

About

A.A. Around the World

Fourteenth World Service Meeting

Forty-two delegates, representing Alcoholics Anonymous in 34 countries, gathered in New York City this past October for a five-day meeting hosted by the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous in the U.S. and Canada. The theme of the meeting, which was simultaneously translated into Spanish, was "Love and Gratitude in Action."

Begun in 1969, the primary purpose of the World Service Meeting is to carry the A.A. message of recovery to alcoholics who still suffer, wherever in the world they may be, whatever language they speak. The meeting seeks ways and means of accomplishing this goal by serving as a forum for the sharing of experience, strength and hope by these worldwide participants.

The biennial meeting alternates between New York City and other locations around the world. Prior meetings outside New York City have been held in London, Helsinki, San Juan del Rio, Mexico, Guatemala City, Munich, and Cartagena. The Fifteenth World Service Meeting will be in Auckland, New Zealand, October 4-8, 1998.

Although A.A. is estimated to exist in more than 146 countries around the world, the delegates who came to New York represented only those places where A.A. has a service structure, a national office and, in many cases, a literature distribution center.

The countries represented at the Fourteenth World Service Meeting included Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, England, Finland, France, Germany, Guatemala, Honduras, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Norway, Panama, Poland, Scotland, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Uruguay, U.S./Canada, Wales and, for the first time, the Russian Federation. Nonalcoholic delegates included trustees from the A.A. General Service Boards of Belgium, Japan and the United Kingdom.

In his opening remarks, chairman of the General Service Board (U.S./Canada), Jim Estelle (nonalcoholic), said: "The miracle of your lives in sobriety dictates that our love and gratitude be demonstrated by sharing the message and joy of sobriety with our still-suffering brothers and sisters. We do this not by accident, but with the energy borne of knowing that our sobriety is safeguarded only by passing it on."

Over the course of the five days, in general sessions, committee meetings and workshops, the delegates shared on various A.A. matters, including how the A.A. service structures function in their own countries and how better to expand these services to reach the still-suffering alcoholic. Experiences and ideas were shared on ways of further developing direct communication and public information about

A.A., as well as seeking wider cooperation with the professional community.

The delegates also focused discussion on how to improve on service delivery in translating and distributing A.A. literature. Countries with an established structure reach out to neighboring countries with no structure, by providing A.A. literature, and helping to get it translated into local languages or dialects.

The Fourteenth World Service Meeting reinforced the commitment of the participants to A.A.'s Responsibility Pledge: "... When anyone, anywhere reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A. always to be there. And for that: I am responsible."

In summing up the purpose of the Fourteenth World Service Meeting, Giampiero S., delegate from Italy, said "I have tried to express my gratitude by giving, to the best of my ability, what I have received. Carrying the message of Alcoholics Anonymous to the still-suffering alcoholic has become the cornerstone of my life."

Trustees Travel to the Republic of Slovakia

Together with trustee-at-large/U.S. Larry N., nonalcoholic General Service Board trustee, John N. Chappel, M.D., recently traveled to the Republic of Slovakia, where he addressed psychiatrists and other health professionals at a substance abuse seminar held at the Conference Center in Predna Hora, which has the largest treatment center in Slovakia.

Professor of psychiatry at the University of Nevada, School of Medicine, Reno, Nevada, Dr. Chappel is an authority in the treatment of alcohol and drug addiction, and has served on the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous since 1989. John has long demonstrated an appreciation of how A.A. works to help alcoholics stay sober, and why A.A. hews to its Traditions of singleness of purpose, while carrying the A.A. message of friendship and cooperation to professionals the world over.

The invitation to participate in this seminar was extended by Dr. Lubomir Gabris, a psychiatrist, and director of an alcohol and drug center in Nove Zamky. Dr. Gabris is supportive of the A.A. program of recovery, and recommends that former patients attend meetings at the nearby A.A. group.

John and Larry were fortunate to be accompanied by local A.A. member Michaela T., who took them to several open A.A. meetings, including two at a hospital in Pezinok, a short distance from Bratislava, where they were warmly welcomed and heartened by the sharing of the patients. The visit also provided an opportunity for a meeting with hospital director, Dr. Nejdlova, a true friend of A.A.

On arrival at the Predna Hora Center, John, Larry N., as well as Slovakian A.A. members, Michaela T. and Laco T. attended the first ever A.A. meeting held at the facility,

sharing their experience, strength and hope about A.A. recovery with all assembled.

The following morning, Dr. Chappel addressed the professionals at the Predna Hora Center. Among those in attendance were a professor of psychiatry at the University of Bratislava, as well as psychologists and psychiatric residents. Dr. Chappel, while making clear that no individual speaks for A.A. as a whole, suggested that familiarity with the basics of the A.A. program could help to dispell the notion that alcoholics do not change their behavior following medical or psychiatric treatment.

He pointed out that because A.A. has long demonstrated its effectiveness in recovery from alcoholism, knowledge of how A.A. works is important for the helping professional. He explained that the worldwide community of A.A. is protected and guided by A.A.'s Twelve Traditions, rather than any rules. The Sixth Tradition suggests that A.A. can cooperate, but not endorse or affiliate with any outside enterprise, no matter how worthy; that A.A. members seek to avoid any problems of money, property and prestige, which could divert them from their primary purpose—to stay sober and carry the message of sobriety to the alcoholic who still suffers.

Dr. Chappel explained that this singleness of purpose means that the only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking, there are no dues or fees. A.A. does not solicit members or follow up on them. It does not provide housing or employment, and does not engage in medical, psychiatric or nursing care or research. Dr. Chappel also encouraged the attendees to familiarize themselves with A.A. literature.

Outlining some major elements in A.A.'s recovery program, Dr. Chappel said that attendance at A.A. meetings introduces the patient to other alcoholics in various stages of recovery; provides the assurance of anonymity; and one-on-one sharing enables the newcomer to benefit from the experience of members with longer sobriety.

Before the trustees returned home, Dr. Chappel spoke with professionals at the Bratislava Addiction Clinic, where he, Larry N., and Slovakian A.A. friends shared their A.A. recovery experience. The trip was a memorable experience in meeting alcoholics in recovery, and reaching out to cooperate with those helping still-suffering alcoholics.

Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions **in American Sign Language**

Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions has been translated into American Sign Language (ASL) on videotape. Experienced professional signer/actor/interpreter, Alan R. Barwiolek (nonalcoholic), known to everyone as Al B., videotaped this text for Alcoholics Anonymous. (In keeping with A.A. Traditions, the signer could not be a member of A.A., since his face appears on screen.) Profoundly deaf since birth, Al B., an ASL professor of international acclaim, was highly praised for his earlier work for us on the video of the Big Book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, in ASL.

A.A.'s Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions present, in A.A. co-founder Bill W.'s own words "... an explicit view of the principles by which A.A. members recover and by which their Society functions. A.A.'s Twelve Steps are a group of principles, spiritual in their nature, which, if practiced as a way of life, can expel the obsession to drink and enable the sufferer to become happily and useful whole.

"A.A.'s Twelve 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 about it, the way it lives and grows."

Because the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* is replete with spiritual and metaphysical ideas and metaphors, the translation-interpretation process was extremely difficult; it could not be achieved by following the customary procedure of taping an English-language script into ASL.

Following technical brainstorming, however, the challenges were met by having professional signer/interpreter, Alan Champion (nonalcoholic) create a videotape script, with the aid of A.A.'s audiotaped version of the text. The videotaped script was fed into a teleprompter, and through techniques of reverse imaging, Al B. was able to work directly from a script in his own visual language to create his on-screen interpretation of the text. On the completed videotape open captions run across the bottom of the screen, while professional voiceover artist/signer, Phillip E. Giambaresi (nonalcoholic) is heard reading the exact text.

Throughout the entire process, Al B. was battling a serious illness, yet he demanded and gave the best from himself. His dedication to excellence was unswerving and impressive, and he was instrumental in helping everyone to reach higher. Sadly, Al B. died three weeks after completion of the videotape. We are indebted to this friend of A.A. who has made a substantial professional contribution to deaf and hearing-impaired alcoholics, both A.A. members and the still-suffering alcoholic who may be looking for A.A.

The videotape of the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* in ASL comprises five one-half inch VHS cassettes packaged in a slipcase (VS-3; \$35.00).

Other Special Needs Formats

Released in 1992, the videotape of the *Alcoholics Anonymous*, in ASL contains the first eleven chapters, which include the personal story of co-founder Bill W., and constitute the basic text; the Forewords to the three editions; a chapter titled "The Doctor's Opinion"; the personal story of co-founder, Dr. Bob; and the Appendices. It comprises five one-half inch VHS cassettes packaged in a slipcase (VS-1; \$38.00).

The A.A. World Services videos "Young People and A.A.," "Hope: Alcoholics Anonymous," and "A.A.—Rap with Us" are close captioned for the deaf and hearing impaired, as are a variety of 30- and 60-second television public service announcements.

The General Service Office of Alcoholics Anonymous, and many local A.A. offices also have some written materials available for the deaf and hearing impaired. Direct help for the deaf and hearing-impaired alcoholic is available through TTY (212) 870-3199; Voice (212) 870-3400.

For those who work with alcoholics who are blind or sight impaired, *Alcoholics Anonymous* and the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* are available in Braille and on audiocassette. The pamphlets "This is A.A.," "Is A.A. for You?," and "44 Questions," as well as *Daily Reflections* are also available in Braille.

For further information about A.A.'s cooperation with the professional community please contact the C.P.C. desk at the General Service Office.

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