

Around AA

Items of AA information and experience

April GSO Conference Has AA Unity for Theme

Guiding theme of the Eighteenth Annual General Service Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous was "Personal Recovery Depends on AA Unity." Delegates from every state and province in the United States and Canada deliberated almost around the clock during the five-and-one-half-day Conference, April 22-27, at the Hotel Roosevelt, New York City, to express the consensus of the Fellowship regarding the vital need for unity among AA members.

The theme of unity was woven into all presentations, discussion, and debate by Delegates who gathered to express the voice of North American AA. In the keynote address, Dr. John L. Norris, non-alcoholic Chairman of the Board of Trustees, said that unity not only was necessary for our survival today, but was AA's "bridge to the future."

Among the subjects covered at the Conference were literature, financing, institutional AA, international AA, the AA Grapevine magazine, public information, anonymity, and the 1970 quinquennial Convention. In addition, Delegates reported on AA in their areas and discussed solutions to local problems.

The reports, discussions, presentations and accomplishments of the Eighteenth General Service Conference will be highlighted in a future issue of the Grapevine, and covered more completely in *The Conference Digest*, which will be forwarded to all AA groups by your General Service Office.

British Survey of AA Cites 'Caretaker' Function

In addition to helping many alcoholics remain sober, AA may perform a "caretaking" function for many other problem drinkers, according to four London scientists who have published a study of AA in the famous British medical journal *Lancet*. *

The authors prepared a 73-item questionnaire and sent batches to the secretaries of the 45 London AA groups in late 1964. Forty (89 percent) of the groups cooperated, and 306 completed questionnaires were returned.

(AA itself has up to now largely resisted doing research, even on itself, but members have cooperated with scientists who perform such studies, as in this case.)

Here's a brief summary of the London findings. Males accounted for 81% of the membership, females 19%; average age was 45.7 years; 58% were married, 19% single, 20% divorced or separated, 3% widowed.

Using occupation to rank the anonymous members by social class, the authors found almost half the members to be middle-class, socioeconomically speaking; 35% to be of higher classes; 14% to be lower, with only 4% in the very lowest.

Average length of AA membership reported was 48.1 months; and average length of sobriety was 28.8 months. But 42% had been sober less than 6 months; 57% reported one or more slips after joining; and 18% said they had had five or more relapses.

The authors had some high praise for AA. And they pointed out that the Fellowship is usually thought of as a society in which alcoholics stay sober, and it is success at this which gives AA prestige. However, referring to the number of slipping members, they suggested that "AA has created a supportive organization which accepts and continues to tolerate the relapsing alcoholic who has little ability to maintain long-term sobriety." This may be "a less dramatic but perhaps more important achievement," a "possibly larger and more unique role," said the scientists, about an aspect of AA usually overlooked or considered of little importance by many members.

The *Lancet* study also offered interesting insight into identification, the AA group's "exclusiveness" (*their* word) and other dynamics of the Fellowship. "The astonishing skill with which AA has, in the process of its growth, sensed out and sensitively exploited the dynamics of the leaderless group offers lessons of great importance," the authors declared.

"AA has no leader," they explained, "and erects in its place an 'image' of the 'ideal' member—it is with this strongly cut image that the potential new member has to identify if he is to affiliate." Identification is the very essence of the affiliation process, in their opinion, but it is not with any one established member so much as with fragments of a whole series of life-histories which are synthesized into identification with the group ideal.

—B. L.

* Edwards, G., Hensman, A., Hawker, A., and Williamson, V.: "Who Goes to Alcoholics Anonymous?," *Lancet*, August 13, 1966, pp. 382-384

Books That Can Help

'Ministering to Alcoholics'

Some 650,000 of the nation's millions of alcoholics are in the Chicago area, where one branch of the Christian church is currently mounting a major effort to help alcoholics and their families back to sobriety and useful life.

At Lutheran General Hospital, an Alcoholism Treatment Program is being developed under the direction of a team of alcoholism experts including Pastor

John E. Keller. A fund drive has been launched for construction of a \$2,200,000 facility to be called the Rehabilitation Center for Treatment, Education and Research in Alcoholism. The new unit will adjoin 587 Lutheran General at Park Ridge, Ill.

The ambitious Lutheran program for alcoholism treatment involves the team approach: Religious, medical, psychiatric, psychological, and nursing professionals, as well as lay counselors (many of whom are AAs), are being used to conduct alcoholics through in-patient and out-patient relationships with the program, which assume that, according to Pastor Keller, "the alcoholic is totally sick—spiritually, physically, emotionally, and in family and social relationships.

"We approach the patient as one who understands alcoholism and his feelings about it," Pastor Keller says. "There is a nonmoralistic atmosphere in which the person can feel acceptance."

Once the patient has got over withdrawal, he or she (with his or her spouse) attends lectures by the hospital treatment team. One series is for the alcoholics, and one is for both the alcoholics and their spouses. Group therapy sessions are held; individual therapy is conducted; and patients attend the men's and women's AA meetings one night each week.

Pastor Keller has detailed his own deep understanding of alcoholics, alcoholism, and AA in a book, *Ministering to Alcoholics* (Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis), which reports on his eleven years of service as a chaplain with the special assignment from the Executive Committee of the American Lutheran Church "of learning about alcoholism and counseling with alcoholics."

Pastor Keller has indeed learned. His chapters titled "Understanding Alcoholism" and "Alcoholics Anonymous" are full of keen insights into the malady and wise assessments of the AA program. He suggests to churchmen that if they would help alcoholics they must first know something of themselves, and then, in pages which repeatedly challenge what someone has called "normsies," he points out the other kinds of addiction which, like alcohol and drugs, keep men es-

tranged from God and pin them down in self-deceived self-worship. He writes acutely of the addictions (within the ranks, indeed, of constant churchgoers) to success, to work, to food, to buying things, to pleasure, and even to moralism and legalism (consider, he says, the Pharisees!).

Pastor Keller counsels his fellow churchmen to hold up discussion of the Gospel with an alcoholic until the time is propitious, dealing with the alcoholism first in a "nonmoralistic" way. Waiting, he says, "costs much more in terms of self, of concern, of caring, and of loving than readily and easily quoting Bible passages and proclaiming Christ to a person who is still in the clutches of omnipotence, egocentricity, defiance, and self-delusion — and *doesn't even know it.*"

Central to Pastor Keller's view of alcoholism and concern for the alcoholic is the AA experience, and in particular the interpretations of AA method and content which are contained in the writings of the late Dr. Harry Tiebout, first psychiatrist to recognize that AA had made a breakthrough in alcoholism. Tiebout's well-known work on the surrender phenomenon is reviewed by Pastor Keller, and then, in four pages beginning on page 63 of *Ministering to Alcoholics*, he gives an unusually revealing and mov-

ing witness of his own struggle, as a non-alcoholic, to surrender *really* to the will of God in all things.

"Unlike the alcoholic I did not find alcohol. That's the only difference," Pastor Keller says about his own alienation in "omnipotence." He reports, as we all must, only partial success in surrender.

Pastor Keller's is a quiet book — no brassy science and no insistent evangelism. But it is an unusually thorough and thoughtful treatment of the spiritual side of the alcoholism malady from the point of view of the convinced Christian. He sees alcoholics as people, like other people, not in need of more grace from God, but not in need of less. He suggests that the best counseling they will get will be the result of getting it from the best persons — men and women who have themselves weathered alienation from God and love, and surrendered, and returned to help those coming after to take what we in AA call "Twelve Steps."

— N. L.

ABOUT THIS SECTION: AA conducts no research, and holds no opinions on that done by others. Reviews of books, articles, etc., printed here are authors' opinions only.

— The Editors
