Due to the presence of foreign communities in Italy, we also would like to receive literature from Moldavia, Romania, Poland, France and Spain. And, of course we would like to receive some literature in English, too.

Massimo F.

Japan: Alcoholics Anonymous Japan will hold its 45th Anniversary Convention on March 20–22, 2020, in Amagasaki, Hyogo Prefecture, with the theme “What We Pass On to the Future.” A.A. members and guests from around the world will



be celebrating A.A. Japan's 45th anniversary together at this convention in Amagasaki Cultural Center.

A.A. in Japan had its birth in February 1975 — the first Japanese-speaking meeting was held in Tokyo. One American father who was living in Japan made a contribution to it. He became alcoholic in Japan, went back to his home, the United States, and started his recovery through the A.A. program, and then returned to Japan and gathered alcoholics to start a meeting. Prior to that, there seemed to have been several attempts to start A.A. in Japan, but none of them had a chance to take root in Japan, and they withered. After that meeting of 1975, A.A. gradually started to take root in Japan. When the 20th anniversary convention was held in 1995, a nationwide GSR assembly was held as a part of its program, and the establishment of the annual General Service Conference was decided there. Long-timers are saying that A.A. had shown relatively good progress up to that point. Although they were not huge in number, it was said that there were about 2,000 to 2,500 members by that time. In the past 23 years since that convention, the number of groups has been constantly increasing, and the number of members has also doubled.

I think I can mention two significant things other than this. First, the A.A. membership survey was conducted in 2016. This survey is done every three years. Here are the major points and the accompanying statistics:

Currently, we estimate that A.A. in Japan has 600 groups and 5,500 to 6,000 members. About half of them are settled in the Kanto-Koshinetsu area, which includes metropolitan Japan; the rest are living in the other six areas. By the way, about a quarter of the whole population lives in the metropolitan area. It seems that the fact that A.A. in Japan began here still has influence in the situation, although 43 years have passed. About gender — approximately a quarter of the members are woman, and the rate has seldom changed in the past 10 years. Nevertheless, considering that women were hardly seen in the early days, it seems that there are improvements occurring little by little. Financially, three-fifths of members are able to support themselves fully; one-third of members need some kind of support.

In the membership, 14.7 percent have less than one year sober, which is included in the 60.1 percent with less than 10 years. There are 32.4 percent who have more than ten years' sobriety, and for 7.5 percent, the length of sobriety is unknown. However, in this survey, there don't appear to be responses from the many members who don't have a home group, so there is a possibility that the number of members who have more than 10 years could actually be larger. Although for those members who do have home groups, the figures are nearly 90 percent. I feel that number is lower in actuality. We even talk among ourselves about the issue that the number of members coming to the meetings with no home group is noticeably increasing recently. Also, the members who have sponsors also make up slightly more than half of the respondents. But still, the question remains of whether this also reflects the actual situation or not. I, personally, have a strong impression that sponsorships and programs — the solutions that form the basis of A.A. — have been rather neglected.

Alcohol-specialized hospitals and psychiatric hospitals accounted for about 80 percent of those who recommended A.A. to patients. This is the answer to a multiple-choice question, so, according to the answers, about 20 percent of the recom-

mendations are from A.A. members, and about 10 percent or less are from alcohol countermeasure facilities and rehabs. The fact is that only about 10 percent is from "normy" friends, help desks, mass media, etc. A.A. is not commonly known in Japan yet, and our members started to realize this issue recently.

Second is that since A.A. is not yet well known in public, as I mentioned above, there is a movement all around Japan A.A. to put an emphasis on public relations, and this includes members who are interested in doing service. The number of A.A. members has increased in these last 20 years. Still, this question basically remains: "Even though the A.A. program is so attractive, why is the increase of members so low?" One of the answers is that a growing number of members have begun to think that it is necessary to focus on public information. Beginning 20 years ago, messages to correctional facilities and asylums have been considered as a new direction for Twelfth Step work. However, in addition to that, there are now many members who are starting to think about how to reach physicians and general hospitals, administrators, and so on as public information activities. Then, as a future task, we will have to think about the upcoming issue of how to proceed using public information within society, especially through media. We are requesting a favor from all of you. There might be countries and regions that have followed the same path as we are on. We would be pleased if you could share your experiences with us.

Yasumichi H.

Mexico: Alcoholics Anonymous in Mexico has been called the largest nongovernmental organization in the country, with approximately 14,500 groups and more than 121,000 members. In treatment centers there are 220 groups; in correctional facilities 605 A.A. groups are found, of which 96 are in Federal Social Rehabilitation Centers (CEFERESOS, by its initials in Spanish), 281 in State Social Reintegration Centers (CERESOS, by its initials in Spanish), 196 in municipal jails and 32 in specialized adolescent internment facilities. There are, then, a total of 16,367 incarcerated persons and about 651 free and prereleased individuals belonging to a group, which helps them to face the disease of alcoholism as a part of their social rehabilitation. There are 1,344 districts, 83 areas, six regions, two territories and two corporate entities (the General Services Office and the A.A. *Plenitud* office). The General Services Board consists of 18 members.

Self-support is attained through literature sales (75 percent), member and group contributions (20 percent) and efficiency savings (5 percent). Since the 50th Mexican Conference, we have been working on evening out the association's income, so that we get to 60 percent from literature sales and 40 percent from member and group contributions. To this end, we suggest and invite the country's areas and groups to raise their level of contributions to the best of their abilities, to 40 percent of the expenditures of the General Services Office (GSO) through the donation of \$100 (Mexican pesos) a year per member, in addition to the regular contribution sent by each member to the GSO (through annual drives, volunteer campaigns, Plan Hormiga, etc.). There is no doubt that by balancing our resources (40 percent contributions, 55 percent literature sales and 5 percent efficiency), we will once again keep to our principle of self-support based on voluntary donations and, in that way, get to financially depend less on literature

sales. Our prudent reserve is in good shape, with a sum of \$28,407,358 in fiscal year 2017.

Currently, our Conference is developing in close association with the Conference of the United States and Canada. Toward this end, we put in place for a four-year period an adaptation commission that took steps for the Conference to become fully self-functioning by the 50th Mexican Conference. In that Conference, we began to conduct an inventory, consisting of 48 questions to be answered over a period of two years. It was completed during the 51st Mexican Conference.

Plenitud A.A.: Every 45 days, the *Plenitud* office publishes 60,000 copies of its journal. Given that *Plenitud A.A.* is published seven times a year, 420,000 copies are distributed each year to our community of readers. Moreover, our office produces the digital *Plenitud* for the new generation and special items for the end of the year, including calendars, logs for group meetings, appointment books, etc. The board of directors has planned to launch a digital depository by the end of 2018, consisting of an electronic collection of all the issues of the journal. With issue number 216 of the journal, we have reached nine million total copies, achieved thanks to 40 years of publishing the “meeting in print.”

Twelfth National Convention: The opening and close of the 12th National Convention will take place in Cuauhtémoc Stadium, Friday, March 1, and Sunday, March 3, 2019, respectively. Sharing sessions will be held on Saturday, March 2, at facilities of the Centro Expositor Puebla. The theme will be “A.A.: A Message for the World.” We expect 53,200 united souls to be present at this gathering.

Distribution: A web page was designed for the XII Convention, to be accessed at <http://www.AAmexico.mx>, as well as at the web pages of the Central Mexicana and *Oficina Plenitud*. An icon was included as a link to the site. It should be noted that this page includes an email address, convención-nacional@AAmexico.org.mx, through which clarifications or questions raised by the community regarding the Convention can be addressed. Information on how international convention attendees can obtain tickets will be made available soon.

International Service:

1. REDELA Information Center: Launch of the *redelaweb.org* site for the exchange of information among service zone structures.

The 20th REDELA meeting was held in San José, Costa Rica. Nineteen countries participated, with the representation of 24 first- and second-term delegates for the following structures: Argentina, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, United States, Canada, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Dominican Republic, Venezuela and Costa Rica (as host country). The GSO of New York sent Mary Cumings, who oversees the International desk, and David Rosen, director of publications of A.A.W.S., as observers in this REDELA meeting.

2. Sponsorship of countries:

- In keeping with our new *Sponsorship of Countries* manual, the experience gained is shared through sponsorship of the structures of Chile, Cuba, Dominican Republic and Venezuela.
- *Sponsorship of Countries* entails regionalization, creating districts, strengthening of the General Services

Board, boards of directors and a Conference.

- We have attended conferences in Cuba, Brazil, Chile, Peru and the Dominican Republic. We did not attend the Conference in Venezuela due to the prevailing conditions in the country, in addition to the fact that, at the time we received confirmation that it would be held, only a few days remained before the Conference was to open. We hope that the manager of the GSO of Venezuela will soon visit us in the interests of sponsorship.

3. International Literature Fund: The International Committee for the International Literature Fund has been assigned a budget of \$2,000. We continue to encourage the 83 areas to contribute the equivalent of 100 Big Books in Mexican pesos to the ILF.

National Projects: National Crusade for the Big Book — The crusade has been carried out for the fourth time. It encourages the whole A.A. community in Mexico to donate as a gift a new copy of the *Alcoholics Anonymous* text to diverse sites, such as clinics and churches, prisons and hospitals, libraries and hotels, as well as to the general public.

Miquey C.

The Netherlands: At present, there are 203 groups in the Netherlands with a total membership of 2,000. We count 44 English-speaking groups, two Spanish-speaking groups and three Polish-speaking groups. Interaction among these communities is very positive. Dutch A.A. is based on the Three Legacies. We have six A.A. regions, each with five delegates for the General Service Conference, and one delegate for the General Service Board. This year we can proudly say our GSB consists of five A.A. members, and since April of this year we are happy to welcome our new Class A nonalcoholic trustee to the General Service Board. Our General Service Board schedules quarterly meetings to carry out the decisions of the General Service Conference. Daily operations are carried out by an Executive Committee with full support of the General Service Conference, thus ensuring the legal continuity of A.A. Netherlands. Our General Service Office is a hub for all the services and information within Dutch A.A. Our service volunteers are available all week for the Dutch A.A. groups.

The Finance Committee reviews the proposed budgets of all committees and services. Furthermore, it advises the General Service Board on all financial matters. Financially, we are doing better than before as a result of reviewing the national prudent reserve. The Literature Committee is responsible for translating, developing and updating all A.A. literature, such as books and pamphlets. The committee is currently working on the Dutch translation of *Language of the Heart* and expects it to be ready in 2019. A new brochure, “Where Money and Spirituality Mix,” has been translated and edited and is available free of charge for all group treasurers in the Netherlands.

The National Committee for Public Information oversees all requests for assistance and information from organizations outside A.A. and offers information for the public media. I have to say that we are very grateful for the relentless dedication of our PI people and their efforts to reach out to the press, other media, health-care institutions, and correctional facilities. Dutch A.A. cooperates with a growing number of professional organizations concerned with alcohol abuse. Many

such organizations have based their programs on A.A.'s Twelve Steps. However, negative experiences have also occurred as the commercial interests of treatment facilities sometimes conflict with A.A. interests. This is one of the reasons why we are developing an image plan. This plan is needed since the current reputation of A.A. in the Netherlands is not powerful enough to reach more suffering alcoholics. Especially in professional health care, many are not familiar with A.A. Broader support in the community should create better access for the suffering alcoholics. It is estimated that our country harbors approximately 800,000 alcohol dependants. The main objective of A.A. is to reach the still-suffering alcoholics and to help them. We believe that greater familiarity with A.A. is necessary for the still-suffering alcoholics to find us. At the same time, schools, universities, and clinics are inviting A.A. speakers more often. Contacts that A.A. has established to reach the suffering alcoholic within correctional facilities are very promising. We have also established a close cooperation with the English-speaking public information group.

English-speaking A.A. flourishes in The Netherlands. It affiliates with York and conducts its own conventions. The Dutch A.A. convention is held each year around the beginning of October and has been reduced to only one day (because of budget cuts). Both conventions attract a large number of visitors from abroad. Unfortunately, Flemish A.A. (the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium) was not able to send a representative this year, so I am here by myself. In the future, we would like to send two delegates.

This is all for now, and I would like to finish by saying it is a privilege for me to be here. I look forward to learning more about and from all of the other countries attending. I feel honored by Dutch A.A. and their trust in me as their representative. I wish everyone a sober 24 hours!

Tatjana R.

Aotearoa New Zealand: Aotearoa New Zealand (all place names in this report are written in Te Reo Māori, followed by English) is an island country in the southwestern Pacific Ocean, with a population of about 4.7 million people, made up of two main land masses — Te Ika-a-Māui, the North Island, and Te Waipounamu, the South Island — and around 600 smaller islands. Every January we hold an annual A.A. convention (usually attended by more than 300 members, plus Al-Anon) that rotates between the North and South Islands in our summer. International visitors are always welcome!

The Aotearoa New Zealand service structure begins with the individual A.A. groups that elect general service representatives (GSRs) to represent the views of the group at the District Committee and Intergroup level and the Area Assembly. The Area Assembly elects delegates to represent them at the General Service Conference, keeping in mind that they must act for A.A. as a whole. The A.A. Fellowship in Aotearoa New Zealand has an estimated 5,000 members and approximately 500 registered groups.

Public Information Highlights: The conference Public Information Committee (PIC) coordinates the Public Awareness week and liaises with national media organizations to ensure that A.A. gets maximum value for media placements. The PIC secured a media plan that included radio, television and pre-roll advertising on online newspapers. Members' stories were also

broadcast on national radio as part of the lead-up to the national convention and as a paid feature in an online newspaper. A media workshop at the national convention highlighted that many young members felt the Fellowship was not targeting them enough. With this in mind, the PIC is investigating the possibility of using social media to carry the message of A.A.

Cooperation with the Professional Community (CPC) highlights: Since 2014, the conference CPC Committee has facilitated A.A. participation in the Cutting Edge Addictions Conference. A.A. also hosts a stand of literature staffed by two A.A. members for delegates at the Cutting Edge conference to talk to. This year CPC completed a letter and sent it with pamphlets (P45, P46) to all treatment centers. The CPC was approached by Housing New Zealand (HNZ) to investigate getting the message of A.A. out into the state housing sector through meetings with staff at HNZ. The Class A trustee who works in the addictions section drafted a report about A.A. connecting with medical teaching colleges.

Corrections (The Compassionate Friends) Highlights: There are regular A.A. meetings in eight of the 19 prisons in Aotearoa New Zealand. The Prison Correspondence Coordinator sits on the conference TCF Committee. The primary function is to be a "national point of contact" between A.A. and inmates and to facilitate the "carrying of the message" into correctional facilities by correspondence. The TCF committee has designed a new poster to promote this service in prisons.

The Development of New and Significant Pieces of Literature: In 2017, the board published *The New Zealand Service Manual of Alcoholics Anonymous*. This publication had been in development since 2014, when it was decided that A.A. in Aotearoa New Zealand needed a service manual that reflected local service structure. It is published online, so amendments can be made as needed. The board has also published a pamphlet of the summary of the 2016 online membership survey which has been useful for CPC work.

Advances in Technology and Office Services: The Android Find-a-Meeting app continues to be useful. We continue our attempts to develop an iOS version.

Fellowship Milestones and Special Events: March 25, 2018, marks the 70th anniversary of the first New Zealand A.A. meeting, held in Wakefield near Nelson. June 2018 marks the 70th anniversary of the first N.Z. A.A. group (three members) registered in New York.

Significant Collaborations with Other Countries: Samoa had a roundup early in 2018, and about eight-plus Tāmaki-Makaurau Auckland A.A. members attended. Last year the World Service delegate passed A.A. books on to the Tāmaki Auckland A.A. members to take with them and give to the groups. One A.A. member from Tāmaki Auckland said, "The items were very happily received, and we had great hospitality from A.A. members from Samoa and American Samoa in the roundup."

Pip A.

Norway: Norway currently has about 2,000 A.A. members, which is a small increase. In northern parts of Norway, with low population density and long distances between groups, district meetings are held via Skype. YPAA has been down for several years but is now "back on track" and growing. Our au-

turn seminar, which has been held yearly since 1986, has for the past couple of years attracted even more participants. This seminar focuses on our A.A. structure, our Twelve Traditions, and PI work. Other seminars are held throughout the country, mainly focused on the Big Book. Regional conventions take place regularly, and we have a yearly national convention.

We are well provided with literature; most Conference-approved books and relevant pamphlets from U.S./Canada are translated. Books are printed “outside,” while pamphlets are printed at our service office. We also have a website, which is currently being redesigned and hopefully will be launched later this year. Most groups are active in PI work. Our main challenge is to make A.A. better known and accepted among the treatment centers and professionals. We also have a national phone service for A.A. members, members-to-be, and the general public. This service is covered by the groups nationwide and is a very popular service for many members. We now have some A.A. groups inside correctional facilities with varying results.

Terje P. O.

Paraguay: Alcoholics Anonymous has been present in Paraguay for more than 42 years. The message of recovery came through a religious Argentinian woman on January 23, 1976, with the founding of the first “Happy Sobriety” group.

Our structure consists of the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous of Paraguay, made up of nine trustees, including three Class A nonalcoholic national trustees (president, vice president and treasurer), three Class B trustees (GSO, Literature and Journal), and three CTO regional trustees (Central region, East and South), in addition to the two international delegates. There is one vacancy in the steering committee of the journal *Vy’a Pave*, due to a lack of candidates. It is currently being covered by one of the trustees, acting in the capacity of adjunct director.

The 25th General Service Conference, that took place March 3–4, 2018, under the theme “The Structured Group, Spiritual Road to Working with Others,” included the participation of the board of directors, DCMs, the district secretary, district treasurer, district representatives of the journal *Vy’a Pave* and invited delegates from Argentina and Brazil.

The General Service Office, located in Lambaré, has been providing various services related to the administrative tasks in the office itself, and it has been lending support to committees and to the board of trustees, which meets at the site twice a month. The national directory includes 78 groups with approximately 600 members. Nevertheless, it has been reported that a total of 10 groups on the list are no longer active, while some others are in a trial stage. Districts No. 1, 2, 4, 5, 6 and 9 represent the groups in place. They organize activities in various zones of the country, and they gather in interdistrict meetings twice a year, the last one having taken place in October of 2017 in the city of Encarnación. As of now, we have no established areas.

The members sitting on the Work with Others Committee organize public briefings in a joint effort with the districts, presenting testimonies, exhibiting audiovisual materials and distributing brochures free of charge, as they carry out PI in secondary school institutions, in universities, for businesses, or during visits to health centers and important hospitals and television or radio stations. Thanks to all this, we are seeing a

slight increase in the number of new members joining groups.

CLAAP distributes our literature to all the groups in the country. It is charged with securing the means to maintain a permanent stock of literature. Not much money is raised through sales in literature events or in groups’ anniversary celebrations, and it is not sufficient to cover new literature orders. We have introduced an updated journal, *Vy’a Pave (Infinite Happiness)*, published back-to-back in two editions. Issue 15 was published August 15, 2017, with 1,000 copies, and Issue 16 in April of 2018 with 750 copies, at a reasonable price equivalent to \$3 U.S. We have also worked on developing the official web platform of A.A. Paraguay in our web page, www.alcoholicosanonimos.org.py. In terms of literature events carried out at a national level, three were held in total, two in cities in the interior and one in the Central Department.

With respect to international events, we participated in the following:

- XXIII National Convention (of Bolivia) held on November 10, 11 and 12 of 2017 in Santa Cruz, Bolivia
- 20th REDELA meeting, which took place October 1–5, 2017, in San José, Costa Rica
- VII Three Frontiers Meeting with the participation of colleagues from Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay and the Al-Anon community; celebrated April 7–8, 2018, in the Asunción Gran Hotel in Ciudad del Este.
- 42nd General Services Conference of Brazil, April 22–27, 2018, in the Grande Hotel Serra of Serra Negra in São Paulo
- 55th Annual Meeting of the General Services Conference of A.A. Argentina, June 23–24, 2018

Once again, we find ourselves preparing with great expectations and enthusiasm for a World Service Meeting being celebrated this year, the 25th. Lastly, the organization of the First South American Convention is projected to take place in November of 2019. For an event such as this, we are counting on the support of all the countries of the region. And so, it is necessary to strengthen the ties with the other A.A. structures the region covers.

In conclusion, we extend our appreciation to you in the name of our community for offering this opportunity, which has allowed us to spend time with all of you and to return to our homes with renewed spirit and filled with gratitude.

Juan D.

Peru: The XXVIII General Services Conference was held with the theme “Structured Service, Everyone’s Responsibility.” It went from May 18 through May 21 of 2017. The XXIX General Services Conference was conducted May 10–13, 2018 with the theme “Service: Commitment and Responsibility Born in the Group.” Both conferences took place in the Casa de Retiro San José de Cluny, in the district of Magdalena del Mar, department of Lima.

Currently, the amended statutes of the General Services Association of Alcoholics Anonymous are in the process of being registered in the public record. Our legal status is up to date, as the current president of the General Services Board is registered in the public archives. Up to now, our structure has not fully complied with the spirit of the Seventh Tradition. Travel costs of delegates and trustees to General Service Con-

ferences (including registration), events and service meetings are partly covered by the areas and/or regions. In other words, we are not yet fully assuming the cost of services. Internally, things are changing little by little. Areas are covering a part of the cost of travel of their delegates when they are invited to events. In most cases, the trustees themselves take on the cost of their service trips, whether in or outside the country (REDELA, WSM, invitations to visit other structures).

There are some 210 groups active in Peru (the number not having grown much in the last few years). Almost half of the groups are in Lima, the capital of Peru, while the rest are found in the country's departments. There are 18 districts working well throughout the country, with 10 districts within the two areas of Lima.

Public Information has made headway. Members, especially newcomers, are reading more. Delegates arrive better prepared at the General Service Conference. It is important to stress that in recent years we have seen positive growth in participation in regional events, conventions and forums. More work has to be done in terms of Cooperation with the Professional Community. This is borne out in the small number of nonalcoholic friends we have and reflected in the General Service Board, with only one Class A trustee.

In the last few years, our structure has not missed a WSM or REDELA event, or the General Service Conferences of Mexico and Colombia, to which we were invited. It is important to keep the international perspective of Alcoholics Anonymous by passing on experiences.

The General Services Office is still undergoing its administrative restructuring. The current manager began to serve on March 1, 2017. The GSO has three employees: the manager, a nonalcoholic administrative secretary, and a standing committees' secretary working on a part-time basis. Our GSO is largely maintained through literature sales. The GSO has been striving to grow and to improve services to groups and members. We are working on the idea of the areas taking up the task of sending proposed recommendations prior to the Conference, so that the groups can focus on their participation in the General Service Conference. Right now, only a very few areas are sending their proposed recommendations. More work needs to be done to consolidate the authority and responsibility of the Conference committees.

Juan H. L. V.

Poland: Greetings, everybody. My name is Michał. I am an alcoholic and a first-term delegate to the European Service Meeting (ESM), representing Poland. The Polish board of trustees is currently made up of 14 alcoholics, five nonalcoholic members and two national delegates. For the first time in the history of Polish A.A., we have such a composition. A significant number of nonalcoholics gives us many new opportunities in the field of public relationships and cooperation with the professional community.

For more than 30 years, we have been carrying the A.A. message into correctional facilities. Currently, 210 A.A. groups are present in 130 jails and prisons. This year, the first International Conference of Prison Service and A.A. Fellowship has taken place in Kalisz, attended by 34 A.A.s from Poland, Belarus, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Great Britain, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia and Ukraine, and about 50 prison service officers and professionals from Poland, Canada, Czech Republic, Germany,

Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia and Ukraine, who shared their experience on the theme "Common Goal — Joint Action." During the final speech, A.A. Poland's representative appealed to foreign participants, "Please follow the example of Poland and organize the next conference."

In the last two years, many foreign observers from A.A. structures joined us in our General Service Conference. I hope Brian J., observer from A.A. Great Britain, will not mind when I quote a part of his report: "There were 19 delegates from 12 countries making the conference a truly international gathering. The welcome we received was second to none with all participants that were already there speaking to us and shaking hands. We may not have understood the words, but the feelings and actions were unmistakably those of friendship and fellowship. The atmosphere was electric with much happiness and goodwill directed to all participants."

Language of the Heart — The whole A.A. Poland structure has been waiting years for this item. Last February we received the necessary license documents. On behalf of A.A. Poland, let me express my sincere gratitude for all the help and efforts made by David Rosen, publishing director at A.A.W.S., Inc., to have this issue finally resolved. The book will be distributed at our August 2019 convention to mark the 45th anniversary of the A.A. Fellowship in Poland. Thank you for attention.

Michał F.

Portugal: This year, Portugal had its 20th conference. We are a small structure with 11 areas and about 91 groups. We are coming out of difficult times because of lack of tolerance and poor unity. It seems that it is easier to get active when you are against something than when you are for it. We see some active members and good trusted servants, but others are lacking enthusiasm and the will to serve. The Portuguese society is receptive to our actions, but sometimes we need members to do more. Also, we see newcomers arriving, but our groups are not growing accordingly.

We keep a central office, open daily from 10:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m., with a nonalcoholic paid employee. There we have our central services: finances, information and support to groups and members, literature, answering services, Internet site, public information and national events. The board does finances and information and offers support to groups and members; the other services get done by committees with liaison to the board. The board also takes over on the employees' holidays.

After a decrease that started in 2009 and lasted until 2012, we are now seeing some increase in group, area and members' contributions. We are paying our bills but still need some financial help to be able to attend international meetings. It's been possible to begin our prudent reserve, even if with small amounts every month. We are also contributing to the European Service Meeting in a more consistent way. European Portuguese literature is mainly being translated from A.A.W.S. items, although we have our own manuals (*Service Manual* and a PI manual). Quarterly we publish a magazine (*Partilhar*) and a bulletin ("Os Três Legados").

Our central answering services are seeing some increase in the number of calls and emails received. The calls are forwarded to mobile phones on a weekday basis where a seven-member pool answers them and directs them to group members or PI trusted servants. We have a central Internet site that

has been upgraded and is now a new platform and has new features, some of them directed toward the members.

In the PI Committee, we are lacking members with the needed time and skills to do more. It's been possible to answer the demands that have been made on us and to do some PI meetings and some actions to support area PI committees. We are partners in the Alcohol and Health National Forum, which means that Portuguese society accepts A.A. and recognizes our value. Every year we have a service forum and every two years our national convention. We provide support to Portuguese-speaking groups in Angola (six) and Mozambique (three). We've been invited to and did attend the last four Great Britain conferences, and we also participated in the last two European Service Meetings.

Porfirio S.

Romania: The Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous in Romania in 2018 consists of almost 60 groups with more than 600 members, three Intergroups and three regions. We have Romanian language groups in Berlin, in Chisinau, Moldova Republic and a Romanian online group (for Loners and others) with meetings every evening. The board of trustees is currently made up of 11 members, 10 alcoholics from different regions of the country; and this year we have a Class A trustee (a non-alcoholic female psychologist).

The board of trustees is composed of four standing committees:

- Committee for Public Information
- Financial Committee
- Literature Committee with a subcommittee for Archives and another for *Noi insine (We Ourselves)*, magazine
- Committee for Cooperation with Professionals

The General Service Conference takes place annually for three days, in a place decided by the delegates the prior year. The Conference held this year in May determined that the delegates should work in four committees. The General Service Conference adopted a resolution that authorizes the Romanian General Service Conference to act for A.A. Romania as a guardian of A.A.'s Twelve Traditions within Romania.

This year we decided to start a new *Service Handbook* after we translate the *A.A. Service Manual*. A.A. in Romania is self-supporting through contributions from the groups and the sale of A.A. literature, but that seems not to be sufficient, because our delegates have to support all the cost for participation at the General Service Conference. The Romanian Fellowship is still depending on the wider A.A. Fellowship to be able to send a delegate to the WSM and the ESM. We are grateful for this support.

We have published a few books in Romanian. We continue to publish our magazine, *Noi Insine*, with a circulation of about 200 copies. We have begun translating *Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers* and *Language of the Heart*. We also have an A.A. helpline phone. We now have a digital call center that can transfer every call to four members from all the regions. Actually, we have three numbers and a national number 0770 CALLAA. We also created a new online application for A.A. meetings at grupuri.aaromania.ro.

We restarted participation in the European Service Meeting, and we have also participated for the third time in the

World Service Meetings. In 2016, two Romanian A.A. members were invited as observers to the Polish Service Conference, and in 2018 we were invited as observers at the Czech and the British A.A. service conferences. We really appreciate the support from the A.A. Fellowship ensuring our attendance at the General Service Conference and the participation at the ESM and WSM.

Catalin I.

Russia: Officially, there is one Russian A.A. General Service Conference, one General Service Board and one General Service Office (Foundation of Alcoholics Anonymous called "Unity"), which can be confirmed by the presence of over three-quarters of the Russian A.A. groups represented by delegates. In April 2018, the 30th Russian A.A. General Service Conference was held. At present, there are more than 500 groups in 120 localities in Russia. Basically, groups exist in big cities. Some of them hold their meetings several times a week.

A.A. Service Conference of Russia was deprived of its National Office in 2011 — Service Foundation of Russian A.A. and consecutively of its archives, contact details of the groups, etc. In 2012, under the resolution of the Conference, a new national service was established: Unity Foundation (GSO) that managed to recover group data, facilitate group services of A.A. in Russia within a short period of time, providing them with published literature and necessary information. Today, GSO keeps in touch with A.A. in Belarus, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, and the UK. GSO also maintains Russian-speaking groups in Ulan-Bator (Mongolia), Mogilev, Leda (Belarus), Haifa (Israel), Stockholm (Sweden), Helsinki (Finland), New York (USA), London (UK). We are also in regular contact with the U.S./Canada GSO in New York.

GSB publishes all basic books, brochures and leaflets approved by the General Service Conference of U.S./Canada. Since 2008 we've been working on clarifying the translation of *Alcoholics Anonymous*, preparing separate chapters of the updated translation. At present, the translators are working in close cooperation with GSO in New York.

Unfortunately, publishing and distribution of non-licensed A.A. literature by an unofficial service structure called FOAA continues (this unofficial entity was established in 2011). From December 2016 until June 2018 in accordance with GSO recommendations to FOAA to distribute literature published by GSO A.A. Unity Foundation under an agreement between FOAA and GSO A.A. Unity Foundation a small delivery of the book *Living Sober* was made. Service Foundation quoted the number and titles of literature to be purchased from GSO A.A.

Within the last several years, delegates have been starting to participate more actively in committee meetings of GSO A.A. Also, delegates initiate informal meetings between themselves and those interested in service through online meetings (chat, voice messaging meetings) where oldtimers are invited to inform and share experience.

Over the last few years, contributions from A.A. groups, areas and district committees have been significant. It is important to note that contributions increased as a result of the growing conscience of both individual members as well as A.A. groups and regional service entities, which started to send more prepared and informed candidates to the Conference. After the conference meetings, delegates take an active part in the work of GSB committees.

In contrast to previous years, we have had many seminars, speaker meetings and roundtable discussions dedicated to the Steps, Traditions and Concepts. Unfortunately, some of these seminars and speaker meetings focus on so-called “guest stars” from abroad or our local “celebrities.” While the seminars often focus on working the program of recovery in daily life, not much attention is being paid to carrying the message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

For the past several years, online A.A. groups have grown considerably, usually gathering on Skype, and we have a single service district for online groups so that they can take part and vote in Russian A.A.

In addition to our regular and ongoing public information efforts, we have been focusing on carrying the message to teenagers, starting new young people’s groups and informing appropriate governmental agencies.

Dmitry T.

Slovakia: In 2018, Slovak A.A. celebrated its 28th anniversary. As of 2016, we have 53 registered groups in 36 cities with approximately 440 members across five geographical areas. We continue to have one English- and one Hungarian/Slovak-speaking group. Only a few new groups have been registered by our GSO in the past couple of years. Most new members join an existing group in their area.

In 2015, I reported that due to personal disagreements, the majority of our General Service Board members had resigned. Since then, new members have been elected by our General Service Conference. The new trustees were able to continue to provide excellent service during these times of uncertainty concerning the Slovak A.A. service structure. Unfortunately, one Intergroup representing a large geographical area still chooses not to participate in the service structure. It had also stopped contributing any funds to GSO during the last three years. One member from this region decided to publish his second book on how to work the Twelve Steps. He basically copied complete pages and paragraphs from the Big Book and only provided his commentary. All this without any consideration of breaking our Tradition of anonymity and copyright laws. In his first book he used his whole name as the author. Both of these books are being sold in A.A. meetings and conventions organized by this particular Intergroup. Our GSC advised groups that this is not GSC-approved literature and expressed concern regarding violations of our Traditions and copyright laws by this author.

Our last GSC approved the production of a documentary of Slovak A.A. filmed by a professional team of videographers, produced by a well-known documentary film producer, of course, adhering to all our Traditions.

Early in 2018, we published our revised third edition of the Big Book. Our latest addition to our literature will be the book *Experience, Strength and Hope*, which should be published later in 2018.

Inter-country cooperation, including sponsorship between groups and service structures, continues. Early in 2018, for the very first time, we attended the GSC in Ukraine, for which we are very grateful.

We finished our new website. It is being constantly updated and now offers an easy way to search for meetings based on one’s current location and search radius. We also included the ability for different members to update specific parts of the

website. In 2018, our GSC approved a national phone number listed on our website. It is a new service shared by our members. So far, we have received only a few phone calls; more people lean toward emails.

We update our service manual on almost a yearly basis. This will also help any people new to service to navigate our service structure and guide them in their efforts. For the first time, we will be printing copies of the service manual and distributing them to each group. We are planning to conduct service-related workshops later in 2018.

Lubomir B.

Slovenia: Slovenia is a small country with a population of two million. This year we started the activities for celebrating the 30th anniversary of Slovenian A.A. in the coming year. This spring we started to collect the stories about our pioneers.

Today there are 54 groups with about 450 members. Our A.A. is organized in the traditional way. For the past two years, we did some very hard work in the process of changing our rules. We had to adapt them to fit better to our national laws and still keep the spirit of the Twelve Steps, the Twelve Traditions and the Twelve Concepts. In this procedure, we also had some trouble with placing principles before personalities, but we have managed well enough.

We are also very satisfied with our International Convention. This year will be the eighth. It will take place in the wonderful and intimate surroundings of the Julian Alps. Each year our guests are very satisfied with our translator, who is also a wonderful singer; for sure she is an excellent translator.

Our members are translating the *A.A. Service Manual, Combined with the Twelve Concepts for World Service* by Bill W., 2016–2018 edition. They have probably translated more than 85 percent of the book.

We have good relations with A.A.s in other European countries. Our international delegate was invited to join last year’s conference of Italian A.A. and this year’s conference of Danish A.A. Our friends in Denmark were especially interested in our experiences with including nonalcoholic members in our structure.

Through the Centers for Prevention and Treatment of Drug Addiction we have started to encourage those drug addicts who also have problems with alcohol to join A.A. groups. Some members of A.A. are also members of N.A.

Jasna Č. R.

South Africa: It is with a deep sense of gratitude that South Africa celebrates 72 years of A.A. Most encouragingly, there has been a steady growth of A.A. since 2016, and 56 new groups have opened their doors, bringing the total number of groups to 386. We now have an estimated membership of 5,500 members.

Notably, our 67th National General Service Conference was held in May this year in the A.A. spirit of love and tolerance. We lovingly welcomed an observer from Botswana and by doing so, embraced our Responsibility Statement by reaching out the hand of Alcoholics Anonymous to our neighboring countries. Namibia and Zimbabwe are now also part of the A.A.S.A. (Alcoholics Anonymous South Africa) structure, giving them representation at Conference level.

The Sub-Saharan Africa Service Meeting has positively con-

tributed to the growth of A.A. in our part of the world. Our sincerest appreciation and acknowledgments go to the boards of Great Britain and U.S./Canada for supporting and sponsoring this meeting.

At the Conference it was accepted that the theme will be "Service in Action." In light of this, the Conference ratified the month of August as "Service Awareness Month." This project will be coordinated by our national secretaries from GSO. It is hoped that this initiative will result in more members embracing and becoming involved in our Third Legacy of Service.

We have recently successfully launched the A.A.S.A. app, which has the following innovative features: Find a Meeting; Find an Event; Frequently Asked Questions; a link to the A.A.S.A. website; *Regmaker* magazine online; A.A. shares; and a notification feature for events, updates, important news and so on.

South Africa has 11 official languages, and the availability of A.A. literature in these languages is therefore a constant concern for GSO. Thanks to the generous assistance of the General Service Office in New York, the Big Book has been translated and published in Xhosa, Zulu and Afrikaans. The original English version is, however, still the most popular and is used at most A.A. meetings. In 2016, for the very first time, the English version of the Big Book was printed in South Africa.

The six regions in South Africa relentlessly continue to do good work with the various outreach programs in carrying the message to the still-suffering alcoholic. These programs are also focusing on the previously disadvantaged areas, namely, the townships in South Africa, and it is good to note that we are making visible progress in getting A.A. into the townships. A.A. is in a position to take its message of recovery to the still-suffering alcoholic in sectors of the population that to date have not been exposed to this wonderful program. Our Class A Trustees Social Worker Project has conducted 11 workshops in the six regions and in Namibia, reaching out to 1,300 social workers, child and youth care workers and psychologists. This project has enabled A.A. to make significant inroads into the social welfare system.

Durban lovingly awaits our World Service Meeting delegates.
Rajeev S.

Spain: At the present time, Spain's structure is made up of 25 areas distributed in four regional zones, 620 groups (13 of which are in penal institutions) and some 9,600 members. The General Service Board consists of two Class A trustees and eight Class B trustees, of whom four are from the headquarters city and one each from the regional zones. We are in contact with non-Spanish-speaking groups in order to try to work together and draw them closer, and if they so wish, integrate them into the structure in Spain. We continue to participate in the service forums held in the regional zones, facilitating the sharing of experiences among the various areas that take part in the forums, which are attended by two Class B trustees from the headquarters city and the trustee from the zone. This serves the purpose of bringing together the groups and the board and GSO activities.

Since the last World Service Meeting, we have held our XXXVIII and XXXIX General Service Conferences. The XXXVIII Conference took place April 13–15, 2016, with the theme "Our Literature, Our Wisdom," and the XXXIX Conference took place March 29–31 with the theme "The Delegate: Link in the

Structure." The operation of our office is made possible by the excellent work and dedication of the two hired staff members.

We continue to carry out the responsibility of holding Public Information activities in the "white zones" (where groups have not been formed). In addition to the activities implemented by the groups and areas in their zones of influence, the board focused its activities on Zaragoza 2016, Huelva 2017 and Mérida 2018. Two members of the General Services Board attended the XXIV World Service Meeting celebrated in Rye Brook, New York, October 26–27, 2016.

On June 12, 2017, our president accepted Línea Directa's "Solidarity" Prize on the recommendation of the deputy director of the office of the Director General of Traffic. In his remarks on accepting the award, he rejected the prize money, in keeping with our tradition of self-support. The XIX European Service Meeting, October 13–15, 2017, attended by delegates, was held in York, England, with the theme "Principles Before Personalities."

We are seeing a great increase in the number of visits to our web page, which allows us to readily and in a personal manner address the inquiries made by people interested in our program of recovery and/or family members, referring those asking for our help to the areas or groups. We continue to publish our two periodicals, *Akron 1935* and *Sharing*, with subscriptions now numbering over 2,000. We sent 435 copies of *Akron 1935* to nonalcoholic professionals and continue to stress the need for increasing subscriptions.

Cipriano C.

Sweden: A.A. in Sweden was founded in 1956. Today we have about 460 groups; there are also English-, Finnish-, Icelandic-, Polish-, Russian- and Spanish-speaking meetings. There are also about 20 Swedish-speaking groups abroad and three online groups.

The General Service Board consists of eight trustees, one from each of the six regions, and one Class A member. The international delegates are members of the General Service Board. The trustees of the board and the international delegates are elected by the Service Conference.

The Alcoholics Anonymous Association in Sweden is a registered nonprofit association, founded in 2001 and represented by the General Service Board. The association runs the publishing business and is also responsible for the General Service Office. The General Service Office has one full-time and one half-time employee.

The Conference-approved A.A. literature today consists of 11 translated books and one book published by Swedish A.A. There are 20 booklets and pamphlets in addition to decals, shades, CDs and DVDs in Swedish. The Big Book is now translated into Swedish (third edition), and we are happy to say that it still sells very well. The Literature Committee is now busy working with booklets and pamphlets so that they are aligned with the new translation of the Big Book.

The Swedish website www.aa.se has been expanded and is an important link in the network of spreading the message. The meeting list is available online. The workgroup has finished the new website based on the latest technology, and it has been up and running since August 2015. At the last Service Conference, a new design for the website was approved. The new website is now working with the latest technology and design.



and we continue to effect outreach programs through the media, health fairs, lectures and discussions to sensitize the population about the dangers of alcohol consumption and the availability of A.A. One of our Intergroups set up an information booth at the main venue of our carnival celebration, which was visited both by local members and foreign visitors as well.

Since the last World Service Meeting, we hosted national conventions in 2017 and one in 2018, which were two-day events in Trinidad and Tobago. The programs for these conventions were imaginative as well as inspiring. Our annual General Service Meeting is held in November each year when all stakeholders of A.A. come together to discuss, debate and make recommendations for matters concerning the health and growth of our beloved Fellowship. In addition, over the past two years, six groups have started, which had to be added to the "Who Me?" in our next printing. The annual convention, as well as our annual gratitude dinner, continue to be our major fundraisers to supplement contributions from members and groups. We continue to implore members and groups to support our services.

A.A. in Sweden is still not self-supporting by its own contributions. Approximately 60 percent of our income comes from the sales of literature. The Archives Committee continues its work to examine and catalog all the material contained in the archive.

Ewa B.

Trinidad and Tobago: Trinidad and Tobago form a twin island republic, and they are the most southerly islands of the Caribbean, with a population of approximately 1,392,000. There are currently 116 A.A. groups meeting in rural and urban areas throughout our twin island state.

We have three principal publications: the *A.A. Times*, which is a quarterly publication reflecting news and views from our General Service Office; the *A.A. Pumpkinvine* magazine, which is now published annually to coincide with our national convention; and the "Who Me?" pamphlet, which contains vital information on A.A. and alcoholism, and a complete listing of all our groups and their meeting times and venues.

We are still in the process of building our web page in accordance with the guidelines on websites. We have actually employed an individual to get the site up and running. We have a 24-hour telephone service on which we receive an average of 10 calls daily from persons seeking information about A.A. These calls come mostly from relatives and employers of persons who might have drinking problems.

During the past two years, we have established contact with the judiciary because we are getting more and more referrals from the courts for persons caught driving under the influence, and they require proof of attendance at our meetings. The courts do not supply these persons with any forms or slips, and we have to formulate some sort of certificate to give to these persons as proof of attendance to our meetings.

Our country is well known for our carnival, calypso and steel band, all of which are closely associated with the excessive use of alcohol. We in Alcoholics Anonymous know this,

debate and make recommendations for matters concerning the health and growth of our beloved Fellowship. In addition, over the past two years, six groups have started, which had to be added to the "Who Me?" in our next printing. The annual convention, as well as our annual gratitude dinner, continue to be our major fundraisers to supplement contributions from members and groups. We continue to implore members and groups to support our services.

Raj R. R.

Turkey: A.A. has been active in Turkey since 1988, with alcoholics in recovery applying the Twelve Step recovery program, with groups protecting the Twelve Traditions, and with GSO following the Twelve Concepts in service. Alcoholics Anonymous has existed and tried to help alcoholics recover for 30 years without a legally recognized identity.

Currently the main highlight of A.A. Turkey has been the recent acquisition of a legally recognized identity: *Adsiz Alkolikler Yardımlaşma ve Dayanışma Derneği* — Alcoholics Anonymous Solidarity and Support Association — was formed on February 7, 2018, with all the necessary legal approval and authority, as approved by government offices. The official address has been changed and registered as *Kocareis Mah. İlkiz Sokak 22/8 Cankaya Ankara*. The association now, with its legally recognized identity, joins and organizes panels and conferences in hospitals, prisons or other governmental associations, and supports the A.A. groups' activities with the necessary literature.

The main purposes of the A.A. Turkey association:

1. To cooperate with government agencies;
2. To put donation income and literature sales income on a legal basis;
3. To use a legally recognized identity to help A.A. grow in Turkey and reach more alcoholics.

Another highlight after forming the association has been

the recent cooperation with governorships. In 81 cities, in the governorships, Addiction City Council Units have been formed. We have applied for membership in these councils, while protecting our Sixth, Seventh and Tenth Traditions. On these councils are the assistant governor of each city, surgeon generals of hospitals, chief constables nonprofit organizations. These members work in the field of addiction.

At the Annual Conference that will be held in October, we will be inviting our A.A. fellow members from all around the world, and we will be holding official English-speaking meetings. So far, the English-speaking groups and fellows have been joining our conventions and have been holding meetings. Our English-speaking A.A. members have been helping with translation in Turkish meetings. This time, there will be official English-speaking meetings, both for English-speaking members who live in Turkey and for our guests from all around the world.

Apart from all this good news, we do have an issue. Today, our Fellowship has very limited funds. Unfortunately, Tradition Seven does not work as well as it should, and most of our members pay for most services out of their own pockets. In meetings, the money put in the basket is sometimes less than the price of a cup of tea. Since we cannot force anyone to contribute, this problem remains unsolved. Therefore, the activities and projects we can work on are limited.

We are grateful to be attending this meeting through the funds given to us by A.A. Great Britain and the World Service Meeting fund. We are hoping to do this with our own funds one day and even funding some other Fellowship. One day at a time....

Fatma N. I. Z.

Ukraine: Alcoholics Anonymous in Ukraine, now in its 29th year, is continuing to evolve and grow, relying on successful past practices as well as trying out and implementing new approaches to service and to carrying the A.A. message.

Our 20th General Service Conference this May again took place over a three-day period and included presentations by Conference participants on various topics such as unity, carrying the message, and service, and for the second year had a speaker's meeting and a "What's on Your Mind?" sharing session. We continue to have international A.A. guests at our General Service Conferences. This year's guest observers were Lubomir B. from Slovakia and Aivars E. from Latvia, A.A. international delegates in their respective countries. They took part in the Conference's general and committee sessions, shared on the Conference's theme "Keeping It Simple," and added to the overall spirit of our Conference with their presence and participation.

The Prydnistrovya region, which is composed of five groups from the cities of Dnipro, Kryvyi Rih and Zaporizhia in south-central Ukraine, was accepted into our A.A. service structure during our Conference, giving Ukraine A.A. five active regions. There are two nonactive regions as well.

Planning for our 30-year anniversary convention next summer was slowed down a bit as the Conference decided to postpone voting on the selection of the host city until the July board meeting. The board was authorized to decide between the Western Ukraine city of Ivano-Frankivsk and Ukraine's capital, Kyiv. Two mini conferences were held this year in the Western Ukraine and Kyiv regions, respectively. Their purpose is to

allow for A.A.s in the respective regions to share their concerns and thus better prepare the region's delegates for the General Service Conference.

The General Service Board held its first-ever board inventory at its November 2017 meeting. The process was facilitated by former U.S. and Canada trustee and U.S. international delegate Bob W., who joined us on Skype. We had established a relationship with Bob when he attended our Conference in 2016. Earlier in 2017, in February, the western Ukraine region conducted a region inventory, a first for A.A. in Ukraine.

The Literature Committee continues to translate brochures into the Ukrainian language. Five brochures were translated and printed in Ukrainian since the beginning of 2017; another two have been translated and are going through the approval process, and another three are at various stages of the translation process. We also have printed in Ukraine two Russian-language books as well as several pamphlets, which were translated by A.A. in Russia. All our literature is now designed to look like the A.A. literature printed by A.A.W.S. in New York. A.A.W.S. has approved our retranslation of the Big Book into the Ukrainian language. We are completing final editing and continuing to gather personal recovery stories from A.A. members in Ukraine. We will also be translating selected stories from the English-language fourth edition of the Big Book. A.A. Ukraine was helped last year by a generous donation from our fellow A.A.s in British Columbia, Canada, who purchased a total of 800 Big Books and the "Twelve and Twelve" for a discounted price made possible by the International Literature Fund, a gift for which we are very grateful. This year we were able to "give back" by donating Ukrainian-language literature to the General Service Offices in the UK, Poland and Italy. We plan to offer a free sampling of our Ukrainian-language literature to A.A. General Service Offices in countries that request it.

This year, we were able to pay off a significant debt for legal fees in connection with reregistering our General Service Office and moving it to Poltava in May 2016. We continue to organize service workshops to share, learn, and carry the message within our own A.A. community, including seminars on the Steps, Traditions, Concepts, carrying the message, sponsorship and the home group. And in December 2016, four board members held a special meeting with A.A. members in the Volyn region in which groups had stopped sending Seventh Tradition contributions to the General Service Office. They talked to about a dozen A.A. members there about service, listened to them, and answered questions. At the region's service conference the next spring, conference participants voted to begin sending contributions to the General Service Office again and have followed through.

Yury T.

U.S./Canada: In our service structure, there are more than 68,000 listed A.A. groups with nearly 1.4 million members. Our structure is divided into eight regions, six in the United States and two in Canada. Within these regions are a total of 93 delegate areas, with each area electing a delegate for a two-year term.

Each year in the spring, we hold our General Service Conference in New York, with approximately 137 voting members, at least two-thirds of whom are delegates, with the remainder being trustees, nontrustee directors of the corporate boards

and management and selected staff members of our General Service Office and Grapevine.

Among many other things, the 2018 Conference approved development of new pamphlets for Spanish-speaking women in A.A. and on A.A.'s Three Legacies, as well as updates to several pamphlets to add language related to the military, anonymity and safety in Alcoholics Anonymous and the adoption of "The 'God' Word" pamphlet currently published by Great Britain. The Conference also authorized A.A. World Services to develop a company page on LinkedIn and approved the new public service announcement, "Changes."

A.A. World Services and AA Grapevine are both currently developing new or updated websites, apps and YouTube channels. Simultaneously, the General Service Board has commissioned a Communications Audit by an outside consulting firm to make recommendations and implementation plans for improving our communications both within the service structure and externally, with any approved actions to take effect over the next three years.

Driven in part by increased online activity by groups and members, total contributions in 2017 exceeded \$8.4 million, the highest ever and six percent greater than in 2016. In 2017, our website, aa.org, was visited nearly 13.4 million times, an increase of six percent over 2016. Many recent updates include an "A.A. Around the World" feature with a downloadable version of the World Service Meeting Final Report.

In 2017, we published more than 1.7 million books and booklets in English, French and Spanish. We also published more than 2.9 million pamphlets. Our net literature sales were nearly \$13.7 million, an increase of 3.8 percent over 2016. The Big Book is currently available in 71 languages. Other literature is translated into over 92 languages.

Last, but certainly not least, the 15th International Convention of Alcoholics Anonymous will take place in Detroit, Michigan, on July 2–5, 2020, with the theme "Love and Tolerance Is Our Code." More than 50,000 A.A. members and guests from around the world are expected to celebrate A.A.'s 85th year with Big Meetings held Friday night, Saturday night and Sunday morning in the Ford Field Stadium, as well as smaller meetings downtown throughout the weekend. Registration information will be available next year on the website, and we look forward to seeing you in Detroit in 2020!

Newton P.

Venezuela: Alcoholics Anonymous in Venezuela has approximately 2,700 members and about 240 groups, in addition to seven institutional groups. The structure includes 30 districts (only seven areas work under this system), two territories, five regions and 27 areas, of which 21 are currently active. Alcoholics Anonymous of Venezuela has a General Services Office in Caracas responsible for all administrative and distribution tasks for the entire Fellowship in Venezuela.

Self-support for our Fellowship is achieved through member and group contributions, although the amount collected has been rendered insignificant by hyperinflation, now at three percent per day. We depend on several plans for self-support:

- Plan 365 and annual individual contributions
- Plan 365 and annual group contributions
- Structure Week
- Appreciation Week

We also have a magazine called *Gratitude*, which used to come out quarterly, but due to conditions in our country at this time, we are now publishing two issues in black and white with a reduced number of pages.

We do not have a formal collaboration agreement. We have been working without it and, for reasons beyond our control, it hasn't happened. Most institutions are struggling to keep going, and governmental institutions have not opened their doors, even with the constant stream of letters we have sent asking for a meeting with them. In PI we continue to work on the different special weeks through the Social Networks, which is the networking system available in Venezuela.

Central Mexicana is still sponsoring us. We have to solidify the structure of the GSO and the Conference to spur a balanced development of all levels of the General Services structure, expanding our capacity to carry the message to the still-suffering alcoholic.

Some things we have recently done to improve our ability to carry the message:

- Appointing trustees: We went from four trustees, three Class B and one Class A, to five Class B and one Class A, thus improving in this respect.
- We have formed General Services Board committees. Those now set up are the following: Finances and Budget, Appointments, Literature, General Services Conference, Public Information, Cooperation with the Professional Community / Treatment / Special Needs-Accessibilities, National Conventions / Regional Forums, International Conventions.
- We also organized the General Services Board.
- Hiring staff: We are struggling to keep the employees we have. Even though the salary each one gets is only about the cost of a carton of eggs, they are doing an admirable job for us.
- Conference committees will be restructured.
- The National Public Information Plan was developed.

Aside from this, we have been invited by our sponsors to send two members of our board to the annual Mexico Conference. Two delegates of the Venezuela Conference have been invited by the Mexico structure to share in work done in several areas. Similarly, we were invited to send our general manager to visit the General Services Office of Central Mexicana. Finally, a Class B trustee is participating in the 20th REDELA meeting.

I wish to say that despite the extreme circumstances we are living under in our country, Venezuela, Alcoholics Anonymous continues to overcome all obstacles, whether of race, economic, social, structural, political or economic, among many others. Our story in Venezuela is not a typical success story, but rather that of how, by the grace of God, an unexpected strength has emerged from our weakness; of how, under the threat of breakup and collapse, unity and national fellowship have been forged (which we have always had). We have felt the support not only of our great sponsors, but also at the international level. We are and always will be infinitely grateful, and we will always be there for them, God willing. This is the Great Reality for us. May God always bless and protect us.

Nicolás P.

Committee Reports



Agenda

The committee reviewed the Composition, Scope and Procedure and made no changes.

The committee recommended the following theme for the 26th World Service Meeting: “The Purpose of Our Service: Sobriety within Everyone’s Reach.”

The committee recommended that the following presentation/discussion topics be included on the agenda for the 26th World Service Meeting:

1. Importance of the Group Conscience Process
 - a. Reaching an informed Group Conscience
 - b. Sharing the group conscience throughout the A.A. structure: A two-way process
2. Encouraging Women into General Service
 - a. Sponsorship in the service structure
 - b. Overcoming barriers that prevent women from participating in service
 - c. Sharing the joy and benefits of general service
3. Young People in A.A.
 - a. What are we doing to attract young people in A.A.?
 - b. Helping young people stay involved in A.A. through their home group, sponsorship and service?
 - c. How can we improve digital communications between newcomers and oldtimers?
4. Anonymity
 - a. Personal Anonymity
 - b. Anonymity in the Home Group
 - c. Anonymity and the Internet
5. Safety in A.A.
 - a. What are groups doing to maintain a welcoming and safe meeting environment?
 - b. The role of sponsorship and our literature in regards to safety
 - c. Safety for the newcomer — our personal responsibility

6. International Literature Fund

- a. Raising awareness of the importance of the International Literature Fund
- b. Sharing experience on how countries support the International Literature Fund
- c. Encouraging country participation

The committee recommended that the following Workshop topics be on the agenda of the 25th World Service Meeting:

1. Communication — A Key to Unity
2. The Use and Value of our A.A. Literature in Sponsorship
3. The Importance of our Nonalcoholic Friends in Our Structures

The committee elected Ewa B. of Sweden as chairperson and Jorge T. of Mexico as alternate chairperson.

Literature/Publishing

The committee reviewed the Composition, Scope and Procedure and made no changes.

The committee accepted the A.A.W.S. Report on the International Literature Fund regarding the fund and the disbursement of funds. Committee members shared on current challenges in providing A.A. literature reflecting the cultural experience of the membership in their respective countries while ensuring the integrity of the A.A. message. The committee also discussed the importance of maintaining literature that is current and attractive to the younger alcoholic.

The committee reviewed with appreciation the “Country-to-Country Sponsorship” service piece. Committee members discussed the development of guidelines (like the various Guidelines published by the U.S./Canada General Service Office) that might be useful to countries in “carrying the A.A. message worldwide.” It was determined that the development of a codified document may be difficult since no one experience would fit all situations. Instead, committee members

discussed that some countries have already developed guidelines useful within their structure, and that one-on-one discussions between delegates may also be helpful in providing shared experience.

The committee addressed the following topics related to A.A. literature:

1. The need for modernizing the language in the book *Alcoholics Anonymous* considering younger members whose vernacular is different from the language used when the Big Book was written.

After a lively discussion, it was the consensus of the committee that the essence of the Big Book — the principles and philosophy as reflected in the first 164 pages — remain timeless and should remain as it was written. However, one member felt that the current text was off-putting to women; and another member suggested that the text should be changed to a more “gender-neutral” language (i.e., the chapter “To Wives” can be retitled to “To Partners”). One member suggested that the addition of footnotes to explain that the language reflects the zeitgeist of when the Big Book was written. Another member suggested that the story selection should be updated to reflect the current population of the Fellowship.

Committee members agreed that there should be an ongoing process to ensure that A.A.’s other books and pamphlets reflect present-day A.A.

2. Who sets the literature prices in your country? What procedures are used?

A few committee members indicated that the literature prices are set by their respective service structures via committee system (i.e., finance committee).

Most committee members shared the challenges in providing literature at an affordable price against the backdrop of decreasing group contributions wherein the profit margin percentage is crucial to funding the vital services needed to carry the message.

One member shared that books are priced at cost and the shortfall is made up with non-A.A. sales (i.e., selling literature to treatment facilities).

Another member shared that while literature prices fluctuate with the rate of inflation, 10 copies of the Big Book are provided free to new groups.

3. What is your country’s experience regarding pricing (if at all) A.A. leaflets and brochures?

Most committee members shared that A.A. pamphlets are provided at no cost to members.

4. When a member requests to purchase literature (published and distributed by the member’s country) from another General Service Office, the member should be referred to the G.S.O. in his/her country.

The committee agreed with the current practice that members outside the U.S./Canada who wish to purchase literature from the U.S./Canada General Service Office are referred to the G.S.O. in their respective country.

The committee recommended that A.A. World Services, Inc. consider use of the International Literature Fund to offset ad-

ministrative costs associated with translation review and copyright registration of AA Grapevine, Inc. books.

The committee had a wide-ranging discussion regarding the benefits, pitfalls and development of policy regarding online literature including, but not limited to:

- The potential of downloadable literature cannibalizing print literature sales; one country noted that while their literature is available electronically, it is not downloadable;
- The benefits of e-books and audiobooks as a means of providing the A.A. message in a more accessible format, including those members who may have learning challenges.

The committee agreed to forward this topic for further discussion by the Literature/Publishing Committee at the 26th World Service Meeting in 2020.

The committee elected Fatma N. I. Z. of Turkey as chairperson and Newton P. of U.S./Canada as alternate chairperson.

Policy/Admissions/Finance

The committee reviewed the Composition, Scope and Procedure made no changes.

The committee approved the requests of Bolivia and Turkey to participate at the 25th World Service Meeting.

The committee reviewed the qualifications for countries participating in the World Service Meeting and the qualifications for World Service Meeting delegates and made no changes to either.

The committee reviewed World Service Meeting finances and delegates’ fees and had an in-depth discussion of the spiritual and practical aspects of the Seventh Tradition principle of self-support. The committee discussed a proposal to form a subcommittee to perform a cost analysis of the World Service Meeting and provide suggestions that would allow the delegate fee to remain at the current level and reduce the actual overall cost per delegate and took no action. The sense of the committee was that this was not needed at this time.

The committee recommended that the 26th World Service Meeting be held October 25-29, 2020.

The committee reviewed a memo from the World Service Meeting Coordinator that reported the progress made in exploring an online communication vehicle for World Service Meeting delegate sharing between meetings and the implementation of that communication platform within the next six months. Most committee members found the World Service Meeting Dashboard helpful; however, one member indicated a preference for receiving documents via postal mail, noting that some delegates may have limited computer access.

The committee reviewed correspondence from El Salvador and Honduras, notifying the World Service Meeting of their withdrawal from the Central American Northern Zone and sharing their intention of participating in the World Service Meeting as individual countries starting in 2020. The committee also reviewed correspondence from Guatemala sharing their intention of participating in the World Service Meeting as an individual country starting in 2020.

The committee recommended that countries that have participated in the World Service Meeting as members of a zone

and want to begin participating as an individual country will need to reapply for admission as an individual country.

The committee discussed current World Service Meeting financial assistance procedures and agreed to establish a 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 will be maintained and administered by A.A. World Services under the purview of the World Service Meeting Policy/Admissions/Finance Committee.

The committee agreed that World Service Meeting delegate listings in the International A.A. Directory and the World Service Meeting *Final Report* may include the delegate's full name, telephone number and email address but exclude their home address.

The committee elected Agust A. of Iceland as chairperson, and Alberto C. of Argentina as alternate chairperson.

Working with Others

The committee reviewed the Composition, Scope and Procedures and made no changes.

The committee discussed the following topics:

1. Public Information

Committee members shared their experience on how best to communicate the A.A. message and enhance unity using current media and outreach.

A number of countries reported the use of social media to increase participation and outreach. For most, it has proven to be a valuable tool in communicating with professionals, young people and remote communities. Some, however, cited privacy concerns and the waning popularity of Facebook and other social media outlets as a reason to rely instead on a strong web presence with GSO-approved content to disseminate information about local A.A.

Some committee members noted the use of television and radio spots, the written press, documentary films and apps to drive awareness and participation. Additionally, some members noted the use of Skype and Zoom to facilitate virtual meetings in contexts that are not conducive to physical meetings.

Most regarded technology as an enabler, not a substitute, for in-person meetings and noted the A.A. message is still best communicated person-to-person.

One country reported difficulty communicating due to very restricted, Internet access, government control and limited resources. It was shared that direct outreach to medical professionals, mental health practitioners and corrections personnel — as well as engagement with non-governmental organizations — has been an effective method for engaging the professional community.

Many countries cited the significance of Class A trustees in sharing the message of A.A. through direct access and interaction with the public. Similarly, some countries noted the absence of Class A trustees has hindered their outreach efforts.

While most countries indicated that technology facilitates interaction, some committee members noted the

importance of safeguarding anonymity as groups venture into social media and other tech outlets.

2. How do local A.A. groups collaborate with A.A. groups across national borders, and what is the role of online meetings?

While some countries noted they do not hold online meetings, others cited the use of email lists and online forums for sharing questions, comments and support. Most countries reporting the use of online platforms cited geographic isolation as the primary impetus.

One member discussed online interaction as an entry point for face-to-face meetings. It was noted that regardless of format, adherence to the Traditions, principles and teachings of A.A. is paramount.

A number of countries shared that interaction between local groups across borders is common, as neighboring countries are often connected through shared language and physical proximity.

One country noted that service meetings encourage increased cooperation and collaboration within and between groups.

Reacting to the word “local,” one member shared that interaction among members often transcends national boundaries when groups meet virtually or in person to discuss their shared concerns and the common traditions of A.A.

One country reported that due to the absence of Internet connectivity, human contact is the primary method of communication. As a result, group members often take long journeys to reach and engage with new participants.

3. Strategies to keep members active in service

One country shared that newcomers in its groups are particularly encouraged to serve. Some countries also noted the importance of engaging newcomers through sharing, rotation and service workshops. Another country noted that sponsorship is a useful way to pass on experience and engender a deeper understanding of practice and principles.

Several countries reported a decreased appetite for service, often affecting trust and confidence within the groups. It was noted that literature can be a critical tool to reflect and encourage the principle of service. Also noted was the importance of leading by personal example, modeling behavior and fostering a safe judgment-free environment. One member shared the importance of encouraging members to see service as a small price for their continued sobriety.

One country noted it maintains a database of all members in service so as not to lose contact upon rotation. Another country discussed the use of service sponsors to train and mentor those who are new to the role.

4. Accessibility of the A.A. message to underserved communities.

One country noted it employs simplicity of language and message to make A.A. more accessible to underserved communities. Another country shared that increased, diverse representation on boards is a means to achieving accessibility. A committee member noted the

word “underserved” can refer to gender, ability, health, social status and numerous other factors.

Some countries shared they make use of technology to reach underserved communities such as the elderly or disabled. Following a conversation on how best to serve those who are Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing, one country noted its website offers guidelines for members of the A.A. community who are deaf. She invited committee members to access and utilize that information.

Several countries cited insufficient experience on the topic.

5. Are all alcoholics safe in A.A.?

Most countries shared that safety in A.A. is a serious concern and that there are frequent reports of sexual harassment. One country also noted challenges with racial discrimination. A few countries shared that safety has not been a concern in their local groups.

One country noted strong, effective sponsorship helps initiate new members and properly set expectations regarding conduct. A suggestion was made to develop Safety Cards and committee members were invited to review the card currently used in the United States/Canada.

One committee member added that in her country, groups become safer as more women enter into service. Another member suggested that same-gender sponsorship is an effective strategy to avoid incidents.

A member commented that the concept of safety also extends to minority groups, adding groups must be tolerant and welcoming of all people, but intolerant of any form of discrimination or alienation.

6. Cooperation with the Professional Community (C.P.C.)

C.P.C. as a resource for alcoholics through public and private companies in the occupational health care business: Some countries reported working with private sector companies and events to present and discuss the benefits of the A.A. program. To accomplish this, they secured commercial booths to distribute literature and pamphlets.

How A.A. cooperates with professionals: One country shared it frequently engages physicians in educating medical students about A.A. Another country shared that upon recovery, formerly hospitalized alcoholics play a critical role in impressing upon the medical community the benefits of A.A.

One committee member shared alcohol is forbidden in his country. In the absence of a regulating body to ensure the safety of alcoholic beverages, many who drink are harmed, often fatally, from alcohol consumption. Additionally, he noted the challenge of A.A. being unrecognized as a legal entity due to the country’s rejection of all non-governmental organizations. While meetings are permitted, members are unable to engage with institutions in an official capacity.

Maintaining A.A.’s primary purpose in treat-

ment settings: One member discussed the function of A.A. groups in the health sector and noted it is important that groups remain autonomous. Another member stressed the importance of developing strong relationships with healthcare staff while being conscious of the program’s independence from the institution.

Some countries noted the challenge of changing the perception of alcoholism — that it is a disease and distinct from other forms of addiction. They remarked on the cultural trivialization of alcoholism and the frequently perpetuated myth that it is a curable condition.

A.A. as a resource for alcoholics in the judicial system and for legal professionals: One country reported working with the judicial system, magistrates and various legal bodies to increase understanding of A.A. To achieve this, members attend legal conferences, conventions and other events to distribute A.A. literature and heighten awareness.

What are we doing to carry the message into correctional facilities?: Some committee members shared that A.A. groups are not permitted within correctional facilities in their countries. They discussed ongoing efforts to negotiate with local governments, NGOs and medical professionals to secure a place for A.A. within the prison and legal system.

One country discussed the positive impact of engaging recently released inmates in service.

Maintaining A.A.’s primary purpose in correctional facilities: Some countries reported their local A.A.s provide workshops and trainings to educate mental health practitioners and solidify the program’s reputation as a vital and successful treatment method.

Citing considerable success within the prison system, one country reported weekly meetings for alcoholic inmates and annual gatherings for practitioners.

The committee elected Lotus A. of French-speaking Europe as chairperson, and Rajeev S. of South Africa as alternate chairperson.



Workshop Reports

Workshop I

How to Use the Internet Wisely

1. *What examples demonstrate effective use of the Internet and A.A. websites to help carry the A.A. message? Discuss service structure, group and individual A.A. efforts to carry the message online.*

The Internet helps to carry the message to areas where there is no presence of A.A. A.A. literature and books can be read online in many languages.

The use of the Internet by service structures is almost universal with most countries maintaining a national website. The use of national websites to provide information about A.A., list meetings, events and other A.A. relevant information helps to carry the message and to inform the public about A.A. The ability to accept contributions online has resulted in increased participation in the Seventh Tradition in some countries.

The sites must be user-friendly, easily accessible and continually developed. Working with professional website development companies is important. Websites can provide useful statistics that can aid in evaluating the effectiveness of a site. Website content is typically reviewed and approved by trusted servants.

One country reported that 10 members provide Twelfth Step help 18 hours a day via their website; another country developed a chatbot, "the anonymous friend," to share A.A. experience and information. Many websites include a web shop for the purchase of literature and magazines, and a variety of meeting finder approaches, some of which integrate mapping software. Information for members, including board, regional and office news along with conference reports, is available on some sites.

Service structures around the world are using a variety of online platforms such as Skype, WebEx and Zoom to conduct meetings of all kinds, from trustees' meetings to a literature committee working on a revision/translation of the Big Book. Some structures also use social media platforms including WhatsApp and Facebook, citing the use of private messaging features that allow newcomers to ask for help; however, there is concern that maintaining anonymity on social media platforms can be challenging. There are varying opinions as to the actual level of anonymity afforded by "closed" and "private" groups on social media platforms.

Countries are using mobile apps for member contributions and meeting finders. One country's website provides a place to subscribe to a podcast meeting on radio each month. Some countries have YouTube channels. Use of email has significantly reduced postal mail costs.

Opportunities exist to coordinate more with Class A non-alcoholic trustees to carry the message online and to utilize password-protected webinars for workshops and presentations.

In some countries websites and web access are controlled by

the government and have resulted in limited or no access to online platforms. Email is a useful tool for many structures.

Use of the Internet at the group and individual level has both positive and negative aspects. Online meetings and groups allow members who cannot attend face-to-face meetings to attend A.A. meetings, carry the message and be of service. At the same time, it is important not to lose the value of face-to-face A.A. meetings and interaction with other members outside of meetings. Many members stay in contact with each other on a variety of Internet platforms.

Anyone can find information about A.A. on their mobile phones: pamphlets can be downloaded, there are podcasts to listen to, there is a YouTube channel, websites can be accessed. It was noted that sharing the Daily Reflection or excerpts from other A.A. literature via social media may be violating copyright and decreasing sales.

Some feel that use of the Internet is for sharing "information not the message." Many expressed the concern that social media platforms conflict with Traditions Three, Six and Nine. While it is clear that the Internet is a vital conduit to share information about A.A. and that many, if not most, people today look for information about A.A. online, anonymity breaks especially at the individual level are problematic. While anonymity breaks on social media platforms are a particular concern, it is also possible to be too anonymous so no one can find you.

2. *After reflecting on Traditions Eleven and Twelve:*

How do we practice attraction not promotion on the Internet?

As we lovingly share our experience, strength and hope, by relating our own life experiences to those seeking help, this will surely be attractive. Others feel that while social media does attract people to A.A. the Internet is not appropriate for personal stories. Newsletters for professionals have been useful and are not promoting but providing information. One country suggested that "Attraction means I give; promotion means I'm selling."

Some countries question: how do Google ads fit with attraction rather than promotion? Where is the line between attraction and promotion on websites?

Others are clear that we should share A.A. information like the Twelve Steps, not information about dances.

Some General Service Offices or General Service Conferences provide recommendations for using social media but note that it is up to members what they do.

How do we maintain personal anonymity in this public medium?

There were numerous suggestions for how to maintain personal anonymity in this public medium:

- By adopting Internet safety guidelines; countries should consider developing their own guidelines, using Great Britain's guidelines or reviewing guidelines available from various countries and adapt to suit their own requirements and needs.

- We must exercise great care when using social media as many anonymity breaks are happening; we need to be serious about our Traditions and use these platforms wisely, placing principles before personalities.
- Use only first names.
- Use group names rather than individual's names.
- A blurred image on public media may conceal identity but other indicators may reveal identity.
- Questions like "Are you coming to a meeting tomorrow?" can violate anonymity.
- The future is here; communicating on Internet is normal for many, so it is important that newcomers learn about anonymity.
- It is important to learn and know how to use the technological features of each social media platform in order to insure the Traditions in that particular environment. Each platform is different.
- Add the anonymity statement to meeting formats.
- Sponsors can guide newcomers/sponsees in how to use the Internet while maintaining the Traditions.
- Our actions online as individuals can negatively affect A.A. as a whole.

Workshop II

Country-to-Country Sponsorship

Workshop discussions were informed by the following questions:

1. *A.A.'s history of one country helping another country is extraordinary — share what the benefits have been on the receiving end and on the giving side. Currently, what are some of the ways that your country sponsors other countries?*

While it may be difficult to codify the country-to-country process, a few initial factors may be considered. For example, sponsoring countries where language is shared can be helpful; cultural relationships can also be useful.

Some countries have found that sponsorship works best if there is a procedure in place wherein countries seeking sponsorship can formally request help. One country developed guidelines reflecting shared experience; another with a long history of extending the hand of A.A. to several countries uses the Responsibility Statement as the core of its work. Some shared that it may be best if a country — new to sponsoring another country — were "sponsored into sponsorship."

There are many ways to sponsor countries — from providing shared experience to help developing structures in their infancy, to supporting efforts enabling women to form groups where cultural mores dictate segregation of the sexes, to providing financial assistance enabling a country to send a delegate to the World Service Meeting. Some countries have difficulty in obtaining/translating literature, but financial support — either directly or through the International Literature Fund — is another form of sponsorship. Sponsorship can even take place simply by members attending conventions in a less able area — to help support

financially by their presence and paying for their ticket and providing literature when they arrive, having brought it from their home groups.

Sometimes an amalgamation of countries can be possible, where a larger country can provide facilities to a smaller country and allow them to function as a region of that country.

Engaging nonalcoholics from the professional and/or religious community may prove beneficial. For example, one country cooperated with nuns working in the sponsee-country who, while not alcoholics themselves, were able to carry the message to the suffering alcoholic.

2. *Fostering self-support — How much help is too much help?*

Members shared that in situations where there is a great disparity in resources, caution should be taken that financial aid is not provided at the expense of "spiritual" sponsorship. It was shared that "too much" support is reflected when the gift stunts the growth of the country on the receiving end. Sponsorship should not infantilize the country on the receiving end of sponsorship. It is also critical to ensure that a structure is in place that will allow the Fellowship to continue to grow before ending support. In one example, a country rented rooms for starter groups to hold meetings and would stop the support as soon as the group was self-supporting.

3. *Challenges and solutions in Country-to-Country sponsorship*

- a. *Encouraging local Twelfth Step efforts*

- b. *Sharing all Three Legacies*

Without a service structure, a country is ill-informed. Sponsorship can provide understanding of A.A.'s Three Legacies and how they work within the Fellowship. Ideally, through sponsorship, a country will understand what it means to be part of a united Fellowship and can carry the message to the sick and suffering alcoholic.

Another major challenge seems to be communicating in terms of language/cultural barriers. It is important to be sensitive and to understand that what may work in one country may not work in another. Conversely, one country shared a successful experience with working together with a sponsored country on literature translation because the two countries shared basically the same language.

Another country with successful sponsorship experience shared a process wherein the sponsored countries were first invited as observers at Zonal meetings; these countries are now full members. Many countries shared that inviting sponsored countries to General Service Conferences is also a valuable tool for passing on information and shared experience.

From countries with extensive sponsorship experience to those with little to no sponsorship experience, all shared the importance of imparting A.A.'s Three Legacies of Recovery, Unity and Service, and that while it may take on different characteristics from country to country, it all comes to the simplistic action of one alcoholic reaching out the loving hand of hope.

Workshop III

Leadership in A.A.

Workshop discussions were informed by the following questions:

1. *In your country, how is the concept of “A.A. leaders” defined? How are leadership capabilities developed among trusted servants?*

It is important to choose trusted servants wisely. The role of trusted servants is not to govern or instruct, but to enable. Key qualifications for service are consistency and accountability, a willingness to accept constructive criticism, the ability to lead by example, and the strength to always put group conscience before personal opinion.

Leadership is developed through a deep understanding of the A.A. structure — the Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions and Twelve Concepts. Service assignments provide practical learning, but are best supported by the experience and wisdom of a service sponsor.

Countries with a robust and well-developed service structure tend to be slightly ahead of those with service structures that are still in their infancy.

In some cultural contexts, the word “leader” can be problematic. Leaders are often met with criticism and resistance. The concept of leadership without governance also comes with its challenges. The dynamics of power, status and ego are common challenges across all countries.

Adherence to the Traditions and Concepts is an answer to this problem. The leadership of a trusted servant is such that it does not govern, dictate or coerce. Humility is key and the trusted servant must always remain part of the group rather than above it. In fact, humble participation is a must for A.A. service.

2. *Serving vs. Governing*

a. *Respecting the group conscience*

A trusted servant serves the Fellowship with integrity and attention to group conscience. He or she will desire no personal gain, power or status but will seek only the common welfare of the group.

Every A.A. member must be heard because all members have something of value to contribute. Hearing and truly understanding the minority opinion is key. As servants, not governors, we must have the ability to change our own opinions when necessary.

b. *Balancing vision with accountability*

Accountability is built into the A.A. structure as a result of rotation and group conscience. An individual member should not carry out or pursue a vision that is independent from the group conscience. He or she should seek authority from the group, district or area. As such, we balance our vision with a sense of accountability to the whole.

3. *The Spirit of Rotation*

a. *Why is the spirit of rotation important in A.A. leadership?*

The spirit of rotation inspires others to serve and find op-

portunities for growth. It ensures that all are equal and engenders a sense of humility by countering ego. The input, knowledge and experience of other members provide fertile ground for deeper learning and understanding.

Servants must never become “bleeding deacons.” They must rotate gracefully and be aware of the Three Legacies.

Rotation can be challenging in some countries already experiencing a shortage of servants. However, with thoughtful sponsorship and support, new voices can emerge and be welcomed into service.

b. *How do we encourage putting principles before personalities?*

This starts at the group level — first by agreeing to accept differences of opinion and by understanding that such differences are inevitable. It also begins by setting the tone for newcomers early on and encouraging them to serve. Simply by virtue of being new, they exhibit less ego and more willingness.

As a group, we must respect principles before personalities. Additionally, members must follow the guidelines of service with regard to the election of trusted servants and rotation. We all have the welfare of A.A. at heart and the Higher Power is always at work within the group conscience.

In the words of Bill W., “Thank God that Alcoholics Anonymous is blessed with so much leadership in each and all of its great affairs.”



Reports of Interim and Zonal Service Meetings

The 12th Asia Oceania Service Meeting (AOSM)

Among the AOSM participants in 2017, I was one of the delegates who had the experience of joining the WSM in 2016, and only a few of us had committed to participate in the WSM in 2018. I think that is why I received this privilege to present the report on the AOSM here.

We prepared the 12th AOSM Final Report and send out a newsletter update twice a year regarding the AOSM. For further information, I would like you to read them. I will talk about the outline here.

Participants

The population of the AOSM zone makes up two-thirds of the earth, and there are 72 countries in this zone. However, the number of countries participating in AOSM is very small. Sixteen delegates from eleven countries, plus the chairperson, secretary, and two GSO staff participated.

Countries attending the 12th AOSM: Australia (2nd term), Hong Kong (1st term), India (1st and 2nd term), Iran (1st term), Japan (1st term), MERCAA (Middle East Regional Committee of A.A.) (1st term, two members), Mongolia (1st and 2nd term), New Zealand (1st and 2nd term), Russia (2nd term), Thailand (1st and 2nd term), Taiwan (1st term).

AOSM Chairperson: Kunal B.

— Dubai, UAE (MERCAA)

AOSM Secretary: James N.

— New Zealand

AOSM Treasurer David G. (Absent)

— New Zealand (Alt. Heather H.)

General Service Office Staff (New York)

— Greg T., Mary C.

There were three female delegates attending from New Zealand, Mongolia and Russia (three of 18 equals 16.7%). It was announced on the last day that there were 240 observers in total. Many observers were from Mongolia, but some were from abroad: United States, Russia, Japan and elsewhere.

Language and Translation

The language of the conference is English. When the delegates spoke in other languages (Mongolian, Russian, Japanese, and Chinese) they were translated into English consecutively. Therefore, simultaneous interpretation volunteers to Japanese and Russian were always participating through the conference. Since most observers were members from the host country, Mongolia, there were about 50 headphones for simultaneous Mongolian interpretation installed at the observer's seats.

Finances (Treasurer's report)

Opening Bank Balance: NZ\$8,575.49

Total Income: NZ\$6,821.85

(Sum NZ\$15,397.34)

Total Expenses: NZ\$9,557.60

Account Balance: NZ\$ 5,839.74

Because of the contributions from four countries (New Zealand, Thailand, Dubai and Japan) final registration fee for the 12th AOSM was \$400 per delegate.

Topics

Committees for the 12th AOSM 2017

1. Policy/Admissions/Finance

Chairperson: New Zealand

Members: India, MERCAA, Japan

Recommended Actions:

- Give "AOSM NEW ZONE DRAFT PLAN" to the Agenda Committee to place it in the 2019 AOSM's agenda for further discussion.
- Encourage AOSM to modify the number of guests and observers as appropriate. PAF suggests a limit of 25 observers to attend future AOSM meetings.
- Distribute the AOSM newsletter in March and October. Include the information of national conventions and major events of AOSM countries (dates, contacts) and the theme for the next newsletter.
- Add to the website, the "helpful flow chart" to explain the bidding process for countries considering hosting AOSM.
- PAF will create an archivist job description as recommended in 2007. An archivist could preserve our history for ourselves and for future generations. PAF considers this a critical need. Without an archivist, AOSM's history and continuity could be lost.

13th AOSM Committee Chairperson is Japan, Alternate Chair is MERCAA.

2. Website/Literature/Publishing

Chairperson: New Zealand

Members: Hong Kong, Iran, MERCAA

The purpose and function of this committee is to provide a forum for an exchange of experience and views related to the following: proposed modification of AOSM website, translations, licensing and publishing of A.A. approved literature of the AOSM member countries.

Recommended Actions:

- Link from AOSM website to each country GSO site: as an effect of the link, you can contact a proper country's GSO when ordering foreign-language literature.

13th AOSM Committee Chairperson is New Zealand, Alternate Chair is MERCAA.

3. Working with Others

Chairperson: Russia

Members: Mongolia, Thailand, Taiwan

We exchanged information on countries that did not participate, for example Korea, Sri Lanka, etc. Although there were no recommendations, we formulated the following three policies:

- Helping to grow and encourage AOSM participation throughout the AOSM zone.

- Roundups across borders — developing a format to help neighboring countries help one another in carrying the message to the still-suffering alcoholic.
- Compiling individual countries' success stories of "Working with Others" and disseminating that information to all AOSM countries.

13th AOSM Committee Chairperson is Thailand (no alternate was elected)

4. Site Selection/Agenda
Chairperson: Australia
Members: Thailand, India, Mongolia

Recommended Actions:

- Add to the bid form: "Send this form to aosmsecretary@gmail.com. Secretary to forward to Site Selection and Agenda Committee Chairperson."

The committee recommended:

- That, as per a past recommendation, "a proposed agenda should be sent to the committee delegates at least six months in advance, to allow delegates to have input."
- That Hong Kong host the 2019 AOSM from July 11–14.
- That the theme for the 2019 AOSM be "Improving our Links to All Communities."

12th AOSM's Program

July 6th, Thursday 1st DAY		
15:00-16:00	Registration & Coffee Reception	
16:00-18:30	AOSM statement of purpose	AOSM Chair
Opening	Welcome & Housekeeping	by Mongolian Host Committee
	Meeting Procedure Review	Orientation
	Importance of work between AOSM meetings	Brief Review of agenda
20:30-22:00	Red Ball Meeting	
July 7th, Friday 2nd DAY		
9:00-10:30	Report	Chairperson (Kunal B.), Secretary (James N.), Treasurer (Heather H.)
	Introduction	Each of the Committees
10:30-13:00	Country Reports	Highlights shared for service updates since last AOSM
14:30-15:30	AOSM Inventory Session Part 1	2nd Term Delegates
15:30-16:30	AOSM Inventory Session Part 2	Sharing time frame of about 3 – 5 minutes for their input
17:00-18:00	Committees Meetings, Session 1	Led by respective committee chairs
20:00-21:30	Open AA Meeting	With all observers
July 8th, Saturday 3rd DAY		
9:00- 9:30	World Service Meeting Report 2016	Heather H. (NZ)
9:30-10:30	GSO Presentation 1	Int'l Help Desk Role in CPC/PI by Mary C.
11:00-12:30	Committee meetings, Session 2	Formulation of motions to be presented
13:30-14:30	GSO Presentation 2	Publishing Role in CPC/PI Work by Greg T.
15:00-15:20	AOSM Inventory Session	Conclusion and wrap-up
15:30-16:45	Committee meetings, Session 3	Finalization of motions to be presented at this AOSM, completion of committee reports, and acceptance by committee
17:00-18:00	Keynote Address (The Theme)	Doug G.
18:15-24:00	Organizing Committee Hosted Dinner	To Genghis K. Statue Complex by bus
July 9th, Saturday 4th DAY		
9:45-11:00	Reading, Discussion & Voting on Reports and Recommendations	Policy, Admissions & Finance Website, Literature & Publishing Working with Others Site Selection & Agenda
11:15-14:00	12th AOSM General Business	Review AOSM Guidelines Election of next Chairperson and Alternate
15:30-17:30	12th AOSM Closing Meeting Closing remarks	Host Committee, Delegates, Chairperson End of 12th AOSM, close with Serenity Prayer
18:00-	Opera Tour	Hosted by the Mongolian Committee

- That the orientation session for 1st term delegates be removed from future agendas.
- That the Site Selection & Agenda Committee follow the same process as those used in the World Service Meeting for receiving and evaluating bids to host future AOSMs

13th AOSM Committee chairperson is Mongolia, Alternate chair is India.

12th AOSM General Business

Election of next Chairperson and Alternate:

13th AOSM Chairperson: Heather H. (New Zealand)
Alternate Chair: Tony V. (Australia)

The term of the chairperson and alternate is the next two years until the day of AOSM to be held in Hong Kong.

Secretary: James N. (New Zealand)
— Stay for two more years
Treasurer: David G. (New Zealand)
— Stay for two more years

Keynote address —

“Preserving the Integrity of Carrying the Message”

Doug G., who is rich in service experience, gave a keynote address. The contents offered valuable suggestions and fulfilling perspectives, providing a look back on the history of our AOSM and A.A. community. In addition to his oral presentation, a written copy was prepared and is included in the Final Report.

AOSM Inventory Session

Delegates were broken into four groups and talked about some inventory questions. The following are examples of the topics we shared. Since these matters can also be applied at this WSM, please do not think that they are only other people’s affairs, and listen carefully by replacing AOSM with WSM.

- After the AOSM is over, in their own countries, the delegates have to make a written report of the AOSM and report it at their General Service Conferences or board meetings. We also report it to our members on other service levels. Depending on the service experience level of members, we change how we talk or change the content itself based on the audience.
- It is necessary to bring back the experiences of other countries and make use of it. It is important for the delegates to teach and learn.
- During the two years between each AOSM, it is necessary to specifically decide who will do what. It is not something that can be done just once. It’s not them, but what I do. Take on tasks that you can actually do, because if not, some subcommittee might stop functioning. Delegates often resign in the middle, so the 2nd term delegate should always inform the 1st term delegate about international matters.
- Tell the secretary new information as soon as possible. We had planned to post AOSM’s newsletter once every three months but it did not happen. In many cases, country-to-country sponsorship has not worked quite well. Everything starts from a tiny informal connection.

- We considered country-to-country sponsorship in the form of financial assistance at the AOSM in Dubai 2015. Sponsor countries only help them just once, and it is suggested that the sponsored country ought to be able to attend the AOSM for the second time by themselves, and not continue to be financially dependent. There was an opinion that it is important to notify individuals and countries that they can make voluntary financial contributions to AOSM.
- Do we really need this service? Are we achieving our primary purpose? We need to ask ourselves.
- There were a lot of preparation activities at the venue. Activities of the host committee were mainly about the preparation of the event, not so much about the content. The main activities of the host committee for the AOSM contents were minimal. They worked well in cooperation with A.A. World Services, Inc.
- It is very troubling when there is no reply to emails. If you cannot answer now, please just say only that, rather than being silent. When sending questions, we will clarify the time limit for when we expect the reply to be sent in the email.
- In countries where the majority of members are from abroad, there is not enough Twelfth Step work for their domestic members. Should AOSM do something? Many people have no sponsors. There are also many “young” members. AZYPAA (Asian Young People in AA) has started to be active.

World Service Meeting Report 2016 (Heather H., NZ)

Of the 18 AOSM members participating with voting rights including chairs, only four members attended the WSM held in New York in 2016. As a result, information on WSM has not arrived and participants need to report the most recent WSM summary.

Next time in 2018, only four members have decided to participate in South Africa WSM. For that reason, Yasuhiko (Japan) will take on the role of reporting this Mongolian AOSM at the next WSM and taking over the role of bringing back the contents of South African WSM at the next AOSM.

AOSM chairperson, Kunal B., asked if it is feasible and realistic for AOSM to send a direct elected delegate to the WSM who will represent the “un-seated” countries of AOSM. MERCIAA countries, South Asian countries other than India, some South East Asian countries could thus get a chance to have a seat at the WSM and be heard and share back their experience at the AOSM and thus increase the overall relevance of AOSM.

General Service Office Staff’s Presentation

About the roles of the International Desk and the publishing department, two people who are full-time employees at the GSO/NY made presentations. The talks were very concrete and easy to understand, and many questions came from each country. They also presented about the importance of listening to the minority voice and the method of election using the “Third Legacy Procedure.”

Organizing Committee Hosted Dinner

A dinner party was held to organize traditional Mongolian cuisine by going out on a private charter bus to the National Genghis Khan Statue Complex which was planned by the

Mongolian Welcome Committee. After dinner, we started dancing in the parking lot, only lit by car headlights, and continuing dancing. The singing continued without interruption, even back in the bus until we reached the hotel at midnight.

Yasuhiko M. — Japan

The 19th European Service Meeting

My name is Lotus and I'm an alcoholic. I am honored to give the report of the 19th European Service Meeting, held October 13-15, 2017 in York, Great Britain, with the theme "Principles Before Personalities."

Forty-eight delegates from 31 countries or separate A.A. structures were represented, and Bulgaria participated for the first time at the Europe Service Meeting. Greece and Turkey were back after many years of absence. The delegates were invited to introduce themselves, followed by the preamble and orientation given by Roger B., general secretary from GSO Great Britain. Mary C. from the International Desk, General Service Office NY, gave a very inspiring, warm and personal keynote address on the theme of the ESM, setting the mood for the whole of the weekend. Michal S. from Czech Republic was of such wonderful service and very much appreciated as chairman.

The delegates were invited to share their country's highlights briefly, and it was apparent in the country reports that some of the newer structures need country-to-country sponsorship guidance and only can avail themselves of a few A.A. publications. A.A. in the Eastern European countries is developing and growing fast compared to other countries where the number of groups are decreasing slowly. One country has a virtual GSO address and no physical office.

The number of groups per inhabitants is unequal throughout Europe. France and Great Britain have about the same number of inhabitants, but Great Britain has 10 times more A.A. groups. Poland has about 2,700 groups for 38 million people. Finland is an old A.A. structure and has 660 groups for only 5.5 million people. In Iceland, there are more than 300 A.A. meetings for a population of only 300,000. Ireland has 900 groups for 4.7 million people, and in Latvia, where the Fellowship is in growth, there are actually 70 groups for about 2 million inhabitants.

New and old friends met during coffee breaks and dinners, and throughout the weekend the atmosphere was warm and loving as often happens in our Fellowship. There was an optional meditation meeting in the morning before breakfast on Saturday and Sunday. Sharing the silence facilitates the sharing of words, and it was a beautiful and serene moment to start the very busy and concentrated days waiting for us.

There are three committees at the ESM, named after our Three Legacies. They met Saturday morning, and the reports were shared in plenary session in the afternoon followed by a question and answer session.

Recovery Committee discussed the following topics:

- Special groups for women, men, LGBTQ, young people and other languages.
- Young people in A.A. and their role in service.
- Anonymity in press, TV, radio, Internet. The media respecting the anonymity of A.A. members. Breaks of anonymity.
- Class A members in the structure and their functions.

It was felt that most young people have dual addictions and can be more attracted to other fellowships. Most countries have meetings in other languages, and some have special groups or meetings, like LGBTQ, young people, or women and men's meetings. For almost all countries, special meetings only take place in big cities.

Unity Committee debated about

- Encouraging members to get involved in their country's structure.
- A.A. websites and what information to provide.
- How to deal with groups that are not a part of the A.A. structure.
- How to deal with alcoholics from treatment centers attending meetings without understanding A.A. principles.

It was among many other things shared that helping people get more involved in service can be dealt with by studying the Traditions, which leads to humility and more service work. Lack of service sponsors, not having a home group and unawareness of the country's structure can be reasons why members are less involved in service.

Service Committee shared their experience on

- How to make ESM better known at group level.
- What consequences if GSR has only a short period of sobriety? Recommended time of sobriety for service in the group and A.A. in general.

The committee shared that the ESM report can be read at regional forums by the delegate or the GSO and should be available on the websites. Some countries print a report in their quarterly magazine. ESM should be discussed at the conferences. Not all countries hold service forums or workshop seminars. It was shared that we are in service thanks to the example of those who served before us, the chain reaction of service by example. The members with many years of sobriety should lead others by example and give way to members with shorter sobriety in order to encourage them to take responsibility.

Saturday evening, Fatima from Portugal and Lubomir from Slovakia gave a presentation on the theme "Anonymity in Service" followed by a most interesting Sharing meeting.

There were three workshops held Saturday afternoon, followed by an open discussion in plenary session. The topics were listed from the theme of the ESM, "Principles Before Personalities" and the workshops were titled:

- Preparing new people for service.
- Sponsorship in A.A.
- Understanding of "principles before personalities."

The presentation of the workshops and discussion of their reports took place on Sunday in the plenary session. The theme for the 20th European Service Meeting in 2019 voted by the Unity committee will be "An Unchanged Message in a Changing World." Rita M. from Italy was elected to be the chair.

To finalize this very spiritual weekend in service, the closing addresses were given with humor, love and emotion by Dagur H. from Iceland, Brit A. from Norway, Jiri H. from Czech Republic and Jatta K. from Finland.

David R., publishing director from A.A. World Services, Inc., gave a closing address explaining the work of the Pub-

lications Department. He moved our hearts telling how the Big Book was translated into the Twi language in Ghana by three women over a period of nine years.

Michal, our chair, closed the 19th European Service Meeting with a heartfelt address in the spirit of the weekend.

Lastly, all 48 delegates formed a circle and shared the Serenity Prayer in their native language, and all together we shared in English. It makes A.A. a real close-knit family and reminds us how privileged we are to share this weekend in service together. I am grateful to be a part of this family.

Lotus A. — French-speaking Europe

20th Meeting of the Americas (REDELA)

My dear fellow members and esteemed trusted servants participating in the 25th World Service Meeting, I have been invited to present our report on the 20th REDELA meeting.

At the moment, the Western Hemisphere is made up of 35 countries. Alcoholics Anonymous is active in 24 of them and in the other 11 we do not know if there are Loners or groups present. Of those 24 countries, 22 are part of the Meeting of the Americas (REDELA) and two are not: Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago. We learned that the latter, like the Belize structure, will soon be participating in a REDELA meeting for the first time.

The 20th REDELA gathering took place from Sunday to Thursday, October 1–5, 2017, at the Hotel Palma Real in San José, Costa Rica. Nineteen countries took part and 24 delegates participated, representing 18 structures.

There were special invited guests, including Mary C., in charge of the International desk in the New York GSO, and David R., director of Publications, A.A.W.S.

At 3:00 pm on Sunday, October 1, we broke the ice with a name game, “the red ball,” which the delegate from Colombia, Hernando S., introduced. It was an exciting way of briefly introducing oneself: whoever got the ball would speak.

After this activity, the opening ceremony was conducted. The flags of all the countries of the Americas were displayed on the stage. All the trustees of the Costa Rica structure were there for this opening meeting.

Ana V. A., chairperson of the GSB of Costa Rica, gave the welcome speech. Jennifer J., manager of the GSO, called the roll. In a moving act, with the introduction of each delegation to the 20th REDELA, there was an abbreviated rendering of that country’s national anthem.

The Canadian delegate, Scott H., presented the Mission Statement.

The theme, shared by Marcio A. dos S. M. from the structure of Brazil, was “Communication is

crucial for the unity of the Americas.” Miquey C. R., trustee-at-large representing the Southern Territory of Mexico, made a presentation on the first Ibero-American Meeting (now known as REDELA). It was quite outstanding and exciting.

Following the agenda, the delegates presented their country reports in groups.

There were reports on Zonal Meetings:

- 24th World Service Meeting,
presented by Mary C., GSO, New York;
- Southern Zone of Central America,
presented by Enrique R., Costa Rica;
- Northern Zone of Central America,
presented by Francisco R., El Salvador.

Eight topics were discussed and experiences and opinions shared. The 24 delegates were very lively in their participation. The topics were as follows:

Topic 1. What outreach efforts are we making for Alcoholics Anonymous?

1. In the Public’s Eye,
presenter, Marcio A., Brazil
2. Outreach to the Government,
presenter, Aaron R., Nicaragua

Topic 2. Do we have enough servants for the working committees?

1. In the Area Committee,
presenter, Juan D., Paraguay
2. In the District Committee,
presenter, Marcelino V., Panama

Topic 3. Is it necessary to put these principles into practice in all of our affairs?

Presenter: Hernando S., Colombia



- Topic 4.** What is being done about the right to participate?
 Presenter: Miquey C. R., Mexico
- Topic 5.** Women and the Three Legacies of Alcoholics Anonymous
 Presenter: Jorge S. R., Guatemala
- Topic 6.** Contact with the Courts
 Presenter: Jorge L. T., Mexico
- Topic 7.** Taking Responsibility, Fundamental for all Groups
 Presenter: Scott H., Canada
- Topic 8.** How are our groups receiving newcomers?
 Presenter: Francisco R., El Salvador

There were three workshops:

Workshop 1.

Theme: How can we use the Internet to communicate more effectively?
 Presenter: Newton P., US

Workshop 2.

Theme: Licenses and Intellectual Property: It is recommended that the structures verify that their licenses are still valid.
 Presenter: Nicolas P., Venezuela

Workshop 3.

Theme: A common language to send a good message to the group
 Presenter: Medardo R., Bolivia

20th REDELA Committees

The committees included Agenda, Literature/Publications, Policy, Admissions and Finances, and Working with Others. They met as scheduled, made recommendations and elected chairs and alternates.

It should be mentioned that Jorge L. T. of Mexico was designated as theme coordinator for the 21st REDELA meeting, and Nivaldo G., of Brazil, was named alternate coordinator.

The director of publications of A.A.W.S., David R., who was present over the course of the REDELA conference, met individually with the delegates of all of the structures throughout the proceedings in order to verify the status of their licenses to print A.A. literature. A.A. literature is protected by copyright. During the meeting, David explained in detail the procedures for getting a new license and for renewing licenses and the need to obtain permission in order to initiate projects for translation of our literature into a new language.

Licenses are granted for a 10-year period, and, in the case of books, specifically cover the publication of each individual version. As regards the pamphlets, there are licenses to cover a group of materials. A.A.W.S. allows for minor changes to be made in the format of the books and pamphlets in order to adapt them to local needs. This includes cover designs, type and size of paper, font, footnotes, and so on. However, the content of the books and brochures approved by the General Service Conference of the U.S./Canada should not be altered.

The licenses for printing AA Grapevine, Inc. titles, such as

Language of the Heart, *The Best of Bill* and others, do not allow any changes in the format or graphic art. At present, requests for printing AA Grapevine materials can be made through the Publications Department of the GSO, but licenses have to be authorized by the Grapevine board.

In order to check on the status of a license, the structures were advised to get in touch with the Publications Department through the International desk of each office and sort through the detailed lists of licenses and their individual status.

The committee also addressed the question of translating the Big Book into indigenous languages, now underway in Ecuador (Quechua) and Mexico (Purepecha). The delegate from Peru informed that there is a translation into Quechua of Chapter Five of the Big Book, which had been requested by a committee of a Lima group. David R. stressed that authorization by the GSO of New York must be requested in order to translate our literature and that the request must be made by the General Service Board of the country in question or, if there is no structure in place, by a committee established by the group conscience of the country. A representative must be designated as the contact person and be in charge of the project.

The challenge of translating *Alcoholics Anonymous* was brought up, as it involves the process of selecting a translation team, a review by experts in the language and members of the Fellowship, and other tasks. It was pointed out that the process could take years. For this reason, it is more practical to start off with the work of carrying the message and requesting permission to translate flyers and brochures, such as *How it Works*, *The Twelve Steps Illustrated* and other basic materials.

Another topic of discussion was literature on the Internet: how it affects the finances of the structures and the importance of protecting the literature available on the websites in order not to interfere with the upkeep of the offices. It was noted that the reason for putting this literature on the Internet is to carry the message and that only one copy may be printed. We are aware of the advantages of this technology and that they are greater than the possible drawbacks.

Policy, Admissions and Finance Committee

Only one request was presented to host the 21st Meeting of the Americas, from the structure of Argentina. Given that the country meets the necessary conditions to organize the 21st REDELA, the request was put to a vote and approved unanimously. Colombia was chosen as the alternate site, also by a unanimous vote. It was mentioned that the ideal date would fall during the first two weeks of October 2019.

With regards to the fifth recommendation of the 19th REDELA meeting concerning surplus REDELA monies, half the sum would be passed on to the next host site and the other half to the ILF. The committee favored this recommendation.

The topic "What is going on?" was discussed on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. A delegate was chosen by lot to present his/her opinion. It was very helpful for everyone to participate. On the last day, second-term delegates were scheduled to share on "Concluding Observations." In closing, it should be highlighted that REDELA benefited from the support of the GSO staff as well as volunteers to take care of all the logistics of the event.

Finally, on October 5, 2017, the members of the GSB of Costa Rica were again present, and, at 4:30 that afternoon, Jennifer J., manager of the GSO of Costa Rica, delivered the closing remarks. At 5:00 p.m. the national anthems were played in Spanish and in English and, lastly, at 8:00 p.m. we closed with a dinner and celebration, in which a traditional band accompanied by special dancers brought joy and elation to all present.

It had been a week of heavy rains in Costa Rica, but the downpour was not felt because of the camaraderie and great unity shown by all of the participants. One night, during a break in the work, the time came to make a tour of the GSO and the journal of Costa Rica, *Action*. We were surprised to be joined by many servants of the Costa Rica structure, coming from distant parts, who shared regional dishes and hors d'oeuvres that we enjoyed alongside the international delegates to REDELA.

While the workload was intensive, what stood out was the unity of the Americas in an ambience of celebration and the delegates' need to feel the pulse and sense of striving, as we envisioned all the work to be carried out in our home countries.

We wish to recognize the countries' gratitude toward our structure for making the presence and participation of their international delegates possible. The delegates from Chile were not able to attend because no delegate had a passport. Uruguay did not attend.

In August, there was a videoconference with the U.S./Canada structure. They informed us that they would lend support to the structures of Nicaragua, Honduras, Belize and Paraguay in the sum of \$5,200.

The structures of Bolivia and the Dominican Republic lacked the means to participate. Bolivia received aid to register for REDELA, with the Northwestern Region covering the cost. The Dominican Republic asked for help to cover travel expenses, and the Northeastern Region provided it.

Cuba was informed ahead of time to appoint a representative for its structure. As always, Mexico would cover the expenses. Unfortunately, the delegate Delvis G. was unable to get a travel permit, so the subsidy went to Venezuela instead. They designated the trustee Miguel N. P. as their representative.

Unfortunately, the Trinidad and Tobago trustee, Raj R. R., was unable to attend the 20th REDELA for health reasons. His participation had been made possible for the first time, with his registration and travel expenses covered fully and in a timely fashion through the International committee budget.

It is worth mentioning that the Costa Rica structure requested the 19th REDELA digital archives from the International desk to help guide them in preparing for this effort.

The 20th REDELA report was included in the packet prepared for the Conference participants. We invite you to read them. In it, you will find details of the activities, workshops, sharing, committee decisions, etc.

I appreciate the attention you have paid to this report, and I wish to thank our Higher Power for allowing me to be here with all of you today coming together for the alcoholic who has yet to reach the safe harbor of our worldwide Fellowship.

Jorge L. T. — Mexico

The 8th Sub-Saharan Africa Service Meeting (SSASM)

The primary purpose of the Sub-Saharan Africa Service Meeting is the same as that of all A.A. activity — to carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers, whoever he or she may be, whatever language he or she speaks. The Sub-Saharan Africa Service Meeting seeks ways and means of accomplishing this goal by serving as a forum for sharing the experience, strength and hope of delegates who come together from all parts of the Sub-Saharan Africa region. It can also represent an expression of the group conscience throughout the region.

Experience teaches us that developing a sound structure enables us to deliver our services more effectively. The SSASM encourages the planning of the sound structures suited to the needs and capabilities of the various countries and the exploration of expanding A.A.'s services to reach the alcoholic through internal communication, community relations and working in institutions.

The SSASM is made possible with sponsorship from A.A. in Great Britain and U.S./Canada and is currently hosted by A.A. South Africa in South Africa. Hopefully, as A.A. structures grow in the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa the meeting will move around other countries in the region. The meeting was attended by two delegates from each of the following countries: Botswana, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Great Britain was represented by a trustee and the chairperson of their General Service Board while U.S./Canada was represented by the general manager and the International desk of GSO, New York. The SSASM chair was a past South African delegate, elected at the 2015 meeting. The secretariat, alternate secretariat and secretary were all South African.

The meeting, themed "Working with Others," started at 8 p.m. on Friday evening, and was opened by Warren B., the chairperson. This was followed by Geoff H., chairperson, GSB A.A. Great Britain, giving the keynote address.

Mary C., International desk, GSO U.S./Canada, gave a talk entitled "Literature Translation and Licences." Denise H., GSB trustee Great Britain, spoke afterward about service with a talk "Recent Reflections on A.A. Service in GB." The evening session was completed with a talk from Greg T., general manager, GSO U.S./Canada, "Self-Support: Why We Don't Accept Outside Contributions."

Saturday started with an early bird A.A. meeting at 6 a.m. and then breakfast at 7 a.m.

The day was filled with Country Reports from the respective delegates and a number of workshops. There were two discussion workshops where the delegates split into four groups and after discussion reported back to the whole meeting. The topics for these workshops were "Working with Others" and "Developing A.A. Structures at Grassroots." These were held at separate times so that everyone took part in both topics. There was also a general workshop with topics taken from the floor and discussed by the full meeting.

After dinner there was a Founders' Day meeting which was also open for local A.A. members to attend.

Sunday was another early start with an A.A. meeting at 6 a.m.

The day's meeting started with the election of the new SSASM chair, Gitau N. of Kenya. This was followed with discus-

sion about the theme for the next meeting which will be held June 7-9, 2019, in Johannesburg. The theme adopted for 2019 is “Our Twelve Traditions — A.A.’s Future in the Modern World.”

Then the sad part of any meeting like this: the farewells from all of the second-term delegates.

These meetings are starting to bear fruit and A.A. is beginning to move in Sub-Saharan Africa. Kenya held their first A.A. Convention in Nairobi, November 2–5, 2017, and Uganda is planning their A.A. Convention for November 1–4, 2018, in Kampala. Zambia held an A.A. Rally in Livingstone on the 16th of June this year. Both Lesotho and Namibia hold an A.A. Rally every year.

John L. — South Africa

Closing Talk

Good afternoon, my name is Frank and I am an alcoholic.

As chair of the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous South Africa, I am both delighted and humbled to have been part of this milestone 25th World Service Meeting of our beloved Fellowship.

I want to take this opportunity to thank Greg T., Mary C., and all on their team for arranging this World Service Meeting and running it like clockwork. I also want to thank, once again, the local organizing committee under the leadership of Pravesh A. for the enormous role they have played in making this the huge success that it has been. But most importantly, I want to thank you, the delegates, from the many different countries around the world for being here and for being of service to our Fellowship.

The theme for this World Service Meeting has been “Our Twelve Traditions — A.A.’s Future in The Modern World.”

Now, we all know that the Traditions deal with the unity of our Fellowship, and to quote Bill W. from *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* where he states:

“The unity of Alcoholics Anonymous is the most precious quality our society has. Our lives, the very lives of those yet to come depend squarely upon it, we stay whole or A.A. dies. Without unity, the heart of A.A. would cease to beat, our world arteries could no longer carry the Life Giving Grace of God. His Gift to us would have been spent aimlessly.”

Over this last week, I have seen those world arteries in action. I have read and listened to the various Country Highlights. I’ve watched and heard the discussions in some of the breakaway groups, and my heart fills with gratitude, because I see the hand of God in all of this.

The first meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous South Africa was held in October 1946. It is now October and 46 countries were supposed to attend. That makes A.A. in South Africa 72 years old. And believe it or not, there are 72 delegates present at this World Service Meeting. I ask myself — was it by coincidence that South Africa was chosen to host this World Service Meeting, or was it perhaps “God Incidence”?

I was fortunate enough to chair the proceedings on Monday afternoon, when I was informed that the delegates from Iran had arrived at the airport and were on the way to the hotel. When the last speaker had finished, I went to the podium and announced the good news. At that very moment, the door opened and in walked Ali and Masood, our Iranian delegates. You all stood up as one and welcomed them with open arms — I ask myself, coincidence or God Incidence?

So much has stood out for me over this week. I have heard that no matter where we come from, we all seem to have the same challenges. The fact that we can share our experience in handling those challenges, and be in a position to perhaps help some other country is surely one of the great benefits of the World Service Meeting.

I have experienced the enthusiasm of so many of the delegates at the sharing session on Tuesday afternoon. The atmosphere was electric. I believe that the word *enthusiasm* is derived from the Greek language and means the “God within.” I saw the same enthusiasm on Wednesday morning. The Workshop report backs were thorough and concise, and it was refreshing to hear the minority voice. I have experienced unity at its very best. The presentations were thoroughly prepared and every one of them has given me some new ideas, something to think about, and even touched my heart. What does not come from the heart cannot reach the heart.

I have heard and seen the level of commitment so many countries are prepared to give to help neighboring countries who are perhaps in not so fortunate a position as themselves, and most of all I have heard the need to carry the message to those countries who don’t know that there is a way out.

Many years ago, I heard a share in a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous and I’m going to relate a story that was told that evening. It’s a tale that goes back to the days of old. The days of kings and queens and kingdoms and palaces. Anyway, this particular king got all his subjects together and told them that he was building a road to his castle, and that whoever travelled the road the best on a certain day, would receive a bag of gold. On the actual day, which was declared a public holiday, all the subjects came to try and get the bag of gold. Some came in their finest clothes, others came with picnic baskets, some decided to run and get there first, yet others rode on horseback. All had their own idea how to win the gold. When the subjects reached the castle, the king asked each of them what they had thought of the road. One by one they said that the road was lovely, apart from a clump of rocks near the end that were in the middle of the road and had forced them to go a long way around to get back on the road. Finally, a man came walking and he had a bag in his hand. He said to the king, “Your Majesty I found this bag of gold in a clump of rocks that were in the middle of the road and which I moved to make the journey easier for those yet to come.” To which the king replied, “My man, the gold is yours, because the person who travels the road the best is he or she who makes the journey easier for those yet to come.”

I want to thank you, the delegates, for your unwavering commitment to make the journey easier for those yet to come. I want to thank each and every one of you for being here and for being of service to your fellow man.

I trust that your stay has been both fruitful and enjoyable. I wish you a safe trip back home, and hope that you leave South Africa with a heart brimming with gratitude as well as with fond memories.

In closing I just want to say that I always knew that there was a God, I just didn’t know that He came to Alcoholics Anonymous, and that, best of all, He has been here all this week, and, even better, that God has been sitting in your chair. May God bless and keep you always.

Frank V., chair of the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous, South Africa

SUMMARY: TWENTY-FIFTH WORLD SERVICE MEETING EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE

Sixty-two delegates attending the 25th World Service Meeting completed their evaluation questionnaires to help with planning for the 26th World Service Meeting. A summary of their responses follows:

Q. What presentations did you find most valuable?

A. The presentations that delegates found extremely valuable were “International Literature Fund” (47); “Attracting Members into Service” (44); “Service: Investing in A.A.’s Future” (41); “Safety of the Vulnerable Member” (40); “Licensing and Translations” (40); “Literature and its Place in an Internet Environment” (31); “Special Purpose Meetings” (31). Other presentations considered valuable were “Share the Value of Tradition Four” and “Old Values for a Modern A.A.” Respondents also noted that the General Sharing Sessions (40), Committee Reports (38), Workshop Reports (31), Country Highlights (31) and Zonal Meeting Reports (21) were extremely important.

Q. What workshops did you find most valuable?

A. The workshops that delegates found to be extremely valuable were: “How to Use the Internet Wisely” (42); “Country-to-Country Sponsorship” (39); and “Leadership in A.A.” (36).

Q. Do you think we should continue Country Highlights?

A. Overall, respondents were in favor of continuing the Country Highlights, noting that they are a good way to provide participation for delegates and to allow the rest of the body to connect faces with particular countries. Said one delegate, “It helps give the feeling of global A.A.” There were, however, a number of qualifications. Delegates commented: there is a fair amount of duplication with material presented in the Country Reports; the highlights should focus on obstacles and strengths, not history; many of the highlights are far too long and should be limited to a specific duration — brevity is important; the allotted timeframe should be marked with the use of a bell; the time taken for the Highlights could be better used in open sessions. It was also noted that given the availability of the written highlights, perhaps they would not need to be presented verbally as well.

Q. Do you think there is enough delegate participation?

A. Most respondents felt that there was sufficient delegate participation, with some suggesting more participation could be encouraged through more open sessions. One comment that was repeated a number of times indicated that, while recognizing the constraints some countries faced in sending delegates, it was hoped there could be wider and broader participation, with more countries represented in the future. Said one delegate, “I wish I could see more countries here.” Some suggestions were made to improve delegate participation in discussions and workshops: providing more time to develop a topic, having the chair monitor participation to ensure that no few individuals dominate discussions, allow more time for workshops and committee meetings comprised of smaller groups to allow for greater input from more people. Said one delegate “It was good to see so many participate in different ways. This was *our* meeting.”

Q. Was the communication and information you received prior to the meeting adequate?

A. Most answered in the affirmative to this question, noting that there was a lot of information to digest, but that it was clear and well-presented. A number of delegates requested getting more information earlier. More updates between meetings were also suggested, with some proposing a greater use of technology to provide interim connections, such as the use of Skype and video-conferencing. Many noted that the dashboard was helpful, but could be easier to navigate. Also, having some basic statistical information available for all countries attending (such as number of groups, members, etc.) would be helpful.

Q. How can the World Service Meeting be improved?

A. Many, especially first-term delegates, indicated that the meeting was perfect, while recognizing that they had nothing to compare it with and might have a different perspective following the next meeting. Nevertheless, comments were uniformly positive about the meeting venue, the preparation and organization, and the spirit of cooperation that ran throughout the meeting. The translation and interpretation was greatly appreciated, while some comments indicated a desire to have all reports translated into Spanish to aid in better understanding of each item and to facilitate reporting out to the Fellowship.

Comments or suggestions: Make better use of technology to create a more vibrant presentation structure, because long written/read reports can become hard to absorb after a while. Perhaps countries that cannot send a delegate would be able to connect by Skype for certain segments of the meeting. It would be helpful to have more time available for general sharing, yet it should be guided in terms of general purpose so as not to fall into a recitation of “war stories” or “my recovery.” Delegates should be more prepared when they approach the microphone, keep it brief and to the point and not repeat what may already have been said by others. Review the schedule to allow for more/longer breaks after lunch and perhaps even for a half “day off” in the middle of the week to allow for better and more focused participation, since there is so much information to share and absorb. Perhaps a round-table format could be utilized for some sessions, with 8-10 members and no set agenda. Include an A.A. speaker meeting (one leader and four speakers) at the opening dinner. Said one delegate, “No comments apart from ‘brilliant.’ Well done and thank you!” Said another, “The only thing wrong with it is that just so few of us get to share this experience.” And, finally, “The whole organization of the main venue and the trusted servants did everything with total dedication and love. I felt so at home, even more than with my actual family. I felt completely protected. Thank you for everything and for being a part of A.A. worldwide.”

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Turkey General Service Office
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Website: www.adsizalkolikler.com

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Service Office: aa.ua.gso@gmail.com
Website: www.aa.org.ua

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FINANCIAL REPORT

(unaudited)

25th World Service Meeting Durban, South Africa — October 2018

Income

Delegate fees	\$ 111,000
Contributions	\$ <u>2,473</u>
Total income	\$ 113,473

Expenses

Transportation—delegates	\$ 50,596
Hotel expenses—delegates	\$ 121,558
New York staff expenses	\$ 66,922
Cost of World Service Meeting Report	\$ 13,000
*Other expenses	\$ 63,734
Simultaneous interpretation	\$ <u>15,150</u>
Total expenses	\$ 330,960
Net GSB expense	(216,487)
Proportion of total expense	-65%

This report is unaudited. Some expenses have been estimated as all costs are not currently available, for example, cost of WSM report.

*Stationery, manuals, manual assembly, AV equipment rental, photography, entertainment, correspondence translations, etc.

2018 WSM COMMITTEES

Agenda

First Term

Ewa B. (Sweden)
Jose C. (Ecuador)
Helen H. (Ireland)
Yasumichi H. (Japan)
Sandra H. (Chile)
Jan K. (Czech Republic)
Etienne M. (Belgium Dutch-Speaking)
Nicolas P. (Venezuela)
Jonathan P. (Great Britain)
Porfirio S. (Portugal)
Jorge T. (Mexico)
Krishna V. (India)

Second Term

Carlos D. M. (Argentina)
Juan D. (Paraguay)
Delvis G. (Cuba)
Grimur G. (Iceland)
Scott H.* (U.S./Canada)
Dmitry T. (Russia)
Odd E. V. (Norway)

Literature/Publishing

First Term

Francisco B. (Dominican Republic)
Cipriano C. (Spain)
Michal F. (Poland)
Toni H. (German-Speaking Europe)
Fatma N. I. Z. (Turkey)
Ole K. (Denmark)
Reinaldo M. (Colombia)
Newton P. (U.S./Canada)
Tatjana R. (Netherlands)
Aliaksei Y. (Belarus)

Second Term

Pedro A. (Paraguay)
Pawan B. (India)
Miquey C.* (Mexico)
Ali H. (Iran)
Jiri H. (Czech Republic)
Christer M. (Sweden)
Francisco R. (Central America/Northern Zone,
El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras)

Policy/Admissions/Finance

First Term

Agust A. (Iceland)
Alberto C. (Argentina)
Massimo F. (Italy)
Nivaldo G. (Brazil)
Miguel M. (Central America/Southern Zone)
(Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Panama)
Terje O. (Norway)
Brian S. (Australia)
Fernandine R. Y. (Peru)

Second Term

Joaquin A. (Spain)
Marko S. (Finland)
Jasna C.-R. (Slovenia)
Mircea F. (Romania)
Sune H.-S. (Denmark)
John L.** (South Africa)
Yasuhiko M. (Japan)
Raj R. (Trinidad and Tobago)
Roger S.* (New Zealand)
Pawel W. (Poland)

Working With Others

First Term

Pip A. (New Zealand)
Lotus A. (French-Speaking Europe)
Esmeralda F. (Cuba)
Masood F. (Iran)
Juha I. (Finland)
Catalin I. (Romania)
Hernán L. (Chile)
Nigel P. (Great Britain)
Eddy P.

(Belgium Dutch-Speaking)

Eduardo R. V. (Bolivia)
Rajeev S. (South Africa)

Second Term

Lubomir B. (Slovakia)
Patrick D. (Ireland)
Marcio D. S. (Brazil)
Ingmar E. (German-Speaking Europe)
Juan H. L. (Peru)
Maria de Fatima O.* (Portugal)
Yury T. (Ukraine)

*Indicates Committee Chair

**Indicates Committee Alternate

The Twelve Concepts for World Service

I. Final responsibility and ultimate authority for A.A. world services should always reside in the collective conscience of our whole Fellowship.

II. The General Service Conference of A.A. has become, for nearly every practical purpose, the active voice and the effective conscience for our whole Society in its world affairs.

III. To insure effective leadership, we should endow each element of A.A. — the Conference, the General Service Board and its service corporations, staffs, committees, and executives — with a traditional “Right of Decision.”

IV. At all responsible levels, we ought to maintain a traditional “Right of Participation,” allowing a voting representation in reasonable proportion to the responsibility that each must discharge.

V. Throughout our structure, a traditional “Right of Appeal” ought to prevail, so that minority opinion will be heard and personal grievances receive careful consideration.

VI. The Conference recognizes that the chief initiative and active responsibility in most world service matters should be exercised by the trustee members of the Conference acting as the General Service Board.

VII. The Charter and Bylaws of the General Service Board are legal instruments, empowering the trustees to manage and conduct world service affairs. The Conference Charter is not a legal document; it relies upon tradition and the A.A. purse for final effectiveness.

VIII. The trustees are the principal planners and administrators of overall policy and finance. They have custodial oversight of the separately incorporated and constantly active services, exercising this through their ability to elect all the directors of these entities.

IX. Good service leadership at all levels is indispensable for our future functioning and safety. Primary world service leadership, once exercised by the founders, must necessarily be assumed by the trustees.

X. Every service responsibility should be matched by an equal service authority, with the scope of such authority well defined.

XI. The trustees should always have the best possible committees, corporate service directors, executives, staffs, and consultants. Composition, qualifications, induction procedures, and rights and duties will always be matters of serious concern.

XII. The Conference shall observe the spirit of A.A. tradition, taking care that it never becomes the seat of perilous wealth or power; that sufficient operating funds and reserve be its prudent financial principle; that it place none of its members in a position of unqualified authority over others; that it reach all important decisions by discussion, vote, and, whenever possible, by substantial unanimity; that its actions never be personally punitive nor an incitement to public controversy; that it never perform acts of government, and that, like the Society it serves, it will always remain democratic in thought and action.



“OUR TRADITIONS ARE SET DOWN ON PAPER. BUT THEY WERE WRITTEN FIRST IN OUR HEARTS. FOR EACH OF US KNOWS, INSTINCTIVELY, I THINK, THAT A.A. IS NOT OURS TO DO WITH AS WE PLEASE. WE ARE BUT CARETAKERS TO PRESERVE THE SPIRITUAL QUALITY OF OUR FELLOWSHIP; KEEP IT WHOLE FOR THOSE WHO WILL COME AFTER US AND HAVE NEED OF WHAT HAS SO GENEROUSLY BEEN GIVEN TO US.”

— *Bill W.*