

**Members
of the
Clergy
ask
about
Alcoholics
Anonymous**

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS® is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism.

- The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees for A.A. membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions.
- A.A. is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any causes.
- Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.

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www.aa.org

**Members of the Clergy Ask
About Alcoholics Anonymous**

No matter how grievous the alcohol obsession, we happily find that other vital choices can still be made. For example, we can choose to admit that we are personally powerless over alcohol; that dependence upon a "Higher Power" is a necessity, even if this be simply dependence upon an A.A. group. Then we can choose to try for a life of honesty and humility, of selfless service to our fellows and to "God as we understand him."

A.A. co-founder Bill W., 1966

These are the suggested Steps through which an estimated 2,000,000 men and women across the world have achieved sobriety in the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous.

THE TWELVE STEPS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol — that our lives had become unmanageable.

2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.

4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Introduction

Alcoholics Anonymous is not a religious society. However, A.A. is deeply indebted to members of the clergy of many faiths who have befriended the Fellowship since its founding in 1935.

The heart of that friendship has been understanding and tolerance — understanding of A.A.'s capacities and limitations as a fellowship, tolerance of the failings of a fellowship of men and women whose spiritual hopes may be higher than their human abilities.

It would be unrealistic to assume that all A.A. members are spiritually inspired. Many, too, are not committed to a formal body of religious doctrine. But innumerable A.A. members — including those of no orthodoxy — say that they have experienced the transforming power of sharing, caring, trust and love.

As it has been said in the past, A.A. hopes that in the future it can continue to be the helpful ally of all members of the clergy, sharing a concern for the recovery of the alcoholic.

The Purpose of This Pamphlet

Many members of the clergy are familiar with A.A. as a nonsectarian, nondenominational ally in their efforts to help alcoholics to stop drinking and lead healthy, productive lives. They know religious leaders of major faiths have expressed support for the A.A. program; and they are aware that among their own ranks there are those who have found in A.A. the answers to their personal drinking problems.

The purpose of this pamphlet, which reproduces questions about A.A. that are frequently asked by members of the clergy, is threefold:

First, A.A. acknowledges its debt to the many

members of the clergy who have been, and who continue to be, so helpful to alcoholics everywhere.

Second, it is hoped that the material on the following pages will provide a useful introduction to A.A. for those who have not yet had occasion to become familiar with the Fellowship.

Finally, in addressing the questions most asked by members of the clergy, this pamphlet synthesizes the personal experience, strength and hope of A.A.s everywhere.

What is A.A.? How Does it Work?

Alcoholics Anonymous is a worldwide fellowship of men and women who help each other to stay sober. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking.

Members share their experience, strength and hope in recovery from alcoholism at meetings and on a one-to-one basis. There are no dues or fees for membership. As stated in the A.A. Preamble, “We are self-supporting through our own contributions.”

At the core of the A.A. program are the Twelve Steps of Recovery, a group of principles based on the trial-and-error experience of A.A.’s early members. Practiced as a way of life, the Twelve Steps include elements found in the spiritual teachings of many faiths. These Steps have helped A.A. members the world over to live sober, fulfilling lives.

How Did A.A. Start?

Alcoholics Anonymous had its beginnings in Akron, Ohio, in 1935, when two self-acknowledged drunks — Bill W. and Dr. Bob — found that by reaching out to each other, they could accomplish what neither had been able to do alone: stay sober. Soon they discovered that their sobriety was further strengthened when they offered to share it with others, and within a few months a small group of sober alcoholics was meeting regularly in Akron. Steadily, their numbers grew to one hundred.

In 1939, with publication of the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*, from which the Fellowship derived its

name, and thanks to the help of many nonalcoholic friends, A.A. was on its way in North America and a few countries overseas. To handle the growing volume of inquiries, and to assist the new groups forming almost daily, the first world service office of A.A. — now called the General Service Office — was established in New York City.

A.A. today has an estimated 2,000,000 members, consisting of more than 120,000 groups located in approximately 180 countries.

What are A.A. Meetings Like?

A.A. meetings are conducted autonomously by groups in cities and towns throughout the world. There are many variations, but basically they break down into two kinds: closed meetings, for alcoholics only; and open meetings, which anyone may attend.

Closed meetings give members an opportunity to share their experience more intimately, and to apply the principles of the A.A. program in order to live sober a day at a time.

Although many open meetings follow a discussion format, most tend to be more structured. They generally consist of talks by one or more speakers who share experiences from the periods of their active alcoholism and of their present recovery in A.A.

Some open meetings — to which helping professionals, media representatives and others are invited — are held for the specific purpose of informing the public about A.A.

Nonalcoholics attending an A.A. meeting for the first time often are surprised to note the humor with which some members recount their drinking experience. Every talk is different — one may have a decidedly agnostic tone while another may be laced throughout with deep religious beliefs. Importantly, A.A. speakers speak only for themselves and not for A.A. What they all have in common, however, is the desire to strengthen their own sobriety by sharing it with others.

Most members have found that regular attendance at meetings is essential to the maintenance of their sobriety. Newcomers are encouraged to attend meetings as frequently as possible.

Many members report that their circle of A.A. friends has widened greatly as the result of coffee and conversation both before and after meetings.

Where Are A.A. Meetings Held?

A.A. groups rent meeting space in churches, temples, other houses of worship, and community centers. Although many A.A. meetings are held in facilities owned and operated by religious organizations, no affiliation or alliance with specific religious doctrines or movements is implied. Rather, this circumstance owes largely to the open-hearted acceptance of A.A. by the clergy of various faiths. Since A.A.'s earliest days, they have provided groups with meeting space at reasonable rent.

Are the Clergy Welcome at A.A. Meetings?

Members of the clergy are most welcome to attend A.A. open “speaker” or discussion meetings, and public meetings. For information on where and when such meetings are held, call the A.A. intergroup, or central office, in your area, or contact the General Service Office of A.A.

Why is Anonymity Important?

In stressing the equality of all A.A. members — and unity is the common bond of their recovery from alcoholism — anonymity serves as the spiritual foundation of the Fellowship.

At the personal level, anonymity provides protection for all members from identification as alcoholics outside A.A. meeting rooms, a safeguard often of special importance to newcomers. However, in their personal relationships with non-alcoholics — and those they think might have a problem with alcohol — A.A.s may feel free to say they are recovering alcoholics. Here, openness may help to carry the A.A. message.

At the level of press, radio, TV and films, anonymity stresses the equality in the Fellowship of all members. It does this by putting the “reminder” brake on those who might otherwise exploit

their A.A. affiliation to achieve recognition, power or personal gain.

In the words of Tradition Twelve, “Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.”

Is Religious Belief Part of the A.A. Program?

A.A. does not inquire into alcoholics’ religious beliefs — or lack of them — when they turn to the Fellowship for help.

However, the A.A. program of recovery is based on certain spiritual values. Individual members are free to interpret these values as they think best, or not to think about them at all.

Most members, before turning to A.A., had already admitted that they could not handle their drinking — alcohol had taken control of their lives. A.A. experience suggests that to get sober and stay sober, alcoholics need to accept and depend upon a spiritual entity, or force, that they perceive as greater than themselves. Some choose the A.A. group as their “Higher Power”; some look to God — as *they understand Him*; and others rely upon entirely different concepts.

Numerous alcoholics, when they first turn to A.A., have definite reservations about accepting any concept of a Power greater than themselves. Experience shows that, if they maintain an open mind on the subject and keep coming to A.A. meetings, they will in time find an answer to this distinctly personal dilemma.

Is Prayer Observed in the A.A. Program?

There are two references to prayer in the Twelve Steps, as written by the founders of A.A.

The Seventh Step reads: “[We] humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.” And the Eleventh Step states: “[We] sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.”

Some A.A. meetings close with a collective recitation of the Lord's Prayer. Others use the Serenity Prayer:

*God grant me the serenity to accept
the things I cannot change,
The courage to change the things I can,
And the wisdom to know the difference.*

In the Fellowship's early days, there was no A.A. literature, and the young groups leaned heavily on Bible reading for inspiration and guidance. Meetings usually closed with the Lord's Prayer because, as A.A. co-founder Bill W. later explained, "it did not put speakers to the task, embarrassing to many, of composing prayers of their own."

Does A.A. Sponsor Spiritual Retreats?

No. A.A. does not sponsor such gatherings.

How is A.A. Organized? Who Runs it?

A.A. has no central authority. There is minimal structural organization and a handful of Traditions instead of bylaws.

Traditionally, two or more alcoholics meeting together for purposes of sobriety may consider themselves an A.A. group, provided that, as a group, they are self-supporting and have no outside affiliations.

A.A.'s essential work is done by alcoholics who are themselves recovering in the Fellowship. Local groups generally select committees to oversee vital group activities and services.

Overall responsibility for A.A.'s worldwide service agencies has been entrusted by the groups to the General Service Conference, composed of area delegates from the United States and Canada who meet annually. Serving in a custodial role is the board of trustees — 14 A.A. members and seven nonalcoholic friends of the Fellowship who serve on a rotating basis.

How Are A.A. Services Financed?

A.A. is entirely self-supporting. Under no circumstances are funds accepted from outside sources.

There are no dues or fees in A.A. The expenses of an individual group (for rent, refreshments, literature, etc.) are defrayed by the voluntary contributions of group members, usually offered during group meetings.

Most groups contribute to the support of area-wide activities — such as carrying the A.A. message into hospitals, treatment facilities and correctional facilities — and to the work of A.A.'s General Service Office in New York. G.S.O. provides services worldwide on behalf of supporting A.A. groups.

What Are the “Twelve Traditions” of A.A.?

The Twelve Traditions are to the life of A.A. as a whole what the Twelve Steps are to each member's personal recovery.

The Traditions are suggested principles that ensure the survival and growth of the thousands of groups comprising A.A. Based on the experience of the groups themselves during A.A.'s crucial first years, they relate to the conduct of a group's internal affairs, cooperation among groups, and their relations with the community at large. Most of the Traditions reflect the spiritual orientation of the Fellowship.

The Traditions are not formally binding on A.A. groups. But the overwhelming majority of groups throughout the world choose to conduct their affairs according to the principles they embody.

Why Would the Clergy be Concerned With A.A.?

Members of the clergy often are the first persons whom sick alcoholics approach for help and understanding — and frequently the first to whom they candidly acknowledge their illness. In fact, many alcoholics look to the clergy for spiritual guidance both before and after joining A.A.

Some alcoholics do not wish to stop drinking, or else think they can “do it alone.” In such instances, spiritual advisers might inform the alcoholics that help is available whenever they become willing to receive it.

What If You Are a Chaplain in the Military?

Like other members of the clergy, military chaplains are often the “safest” people a problem drinker can approach. Chaplains can help direct alcoholics to available A.A. meetings, either on or near the base. Additionally, if no meetings are available, chaplains may be able to connect interested alcoholics with other A.A. materials, such as books and pamphlets or A.A.’s magazines, Grapevine and La Viña. Online meetings are also available for those members of the military who may be deployed, and chaplains can help get them connected electronically through correspondence groups. (A.A.’s General Service Office can provide information on such resources.)

Do Any of the Clergy Belong to A.A.?

Yes. Alcoholism knows no boundaries. A number of alcoholic members of the clergy, representing various faiths, have achieved sobriety in the Fellowship.

What Can Members of the Clergy Tell Alcoholics About A.A.?

Members of the clergy who have worked closely with A.A. emphasize the following points in counseling alcoholics:

1. Explain that A.A. can help only if they have a desire to stop drinking.
2. Urge alcoholics to keep an open mind if the A.A. program initially does not seem to make sense. Suggest that their first impressions will likely change if they keep going to meetings.

3. Stress that A.A. has a single purpose: to help alcoholics achieve sobriety.
4. Remind the alcoholic that A.A. membership embraces a cross-section of society. Newcomers meet members from all walks of life. No matter how different their backgrounds, all share a kinship in recovery from alcoholism through A.A.'s program of recovery.
5. Assure alcoholics that their personal anonymity will be respected.
6. Explain that, according to the best medical evidence, alcoholism is a progressive illness that can be arrested (though never "cured") only when the alcoholic stops drinking. In A.A., alcoholics will find thousands of men and women who, through their shared experience in recovery, can help them make the transition to a sober, fulfilling life.

How Can the Clergy and A.A. Cooperate Effectively?

For members of the clergy who counsel alcoholics, it can be helpful to know an active A.A. member in the community. Once contacted, the A.A. will take special interest in the newcomer, providing he or she *wants* help; take them to a meeting; and share the experience of their own recovery in A.A.

There are several things that members of the clergy can do to familiarize themselves with the A.A. program:

1. Attend some open A.A. meetings.
2. Become acquainted with A.A. literature — such as the books *Alcoholics Anonymous*, *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, and *A.A. Comes of Age*; the booklets *Living Sober* and *Came to Believe*; and some of the pamphlets listed on the inside back cover.
3. Recognize the spiritual (though nondenominational) aspects of the A.A. program.
4. Call upon A.A. for help when the situation warrants it.
5. Open their doors to A.A. meetings.

How Can Members of the Clergy Contact A.A.?

Many local A.A. service committees will, upon request, provide informational presentations for your organization. Sessions can be tailored to meet your needs. A typical agenda might include one or several A.A. films and a presentation by one or more A.A. members on “What A.A. Is and What It Is Not.”

Alcoholics Anonymous can be found on the Internet at aa.org and in most telephone directories by looking for “Alcoholics Anonymous.” Additionally, online meetings are available, which members of the military and others often use when they are in places where there is no meeting nearby.

Literature about the A.A. program, as well as specific directions for getting in touch with a local A.A. group, may be obtained by writing to the General Service Office of A.A., Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163, or visiting our website: www.aa.org.

What Does A.A. Not Do?

A.A. does not: Furnish initial motivation for alcoholics to recover; solicit members; engage in or sponsor research; keep attendance records or case histories; join “councils” or social agencies (although A.A. members, groups and service offices frequently cooperate with them); follow up or try to control its members; make medical or psychological diagnoses or prognoses; provide detox, rehabilitation or nursing services, hospitalization, drugs, or any medical or psychiatric treatment; offer religious services or host/sponsor retreats; engage in education about alcohol; provide housing, food, clothing, jobs, money, or any other welfare or social services; provide domestic or vocational counseling; accept any money for its services, or any contributions from non-A.A. sources; provide letters of reference to parole boards, lawyers, court officials, social agencies, employers, etc.

What is A.A.'s Singleness of Purpose and What About Problems Other Than Alcohol?

Some professionals refer to alcoholism and drug addiction as “substance abuse” or “chemical dependency.” Nonalcoholics are, therefore, sometimes introduced to A.A. and encouraged to attend A.A. meetings. Nonalcoholics may attend *open* A.A. meetings as observers, but only those with a *drinking* problem may attend *closed* meetings.

How Can A.A. Work With You Best?

A.A. is always seeking to strengthen and expand our communication with members of the clergy, and we welcome your comments and suggestions. They help us to work more effectively with you in achieving the purpose we share: to help the alcoholic who still suffers.

THE TWELVE TRADITIONS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity.

2. 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.

3. The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.

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

5. Each group has but one primary purpose — to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

6. An A.A. group ought never endorse, finance or lend the A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.

7. Every A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.

8. Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.

9. A.A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.

10. Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the A.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy.

11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio and films.

12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

A.A. PUBLICATIONS Below is a partial listing of A.A. publications. Complete order forms are available from the General Service Office of ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163. Telephone: (212) 870-3400. Website: aa.org

BOOKS

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS
TWELVE STEPS AND TWELVE TRADITIONS
DAILY REFLECTIONS
ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS COMES OF AGE
AS BILL SEES IT
DR. BOB AND THE GOOD OLDTIMERS
'PASS IT ON'

BOOKLETS

LIVING SOBER
CAME TO BELIEVE
A.A. IN PRISON: INMATE TO INMATE

PAMPHLETS

Experience, Strength and Hope:

WOMEN IN A.A.
A.A. FOR THE BLACK AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN ALCOHOLIC
A.A. FOR THE NATIVE NORTH AMERICAN
YOUNG PEOPLE AND A.A.
A.A. FOR THE OLDER ALCOHOLIC — NEVER TOO LATE
LGBTQ ALCOHOLICS IN A.A.
THE "GOD" WORD: AGNOSTIC AND ATHEIST MEMBERS IN A.A.
A.A. FOR ALCOHOLICS WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES —
AND THEIR SPONSORS
ACCESS TO A.A.: MEMBERS SHARE ON OVERCOMING BARRIERS
A.A. AND THE ARMED SERVICES
DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DIFFERENT?
MANY PATHS TO SPIRITUALITY
MEMO TO AN INMATE
IT SURE BEATS SITTING IN A CELL
(An illustrated pamphlet for inmates)

About A.A.:

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT A.A.
IS A.A. FOR ME?
IS A.A. FOR YOU?
A NEWCOMER ASKS
IS THERE AN ALCOHOLIC IN YOUR LIFE?
THIS IS A.A.
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON SPONSORSHIP
THE A.A. GROUP
PROBLEMS OTHER THAN ALCOHOL
THE A.A. MEMBER—MEDICATIONS AND OTHER DRUGS
SELF-SUPPORT: WHERE MONEY AND SPIRITUALITY MIX
THE TWELVE STEPS ILLUSTRATED
THE TWELVE TRADITIONS ILLUSTRATED
THE TWELVE CONCEPTS ILLUSTRATED
HOW A.A. MEMBERS COOPERATE WITH PROFESSIONALS
A.A. IN CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES
A.A. IN TREATMENT SETTINGS
BRIDGING THE GAP
A.A. TRADITION—HOW IT DEVELOPED
LET'S BE FRIENDLY WITH OUR FRIENDS
UNDERSTANDING ANONYMITY

For Professionals:

A.A. IN YOUR COMMUNITY
A BRIEF GUIDE TO A.A.
IF YOU ARE A PROFESSIONAL
ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS AS A RESOURCE
FOR THE HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL
A MESSAGE TO CORRECTIONS PROFESSIONALS
IS THERE A PROBLEM DRINKER IN THE WORKPLACE?
MEMBERS OF THE CLERGY ASK ABOUT A.A.
A.A. MEMBERSHIP SURVEY
A MEMBER'S-EYE VIEW OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

VIDEOS (available on aa.org)

A.A. VIDEOS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE
HOPE: ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS
A NEW FREEDOM
CARRYING THE MESSAGE BEHIND THESE WALLS

For Professionals:

A.A. VIDEO FOR HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS
A.A. VIDEO FOR LEGAL AND CORRECTIONS PROFESSIONALS
A.A. VIDEO FOR EMPLOYMENT/HUMAN RESOURCES PROFESSIONALS

PERIODICALS

AA GRAPEVINE (monthly)
LA VIÑA (bimonthly, in Spanish)

For additional information, visit www.aa.org
(Information for Professionals) or contact the
Cooperation with the Professional Community desk at the
General Service Office: cpc@aa.org or 212-870-3400.

