



Concepts

Northern IL Area Newsletter Spring of 2018

It has been around 4 or 5 years now that we have not had a district to host the annual Spring Conference until the last minute. I remember hearing Tom B make an impassioned appeal, at a Spring Conference, because no district had stepped up yet and it was looking like we wouldn't have a Spring Conference the next year. The following year it was me making that appeal and the year after that another person and so on and so on.

Here we are, once again, coming to our Spring Conference and the Saturday morning Assembly with no one scheduled to host next year's Conference.

I'm not really sure what to think - does the majority, of our fellowship, not want a Spring Conference? Do we want one but we just don't want to be the ones to do it? Are we afraid to do it because we think it will be too hard?

Personally, I've enjoyed the time I've spent at these events. I learn a lot about service work, how to do it and what the benefit of doing it is. I get to "fellowship" with my friends, especially the ones I don't get to spend a lot of time with, normally, because they live away from me. And I get to hear some great recovery speakers. I would hate to lose the Conference just because people want someone else to do it for whatever reason.

Leadership is being willing to take on the tough job and find people to help. Good leaders are the kind of people others want to follow. They are decisive, willing to get their hands dirty and an inspiration to others to do the same. Being elected as GSR or DCM means that, at least some people, see you that way or see that you could be that way. Maybe you were elected because no one else wanted it and so you "stepped up." Either way you are now the leader for your group or district, the question is - what kind of leader are you going to be?

I hope that you take your role seriously; that you become a trusted servant. Serving your group or district is an honor, and a responsibility to serve your group or district well. Often that means doing what is hard in order to do what is best.

Hosting an event is the responsibility of our districts and an honor. Whether that is a Committee meeting or Assembly, a workshop put on by an Area Committee, or one your district or group puts on, or an Area Conference (Big Book or Spring), these happen because people say - I'm going to do this and then organize a group to do it.

The Area has resources for hosting events, all the events. We have very detailed guidelines that indicate what you need to do, when you need to do it and how to do it. Our Area Alternate Chair has the responsibility to help by being a resource and liaison for the committee doing the work. We have a Conference Advisory Committee to help with making arrangements with facilities where the event will happen. They have

experience with negotiating contracts with facilities. And there are a host of people willing to help along the way.

So here is my emotional appeal: DCM's, talk to your districts and tell them that you want your district to host the 2019 Spring Conference and you are putting in a bid - so get ready to start work. Do it now because you only have a year.

GSR's, talk to your DCM and tell him or her that you want your district to host the 2019 Spring Conference and you want to start putting a bid together now.

Go ahead and decide that you are going to host the 2020 Spring Conference or Big Book Conference and start working on your bid so that you can present it on time.

Start planning to host an Area Committee meeting or Assembly in 2019 and decide which one you want to host.

Start planning to host an Area Workshop, either a Service Orientation or one of the Service Committee workshops.

You do not need to have a facility, in your district, to host. There is nothing that says you can't host a conference at a facility outside of your district. Just like districts host a committee meeting at Lord of Life in Elburn, you can host the Spring Conference at one of the hotels we use in Schaumburg or elsewhere.

Go to the NIA Website (aa-nia.org) and look at the guidelines for hosting these events and start planning. Don't wait for the next emotional appeal.

At one time, it was a privilege to host an event and districts competed for the honor. It still is. Robert S., Delegate NIA 20



2018 Spring Conference & Assembly



Hosted by Districts 10, 11, 12

“People Who Normally Would Not Mix”

March 23rd -25th, 2018

Hyatt Regency Schaumburg

1800 E. Golf Rd., Schaumburg, IL 60173

(847) 605-1234

Questions? Volunteer? Contact Us!

Co-Chair: John P – 773-540-5164

Registration: John C. – 815-308-8169

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<http://www.aa-nia.org>

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Editor's Corner

This issue the theme is spirituality. Our Delegate wrote of a different issue that needs addressing in Northern IL.

Some days I would describe myself as a Christian. Some days not so much. I feel the power in the rooms when people share experience, strength, and hope. I started out as an agnostic of the more belligerent type. If there was a God he hadn't done anything for me lately. And if He was a He then we were all in trouble because men didn't seem to be doing a very good job running the place. . Whatever I believed I certainly wasn't going to be told what to believe. The phrase "as we understand him" in the 3rd Step saved my life. I could see that AA was getting results where I could not alone. The group and AA as a whole are still a very important part of my conception of a Power Greater than Myself.

I have spent a good part of my sobriety questioning the use of the Lord's Prayer in meetings. I have read the Bible and that prayer is definitely in Mark. I think to deny it is a Christian prayer is to insult Christianity and most people's ability to read. AA claims we do not ally with any sect or denomination yet we say the Protestant form of the Lord's Prayer. The Lord's Prayer is rarely used in meetings outside the US, and less often outside the Midwest, in my experience.

I like to think it is because we are lazy and don't want to change, rather than a conscience effort to break the Traditions. But maybe some are so intent on forcing their brand of spirituality on a newcomer that they feel it must be that prayer.

Parse it however you want. Saying the Protestant Lord's Prayer in meetings allies AA with a denomination and a religion.
Heather S. Concepts Editor

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS, SPIRITUALITY AND ME

I intend to live the rest of my life happy, joyous and free one day at a time; therefore I must work for a daily reprieve based on my spiritual condition.

Hello, I am Susan, alcoholic. My sobriety date is 11/16/11 and I have a sponsor and sponsor other ladies and am involved in service at the district and area level.

My spiritual awakening was gratefulness that I was still alive after a forty-eight hour timespan of not drinking (to show my husband I could), went through withdrawal with inability to walk and seeing Barney's on the walls and an ambulance trip to intensive care for five days (which are lost to me). I woke up in a physical rehab unit with a diagnosis of malnutrition, dehydration and muscle weakness. The journey began, little did I know.

I always believed in God, but not to the depth I do today. As I was recovering physically, emotionally and spiritually, I followed the suggestion that upon awakening to ask my higher power to keep me sober throughout the day and thank him at night before sleep for having kept me sober. I've heard this called 'pillow to pillow'. What I started doing was incorporating the daily reflections every morning and some Big Book reading at night. Over the years, I now have about

seven "favorite" morning readings and four evening readings, which do keep me in the right frame of mind to meet the daily ups and downs and settle me down for sleep. I definitely ask for God's help during the day.

Around my second and third year of sobriety, my mother and mother-in-law became ill and died one after the other. Each took a period of about nine months back-to-back. My surrender was complete over outside circumstances and I could not control the direction of their care. They were local and my husband and I did all we could within our power to make each of them comfortable at the end.

Those family experiences and all the issues that include family reinforced this is a one day at a time program, since what worked one day to maintain sobriety did not work the next. Had to dig deep in the spiritual toolbox to address new resentments and issues.

It is amazing, but as I was healing from my tornadic damage so was my family. Life sure looked different and much better, now that I could see and think clearly. The promises had slipped into our lives.

I have returned to church on a regular basis and have become involved with a women's spirituality group, which has helped me grow immensely. The reason for that is, I was willing, due to God's grace, at this point to want to learn more about my religion and spirituality. I

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am the drunk in this group of ladies, but we are all broken in different ways as noted in the 12 & 12 before the St. Francis Prayer. Although not alcoholic, St. Francis had gone through his own emotional and spiritual wringer, and all we need to do is start where we are.

The spiritual inspiration of Sister Ignatius and Father Dowling to our founders is highlighted in many of our readings. The spiritual principles and virtues balance out our character defects and shortcomings. Some of my motivation comes from the fact that each day we can start over – or start over any time during the day. Those spot inventories and restraint of tongue, pen and keyboard really work!

That’s all for now, I have a one-on-one relationship with my higher power which I need to nurture daily. See you on the Road of Happy Destiny!

Alcohol - The best "night-time, speech slurring, headache creating, dehydration having, drink spilling, charm killing, so you think you can dance" medicine.



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Atheists in AA.

My name is Carlyle W., and I am an alcoholic. Currently I serve as Panel 67 Delegate for Area 33 Southeastern Michigan, host of the 2020 International Convention of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Allow me to start out by mentioning that because of the men and women in the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous, good sponsorship, and the gift of desperation, I have not found it necessary to take a drink since Friday, April 21, 2006. Somehow honesty, action, and some good people conspired to make me well again. For this, I owe a debt of immeasurable gratitude. I have volunteered to talk about atheists in AA for a number of reasons-some of which are not completely formed at this time-but primarily because my journey in recovery and my obligation to pass on what has been so freely given to me compels me to do so.

Like many Americans, I grew up in a religious home environment. My parents talked about a spirit, a father "creature" who was a man (they called him "he") but who was not human; who had created the heavens and earth in six days; who watches, keeps score and judges my every move and thought; who is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent, and with the help of his sidekick, the holy spirit, came down from heaven and into the world through the womb of a human female named Mary. And of course, he was an old white man with long hair, a long beard, and fiery red eyes- powerful images

that shaped and dominated my thing overall for decades. I had also been groomed in the tradition of believing in Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, and the Tooth Fairy. To me, this all seemed very natural and normal, primarily because everything and everyone around me supported, encouraged and confirmed the motif.

In fact, I believed in the god of religious upbringing during my entire prodigal and alcoholic life. Yes, theist, I once believed as you believe. It was not until after I joined AA and began working the Steps with a sponsor to develop and honest relationship with myself that I finally came to the realization that I actually did not believe anything-not one word of what I had claimed to believe about the existence of the supernatural, overseeing or intervening entity, being or spirit. I had heard many times of people praying and asking others to pray for loved ones who were to undergo a lifesaving surgical procedure. The requests would usually include something along the lines of "pray for god to guide the surgeon." I can remember thinking to myself, "What's the point of asking god to guide the hand of some lousy surgeon, a man or woman) subject of human frailty? Why not simply ask god to heal the sick person outright and be done with it-cut out the imperfect (possibly hungover) middle man?" or why is god tampering with red lights and traffic cops in my favor so that I can get to work on time unmolested? Was it really god answering desperate prayer from an unmanageable drunk, or are the traffic lights actually just some sort of automatic, preset timing device? And perhaps most

of the time when people speed, they don't get caught.

Prayer provides a basis for belief in a god through the perception of answered prayer. My deconversion-or letting of god-was no a one-step process, because in the mind of any sophisticated believer, the concept of god is a mega-belief. It is a belief that is held together by many small beliefs-many small experiences that accumulate and form one larger belief. If at any time one of the beliefs is attacked, I can still, in my own mind, rely on the strength of the other beliefs. It is only when a sufficient number of the beliefs that form the mega-belief are countered that a Christian, for example, will really start to question his or her faith.

This is what I like to call "graceful degradation." It is concept in network theory where multiple nodes in a network can be knocked out but the network as a whole can still stand. A simplified model of the concept of god for me might be a hexagram, having nodes such as prayer, creation, logical arguments, other Christians, personal relations and morality, with the Bible as the center node. "some of us have tried to hold on to our old idea, and the result was nil until we let absolutely." I realized that I had to either let go or continue lying to myself, pretending to believe in things that were untenable to me. I soon discovered that *It* was the synergy of the rooms, working with others on a common solution, following suggestions and the strict attention to being honest with myself, as "How it

Works" implores me to be, that allowed me to see who and what I am, and – most importantly- what I believe and what I do not believe. This was probably one of the most life-giving and life-renewing experiences of self-awareness I have ever enjoyed. And it has sustained me through good times and bad.

For a while, I kept my newfound self-awareness hidden from public view. My realization that I am an atheistic, fee-thinking or secular, I imagined, would carry with it certain penalties if made known to other AA members. While Alcoholic Anonymous professes to be 'not allied with sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution" I have witnessed many religious (specifically Christian) AA members shamelessly proselytize newcomers, often 'threatening' them into a theistic mindset (real or imagined) lest they die the alcoholic death. I have even heard longtime members, when sharing with newcomers during an AA meeting, refer to their Christian Bible as the BIG Big Book-continuing that after going through the Steps, they will need to turn toward this book (meaning the Holy Bible) for real peace, serenity, and joy through a relationship with Jesus Christ. Others have opened their share at AA discussion meetings with an acknowledgement of their higher power by name-Jesus or God.

Is one's choice and name of a higher power not an outside issue? Why does the entire table or group need to know who or what another member's higher

power is? Could that/should that not be considered an outside issue? When asked about it, the person confronted more often than not reacts with hostility or righteous indignation. I often wonder how these same types would feel or react if another member took the same liberty to thank his or her higher power Lucifer, for example. One just might begin to see how unnecessary and perhaps disruptive to our primary purpose such disclosures can be. As an atheist and as a member of Alcoholics Anonymous, I consider discussions of these matters to be worthwhile exercise in humility and vital to our development in service as we extend the hand of AA.

As recently of May of 2017, an AA group in my Area found itself in a bitter conflict over how it should close the morning meetings: should it close with the Lord's Prayer or with the AA Responsibility Statement? One of the group's Jewish members objected to the Christian prayer and made his sentiments known by calling for change. This sparked strong criticism and opposition from many of that group's Christian members and some left the group and started a new one, which now meets at the same time just a bit down the road.

Clearly, each group is autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or AA as a whole. But I had to ask myself, "If we, as a fellowship, truly believe that we are not affiliated with any sect or denomination, why the intransigence on this matter?" The Lord's Prayer (also called the Our Father, among other names) is a

venerated Christian prayer that, according to the New Testament of the Bible, Jesus taught as the way to pray. This group finally agreed to compromise of sorts, allowing the group's various chairs to decide at the conclusion of each meeting how it would close.

My sponsor (who is a practicing Catholic) and I decided that bring my atheistic temperament into this seething caldron of debate and hostility within that group (a group we both attend) would be imprudent and even disastrous (especially with my serving as Area delegate). So I stayed away from the mayhem and let the group members handle the matter without my interference. One certainly could argue that the group had been engaged in a controversy (although not public) and that some were endorsing or opposing a certain cause. Many could say that Alcoholics Anonymous (or many of its members) is in some sort of denial about being religious. In my estimation, if anyone could claim that the so-called Lord's Prayer did not violate the AA Preamble, then that individual has an obligation to explain what the Preamble secretly means, as opposed to what it clearly states.

Moreover, our Third Tradition tells us: "The only requirement for AA membership is a desire to stop drinking." It does not state: first-class membership for Christians, second-class membership for everyone else. Step Six in the "Twelve and Twelve" instructs us that, "If we would gain any real advantage in the use of this Step on problems other alcohol, we shall need to make a brand-

new venture into open-mindedness. We shall need to raise our eyebrows toward perfection and be ready to walk in that direction. It will seldom matter how haltingly we walk. The only question will be 'Are we ready?'"

I generally encourage newcomers to pray, particularly when I see that they have or have had certain religious leanings. I share that I too have used those methods in the past. The men who I have sponsored tend to grasp enthusiastically on to the idea of the AA group as their higher power. I always disclose the fact that I am an atheist to the men who have asked me to sponsor them-not always immediately, but eventually it comes up.

On the back of each anniversary token I have been given, I have been reminded of this admonition: "To thine own self be true." Thus, I have an obligation to the next sufferer to share *my* experience, strength, and hope and to help others to recover from alcoholism. To the extent that I began to let of my old religious idea of a supernatural old, bearded whit man in the sky-who was controlling, or at least had the power to control, my thoughts and actions-I became more steadily guided and governed to sound reasoning.

Once I started to take AA's suggestions, confusion gave way to clarity, bitterness to gratitude, and chronic suffering to serenity. The joys of recovery proceeded in to my life at once. And the feeling was indescribably wonder. I am certain I had been rocketed to the fourth dimension. One

of the greatest gifts I received was the gift of being honest with myself about what I believe and what I do not believe. I no longer feel the urge to people-please on this matter. And this is great progress for me.

To pretend to be something and someone I am not would surely dampen my joy and cause me to be miserably ineffective. I have ceased fighting anyone or anything-even alcohol. For by this time sanity has returned. I live free from alcohol as a problem today. And I do it one day at a time without prayer, religious abstractions or the need to convince, or force, someone over to my point of view. It is precisely due to this freedom that I am able to demonstrate to other agnostics, atheists, freethinker, secular humanists, and the life that the joys of recovery are waiting for them, too, that working with others is the central dynamic of our entire movement-where we find out how to enter into proper relations with our fellow man. And that isolation and ostracism need not be a way of life for anyone in AA simply because he or she has a different take on the higher power god concept. This is my experience, my journey, my story-the great fact of me.



Rule 62

You might be an alcoholic if:

1. The vodka you're drinking reminds you of the taste of a fine aftershave.
2. You're lying in your waterbed all warm and comfy and you remember you don't have a waterbed.

A rabbit walks into a bar, p.2



A newcomer asks her sponsor what the Big Book has to say about sex. The sponsor refers her to page 69. The sponsee transposes the numbers and goes to page 96. She reads, "Do not be discouraged if your prospect does not respond at once. Search out another alcoholic and try again. You are sure to find someone desperate enough to accept with eagerness what you offer. We find it a waste of time to keep chasing a man who cannot or will not work with you."

How many sponsors does it take to change a lightbulb?

Sponsors can't change lightbulbs. The most they can do is offer guidance based on their experience strength and hope. If the lightbulb want to change and is willing to go to any lengths, then a Higher Power can change the lightbulb.

Rabbit walks into a bar, p.64



Announcements

Mar 23 – Mar 25 2018 Spring Assembly Conference @ Hyatt Regency Schaumburg contact: Co-Chair: John P – 773-540-5164 Registration: John C. – 815-308-8169

Apr 7 Pre-General Service Conference Workshop @ Lord of Life Lutheran Church 40W605 IL38 Elburn, 60119. Registration 8:00 a.m. Workshop begins at 9:00 a.m. Lunch: TBA/\$ Hosted by District 40 – Contact Lisa S. 630 336-7430

Apr 22 – Apr 28 68th General Service Conference in New York.

Apr 28 @ 10:00 am – 12:00 pm Step Study Workshop @ Christ Church of Oakbrook 501 Oak Brook Rd, Oak Brook, 60523 enter door 2 facing the south parking lot. A deeper look at Steps 10 & 11 of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Apr 28 @ 5:00 pm Serenity Corner's Swing into Spring @ KaySee Club Hall. Hosted by Serenity Corner. Tickets: \$15.00 in advance only (ticket sales end April 14th) Contact: Kim J: 815-603-7982, Tim E: 815-673-9060, Haleigh R: 815-822-6452

May 12 Spring Committee Meeting @ Lord of Life Lutheran Church 40W605 IL38 Elburn, 60119. Hosted by d41. Registration 8:00 AM, Meetings begin at 9:00 AM. Spanish interpreter

May 19 Articles for the Summer Issue of Concepts due. Please send to concepts@aa-nia.org

Jun 9 Summer Assembly @ Lord of Life Lutheran Church 40W605 IL38 Elburn, 60119. Hosted by d23. Registration 8:00 AM, Meetings begin at 9:00 AM. Spanish interpreter

Aug 4 Summer Committee Meeting @ Lord of Life Lutheran Church 40W605 IL38 Elburn, 60119. Hosted by the area officers. Registration 8:00 AM, Meetings begin at 9:00 AM. Spanish interpreter

Aug 17 – Aug 19 44th Annual State Conference. Hosted by Area 21. Details to follow

Aug 24 – Aug 2 Regional Conference Kalamazoo, MI.