



ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS NEWS SHEET

Apr/May 2012

“This News sheet is intended as an aid to service throughout the Fellowship in Ireland”

Understanding Anonymity

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

What is the purpose of anonymity in Alcoholics Anonymous? Why is it often referred to as the greatest single protection the Fellowship has to assure its continued existence and growth? If we look at the history of AA, from its beginning in 1935 until now, it is clear that anonymity services two different yet equally vital functions:

- At the personal level, anonymity provides protection for all members from identification as alcoholics, a safeguard often of special importance to newcomers.
- At the level of press, radio, TV, films and new media technologies such as the Internet, anonymity stresses the equality in the Fellowship of all members by putting the brake on those who might otherwise exploit their AA affiliation to achieve recognition, power or personal gain.

Anonymity on a person-to-person basis

From its earliest days, AA has promised personal anonymity to all who attend its meetings. Because its founders and first members were recovering alcoholics themselves, they knew from their own experience how ashamed most alcoholics are about their drinking, how fearful they are of public exposure. The social stigma of alcoholism was great, and those early AA members recognised that a firm assurance of confidentiality was imperative if they were to succeed in attracting and helping other alcoholics to achieve sobriety. Over the years, anonymity has proved one of the greatest gifts that AA offers the suffering alcoholic. Without it, many would never attend their first meeting. Although the stigma has lessened to some degree, most newcomers still find admission of their alcoholism so painful that it is possible only in a protected environment. Anonymity is essential for this atmosphere of trust and openness.

Valuable as privacy is to new members, it is noteworthy that most of them are eager to share the good news of their AA affiliation with their families. Such a disclosure, however, is always their own choice: AA as a whole seeks to ensure that individual members stay as private and protected as they

wish, or as open as they wish, about belonging to the Fellowship; but always with the understanding that anonymity at the level of the press, radio, TV, films and new media technologies such as the Internet, is crucial to our continuing sobriety and growth – at both the personal and group levels.

Anonymity at the media level

After its first few years of success, the Fellowship attracted much favourable attention in the press. Articles praising AA appeared in magazines and newspapers across the country. And, with each new article, the ranks of AA grew. In those days, everyone still feared the consequences of public disclosure; and so the first press coverage guarded members' anonymity for safety's sake. The arrival of new media technologies such as the Internet has offered new vehicles to carry the AA message to the public. AA members continue to preserve their anonymity in these new public media.

As public awareness concerning alcoholism increased, the stigma decreased, and soon some AA members began to publicly acknowledge their affiliation in the media. One of the first to do so was a famous ballplayer whose comeback was so spectacular that newspapers lavished attention on his successful struggle against alcohol. Believing that he could help AA by revealing his membership, he discussed it openly. Even the founders of AA approved his actions simply because they had not yet experienced the cost of such publicity.

Then other members decided to break their anonymity in the media – some motivated by good will, others by personal gain. Some members devised schemes to tie in their AA affiliation with all sorts of business enterprises, insurance, sales, drying-out-farms, even a temperance magazine, to name a few.

It did not take long for those at AA headquarters to realise that overzealous and self-loving anonymity breakers could quickly jeopardise the Fellowship's hard-won reputation. And they saw that if one person was made an exception, other

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exceptions would inevitably follow. To assure the unity, effectiveness and welfare of AA, anonymity had to be universal. It was the guardian of all that AA stood for. In stressing the equality of all AA members – and unity in the common bond of their recovery from alcoholism – anonymity serves as the spiritual foundation of the Fellowship. Back in 1946, Bill W., our co-founder, wrote: “The word ‘anonymous’ has for us an immense spiritual significance. Subtly but powerfully, it reminds us that we are always to place principles before personalities; that we have renounced personal glorification in public; that our movement not only preaches but actually practices a true humility.”

Some questions and answers about anonymity

AA members as well as many people outside the program are sometimes puzzled about how to put the principle of anonymity into practice. Some of the most frequently asked questions about both personal anonymity and anonymity at the media level:

Personal anonymity

Q. After I tell my loved ones about my AA membership, should I ask them not to disclose this information to anyone else?

A. This is entirely a personal matter, but it is usually best for all concerned to let the AA member decide who shall be told and when.

Q. If relatives, friends and business associates comment on my improved appearance and functioning after I become sober, should I tell them I'm in AA?

A. Members of the immediate family and close friends are usually pleased to learn about an alcoholic's membership in AA. As for business associates, it must be best simply to say that you've stopped drinking and postpone decision about disclosing your membership until after you have been in the Fellowship for several months.

Q. What should I do if I meet old acquaintances at AA meetings?

A. You need not ask them to protect your anonymity; they are there for the same, or similar, reasons. They will generally respect your privacy and you, in turn, should respect theirs.

Q. What if I see public figures at a meeting?

A. Like everyone else, public figures should have the protection of anonymity to the extent that they desire it.

Q. I know that I should not reveal the names of members that I learn in AA meetings, but what about other personal information?

A. It is understood by AA members that personal disclosures made in AA meetings are to be treated as confidential. For example, if friends outside the program are acquainted with some of your AA friends and know of their membership, you should be careful not to violate confidences picked up at meetings, however harmless they may appear at

the time.

Q. Should I tell people who seem to have a drinking problem about my AA affiliation?

A. This is a personal matter. However, the spirit of the program is one of sharing and a recent study of AA members shows that a high proportion of them joined the Fellowship through another member. Before reaching a decision about such matters, most members find it helpful to discuss them with sponsors or AA friends.

Q. Should I reveal my anonymity to my boss so that I can attend early AA meetings regularly?

A. Asking for special favours because of AA membership is not in the spirit of the anonymity Traditions.

Anonymity at the media level

Q. What if I appear as an AA member on TV, in a film, or allow my picture to be used in a newspaper or magazine, but do not give my full name? Is this considered an anonymity break?

A. Yes, if full-face photographs and other easily identifiable photos of AA members (who are described as AA members) are published or broadcast, even though their full names are not given, these are considered anonymity breaks.

Q. I've heard a number of people, inside and outside of AA, say the newsworthy AA members should be encouraged to announce their membership to help promote the Fellowship. Why does AA continue to maintain the Tradition of anonymity for celebrities and other members?

A. Those Traditions developed out of the experience of the early members. At first, they too felt that well-known AA members could help the Fellowship by breaking their anonymity. But it soon became apparent that, if one anonymity breaker stepped forward, others would follow; and if members were to strive for public acclaim and power, the spiritual unity so essential to the work of helping fellow alcoholics would soon be lost.

Q. What about videotapes of talks and meetings? Are these considered to be anonymity breaks, since people are seen full-face and clearly identify themselves as AA members?

A. In 1980, the General Service Conference recommended that “...AA members who are requested to videotape talks and meetings preserve anonymity at the level of press, radio, TV, film and videotapes, realising that anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions”. They further recommend that talks by AA members as members be given “in person, rather than be videotaped, in view of the temptation of videotaping to place personalities before principles”, and thus encourage the development of a “star” system in AA.

Q. I maintain an Internet Web site and also belong to an online meeting. At what level should I protect by anonymity on the internet?

A. Publicly accessible aspects of the Internet such as Web sites featuring text, graphics, audio and video ought to be considered another form of "public media". Thus, they need to be treated in the same manner as press, radio, TV and films. This means that full names and faces should not be used. However, the level of anonymity in email, online meetings and chat rooms would be a personal decision.

Facts about anonymity in AA

It is not the media's responsibility to maintain our Traditions; it is our own individual responsibility.

- AA members generally think it unwise to break the anonymity of a member even after his or her death, but in each situation, the final decision must rest with the family.
- AA members may disclose their identity and speak as

recovered alcoholics, giving radio, TV and Internet interviews, without violating the Traditions – so long as their AA membership is not revealed.

- AA members may speak as AA members only if their names or faces are not revealed. They speak not for AA but as individual members.

Experience suggests that AA members:

- Respect the right of other members to maintain their own anonymity at whatever levels they wish.
- When speaking as AA members at non-AA meetings, usually use first names only.
- Maintain personal anonymity in articles and autobiographies.
- Avoid the use of titles such as "AA counsellor" when employed as professionals in the field of alcoholism (the title "alcoholism counsellor" is preferred).

The Way Out or Alcoholics Anonymous?

As the Day of publication approached we racked our brains to find a suitable name for the volume. We must have considered at least two hundred titles. Thinking up titles and voting upon them at meetings became one of our main activities. A great welter of discussion and argument finally narrowed our choice to a single pair of names. Should we call our new book *The Way Out* or should we call it *Alcoholics Anonymous*? That was the final question. A last-minute vote was taken by the Akron and New York groups. By a narrow majority the verdict was for naming the book *The Way Out*. Just before we went to print somebody suggested there might be other books having the same title. One of our early Lone Members (dear old Fitz M., who then lived in Washington) went over to the Library of Congress to investigate. He found exactly twelve books already titled *The Way Out*. When this information was passed around, we shivered at the possibility of being the "thirteenth *Way Out*." So *Alcoholics Anonymous* became the first choice. That's how we got a name for our book of experience, a name for our movement and, as we are now beginning to see, a Tradition of the greatest spiritual import. God does move in mysterious ways his wonders to perform!

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Group Anonymity

Then there is the problem of group anonymity. Like the individual, it is probable that the group ought to feel its way along cautiously until it gains strength and experience. There should not be too much haste to bring in outsiders or to set up public meetings. Yet this early conservatism can be overdone. Some groups go on, year after year, shunning all publicity or any meetings except those for alcoholics only. Such groups are apt to grow slowly. They become stale because they are not taking in fresh blood fast enough. In their anxiety to maintain secrecy, they forget their obligation to other alcoholics in their communities who have not heard that AA has come to town. But this unreasonable caution eventually breaks down. Little by little some meetings are opened to families and close friends. Clergy and doctors may now and then be invited. Finally the group enlists the aid of the local newspaper.

In most places, but not all, it is customary for AA's to use their own names when speaking before public or semi-public gatherings. This is done to impress audiences that we no longer fear the stigma of alcoholism. If, however, newspapers reporters are present they are earnestly requested not to use the names of any of the alcoholic speakers on the program. This preserves the principle of anonymity so far as the general public is concerned and at the same time represents us as a group of alcoholics who no longer fear to let our friends know that we have been very sick people.

Language of the Heart March 1946 pg. 19

Tradition Eleven: "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."

Tradition Twelve: "Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities."

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Conventions Ireland

Antrim Area 22-24 June 2012
Clarion Hotel, 75 Belfast Road, Carrickfergus, Co. Antrim.

West Cork Area 22-24 June 2012
The Maritime Hotel, Bantry, Co. Cork.

East Galway Area 6-8 July 2012
Ard Ri House Hotel, Tuam, Co. Galway.

Tipperary Area 31 Aug-2 Sept 2012
The Clonmel Hotel, Clonmel, Co. Tipperary
Tel: 052 6188700

Clare Area 5-7 October 2012
The Auburn Lodge Hotel, Old Galway Road, Ennis, Co. Clare.

Donegal Area 19-21 October 2012
Clanree Hotel, Derry Road, Letterkenny, Co. Donegal.

47th Kerry Area 9-11 November 2012
Brandon Hotel, Tralee, Co. Kerry.
Theme: Courage to Change.

One Day Events Ireland

Area 7 Day of Gratitude
Saturday 26th May 2012
Coolock Parish Centre, (Old Church), Coolock Village, Dublin.

Armagh Area Day of Gratitude
Saturday 18th August 2012
Newry Arts Centre (beside Newry Town Hall), Armagh. Theme: Keep It Simple.

Down Area Day of Gratitude
Sunday 23rd September 2012
Burrendale Hotel, 51 Castlewelling Road, Newcastle, Co. Down.

Belfast Area
Saturday 10th November 2012
Farset International Centre, 466 Springfield Road, Belfast, BT12 7DW.

Conventions Abroad

Romania 11-13 May 2012
21st Anniversary, Piatra Neamt.
www.alcoolicianonimi.ro

Greece 17-20 May 2012
18th International Convention, Vravona, Attica, Greece.

Croatia 8-10 June 2012
Hotel Medena, Trogir, Croatia
www.grvatska.hr

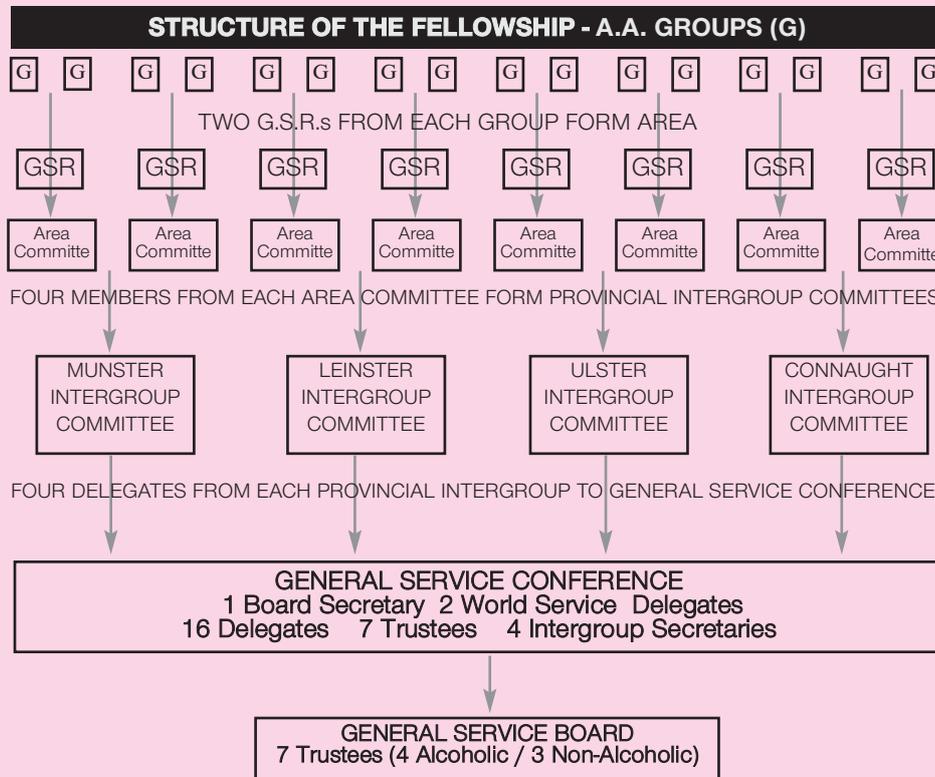
Brazil 6-8 September 2012
Centro de Eventos Pantanal
www.alcoolicosanonimos.org.br

Malta 2-4 November 2012
Qawra Palace Hotel, Qawra, St. Paul's Bay, Malta.
www.europe.net/event

56th All-Ireland Convention - Theme 'Unity'

11th-14th April 2013 Breaffy House Resort, Castlebar, Co. Mayo.

For further information contact: General Service Office. Tel: 01-8420700, email: gso@alcoholicsanonymous.ie, web: www.alcoholicsanonymous.ie
For bookings contact: Breaffy House Resort. Tel: 094-9022033 / Fax: 094-9022276
Email: info@breaffyhouserestort.ie / web: www.breaffyhouserestort.ie



"The views and opinions expressed in the News Sheet are not necessarily those of the Fellowship as a whole"

Published by The General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous of Ireland,
Unit 2, Block C, Santry Business Park, Swords Road, Dublin 9.

Tel: 01-8420700, Fax: 01-8420703, E-mail: gso@alcoholicsanonymous.ie, Web: www.alcoholicsanonymous.ie