

# THE ROAD BACK



MARCH / APRIL 2020  
Issue No. 427



**“You are no  
longer alone.”**

(AA Daily Reflections)

# Editorial

So much has happened in the short two months since we were writing the January/February editorial for your magazine. It's hard to believe that in a short four weeks the Coronavirus/COVID-19 went from being only an item on the news something from far across the world to now, the middle of the greatest lockdown Ireland, and the world, has ever experienced. None of us expected the sheer scale of it, the changes that would be wrought on our lives overnight.

At GSO the staff responded quickly to the new situation and when the order came to stay home, they were ready. Today, armed only with phones and laptops, the work of the office of Alcoholics Anonymous continues to run smoothly and efficiently, albeit from different locations. GSO staff are to be congratulated for their response to the crisis. They have been cheerful and adaptable in the face of some tough challenges. Maybe we can rename GSO staff the AARRU – the Alcoholics Anonymous Rapid Response Unit.

The current issue of the Road Back magazine, continues with its usual mix of personal anecdotes, amusing stories and so on. Online meetings have proliferated over the last month and are helping many people to stay sober. The AA website, [www.alcoholicsanonymous.ie](http://www.alcoholicsanonymous.ie) is crammed with useful hints and tips on how to attend these meetings and how they might be conducted. We are all aware that it is impossible to guarantee confidentiality and anonymity while using the internet. Therefore, members attending online meetings need to protect themselves and their confidentiality.

In other areas AA continues to work hard to keep itself updated and abreast of what's happening in the wider world and not only the world of Alcoholics Anonymous. Changes in the wider world necessitate changes in our own individual lives. Alcoholics Anonymous, through our programme, teaches us acceptance of these changes. It helps us to accommodate ourselves to what is, and not to complain about what is not. Also, we ourselves are often the main agents of change, particularly in our own lives, and this can be difficult for us. Thankfully, we have found a way to accommodate all these changes and still maintain our sobriety and peace of mind – the Twelves Steps and the Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous.

We hope you remain safe and well and sober for the duration of this crisis and, indeed, into the future. Stay safe and stay well one day at a time.

With all good wishes during these unprecedented times,

The Road Back Editorial Team



# THE ROAD BACK

## A meeting in print

**A**lcoholics 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 AA membership; we are self supporting through our own contributions. AA 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.

The Road Back is published every two months by General Service Conference, Alcoholics Anonymous of Ireland. Unit 2, Block C, Santry Business Park, Swords Road, Dublin 9, Ireland. Telephone: (01) 842 0700

Up to date information on forthcoming Conventions and One Day Events can be viewed on our website at [www.alcoholicsanonymous.ie](http://www.alcoholicsanonymous.ie)

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# Why it Works

I must admit that when I first looked over our Twelve Traditions hanging on the wall, I thought they were a dumb, boring business charter. I was so smart that I knew they had nothing to do with me, and with that information, I ignored them for as long as I could. That was until the day my sponsor, wise woman that she was, suggested that I go through the Traditions with her just as we had the Steps. It seemed like a corny idea at the time, but she was my sponsor and I did not know you could tell your sponsor no. (I still don't recommend that.)

One by one we read them together, studying page after page, looking for the spiritual principles and the practical applications.

Though at the time I did not understand the significance they would have in my life or how much wisdom was within the words on the page, I know today that they are "why it works" and they are also, when practiced in my own life, the glue that allows unity in my relationships with others inside and outside the rooms of AA.

My sponsor taught me to take each Tradition and find how it applied to me personally. When I felt stuck and could not see the spiritual significance or application, she encouraged me to dig deeper. She shared her own experience

about what the Traditions had brought to her own life. When I struggled with finances and debt, and with my husband wanting to set a budget, she shared with me the freedom I would experience by being self-supporting through my own contributions.

When I wanted to complain about my husband or mother-in-law one more time,

**She shared with me  
that having no opinion  
on outside issues  
might save me from  
some resentments.**

She said that the common welfare of my family should come first. She said I should stick to my own side of the street and be self-governing, and in this autonomy, I would have peace of mind. She said that everyone, including myself, had the right to be wrong.

And she taught me that keeping my mouth shut and not playing the big shot was a great way to practice anonymity, for it is only by staying right-sized with humility that I can practice the spiritual principles I learned before I let my personality run the show.

*Anon Member, October 2010  
(Grapevine One on One Sponsorship in Action)*



# Heard at Meetings

“ I was around AA for many years, then I decided to join AA! ”

“ AA planted the seed of hope in my heart ”

“ Real courage is doing what you are afraid of ”

“ No man is completely worthless; he can always serve as a bad example ”

“ AA is full of ‘Willing People’, people willing to work and people willing to let them ”

“ Silence is not always golden, sometimes it’s guilt ”

“ If you listen too much to advice, you will end up making other people’s mistakes ”

“ Those who talk most, have least to say ”

“ People who throw mud usually dirty their own hands ”

# A Comfortable House for my Spirit

Early in sobriety I heard a member mention a reading from As Bill See's it (page 8), which I've continued to find very relevant over the years. The reading suggests that practicing the programme is like building a house. When I stopped drinking along with taking other things at age 19 and found myself in AA meetings, it was like the foundational concrete to start absorbing the programme and begin building the structure of a life worth living.

However, the new awareness I gained with a sober mind was painstaking and awkward. I remember walking out of the hospital detox feeling drained and lifeless as I finally came to terms with the damage active alcoholism had done to my body and spirit. As long as I had continued in active alcoholism, I was able to escape or deny the reality of my illness, but it was unavoidable when I was no longer inebriated.

The uncomfortable concrete slab of sobriety, where I was exposed to the heat, cold wind, and rain of reality would've been and was at times unbearable without

practicing the programme. In the first two years, I had to face many of my failings as I showed up to work and family gatherings ended relationships, began relationships and came to grips with people who died along the way. The point is that I couldn't weather these life events if I hadn't formally worked the steps with a sponsor by the time I was 11 months sober, went to meetings despite how I felt and had service commitments to keep my hands busy and out of trouble. Much of those first years I found myself showing up to everyday commitments but not really wanting to be there

**I was willing to trust what my close AA friends said about things getting better if I took the necessary actions each day.**

One day I lifted my head up from trudging the road of happy destiny to find that my life had changed. And, although imperfect and rickety, I had

built a house from spirit which provided me shelter as I faced the challenges of a sober life. No matter the challenge, I needed no drink if I was willing to take refuge in the programme rather than rely on myself alone.

Today, the rooms of my “house” get more solid and comfortable, and have become more than

a shelter, but instead the home of things I did not expect. It has become the home of creativity, spontaneity and joy, which I can share with my fellows as they construct the structure of their lives or possibly just take on a remodel when things get difficult.

TA

(Mainstay Magazine Oct/Nov 2019)

# The Spirit of Sponsorship

December 2001

My sponsor of over twenty years died two years ago and although I couldn't be with her physically, I was there in thought and spirit.

What made her so special? Perhaps it was her enduring love and enthusiasm for the AA program. Or maybe it was her unshakable belief that all people are inherently good and contribute something positive to life. All I know is what this woman did for me as a frightened newcomer and what she continued to do for the next twenty years.

When I questioned the meaning of life's peaks and valleys, she told me that the secret of life was simply to live it. When I became resentful at someone in AA, she advised me to listen to the message, not the messenger. She taught me to look for miracles in unlikely places and to make myself available to appreciate them.

That's why I love a story her family told me when they returned from scattering her ashes on the sea. She loved the ocean and always said that after she died, she wanted to come back as a dolphin. When they released her ashes her husband and children saw two dolphins swimming beside them.

“Look!” one of them shouted. “There goes Mom, and she already has a new sponsee.”

LC

(Grapevine One on One Sponsorship in Action)





# The Gift of Time

I was sober about eight months when Charlie began to call. I met him at young people's conference. (what was he doing there?) He would call me every morning and ask, "What kind of day are you going to have?"

"An excellent day". I would reply (even though I didn't really believe it). When he asked "Why?" I would reply "Because I am not going to drink today."

Charlie would call me regardless of whether or not I was working that day. It made no difference if I wanted to sleep in or had the day off. Most days he would call in the evening to see how my day went.

I was twenty-three years old, fresh out of a long-term treatment facility and I was on my own in a strange town. My face was badly scarred from my last car accident and my insides were badly scared from a life of drinking, fear and hate.

Charlie was in his sixties, had false teeth, wore string ties and smiled all the time. He was known as the "Official Handshaker" and would stand by the door at meetings and shake hands with everyone. He wouldn't leave me alone.

He and my sponsor formed a sober tag-team. They made me get involved and stand at the meeting door to shake hands. When it was time to share and I hadn't raised my hand, I would get a tap or an elbow. I eventually learned that Charlie was my sponsor's sponsor, or my "grand sponsor."

They gave me their time. They would listen to me. Charlie would speak of stories that I didn't really understand until later (and to be honest, some I still don't understand). I often lost patience but they didn't care.

It gradually dawned on me that these men loved me. They would make me laugh and made light of my problems. One time as I complained about their uncaring attitude, Charlie told me, "If I didn't love you and think you were worth it, I wouldn't spend my time with you."

I began to learn the difference between my understanding of love and "AA" love. It isn't always "warm fuzzies" and kid gloves and pats on the back. Sometimes it is the truth.

I have now been sober for almost four years. I try to stay active



and enthusiastic in AA. My life is wonderful compared to the hell I used to live in. I have a good job. I recently got engaged and got a dog. Charlie died over a year ago – I tried to shake everyone’s hand at his memorial service. I cried a lot, but I feel as though he is still with me.

**I was told that  
sometimes a good  
sponsor disturbs  
the comforted  
and comforts the  
disturbed.**

Charlie (and AA) have left me with an obligation. I fulfilled my obligation to the treatment centre I attended when I paid my bill. I no longer feel a sense of obligation to my rehab. I do feel a sense of Obligation to Alcoholics Anonymous. I can “pay back” AA by trying to be there for the next person to come through the door. I can give myself and my time. I can stay active and pay attention to the Traditions. I’m not perfect and I will never balance the ledger, but I can keep trying. After all, someone was there for me.

*JJ, Pennsylvania  
(Grapevine In your Own words)*

## How Is My Now?

I was so busy juggling the regrets of the past with the expectations of tomorrow I had no time for living in the present.

*(Grapevine Daily Quote Book)*

## AA Grapevine - Thought for the Day

A BETTER WAY THAN JUDGING a man is to look for all the good you can find in him. If you look hard enough and long enough, you ought to be able to find some good somewhere in every man.

In AA I learned that my job was to try to bring out the good, not to criticize the bad. Every alcoholic is used to being judged and criticized. That has never helped him to get sober.

In AA we tell him he can change. We try to bring out the best in him. We encourage his good points and ignore his bad points as much as possible. Men are not converted by criticism.

# AA Humour

A guy wants a divorce. He tells the judge “I can’t take it anymore she’s out going from bar to bar every night way past midnight”.

The judge responds “what’s she doing”

The guy says “looking for me”

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## **An alcoholic is sitting at a bar . . .**

He orders two shots. He proceeds to pour out the first one all over the bar, downs the second one and then orders two more. He pours out the first one on the bar, downs the second one and orders two more.

The bartender asks him why he keeps pouring out the first shot all over the bar.

The alcoholic replies with “My AA group said all I need to do is avoid that first drink.”

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## **My wife told me I had to give up drinking**

So I joined the AA.

Unfortunately, I joined the Automobile Association by mistake.

At least either way I’m on the road to recovery.

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## **I did not know this . . .**

When you drink vodka over ice, it can give you kidney failure.  
When you drink rum over ice, it can give you liver failure.

When you drink whiskey over ice, it can give you heart problems.

When you drink gin over ice, it can give you brain problems.

Apparently, ice is really bad for you.

Warn all your friends.

# And people stayed home

And people stayed home  
and read books and listened  
and rested and exercised  
and made art and played  
and learned new ways of being  
and stopped  
and listened deeper  
someone meditated  
someone prayed  
someone danced  
someone met their shadow  
and people began to think differently  
and people healed  
and in the absence of people who lived in ignorant ways,  
dangerous, meaningless and heartless,  
even the earth began to heal  
and when the danger ended  
and people found each other  
grieved for the dead people  
and they made new choices  
and dreamed of new visions  
and created new ways of life  
and healed the earth completely  
just as they were healed themselves.

*Kitty O'Meara*

# Tools of Recovery

A man said to me once, "John, we don't go to hospital when we are sick to become a doctor or nurse. We go to hospital to get well. Then we can go to a university to become a doctor or a nurse and do all the hard work and study necessary if we want to. Once we are well, we can do anything we want if we put in the work". What's your point?" was my reply. He said, "Well, we don't go to AA to become experts at anything mate, we go to AA to get well and then we can do anything we like once we get well".

He was making a good point and I realise that today. That man had identified something about me and loved me enough to point it out.

**Today I do realise  
that I am a sick man  
getting better.**

By the grace of god and the fellowship of AA I am getting well. And, as I get well I can do more things. I can be a better father and husband. I can be a more useful member in the community. I can work. I can go on holidays. I can buy the things that I want. I can help others. I can be happy, as long as I keep well.

Today I keep well by attending regular meetings of AA and use the full range of tools available to me – The Big Book, the 24 Hour a Day book, the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, The Steps, ask other members of AA for help, pray and work, work and pray. Also the "Just for Today" card and the "Daily Moral Inventory" card. This is the literature that I use on a regular basis.

I am a member of a Steps group and do service work within that group. Currently I am Secretary which for me means I have the key to the hall, open up, arrange furniture and close the hall, making sure it's clean the way I found it. So, I arrive early and I'm the last one to leave without the hurry to do so. This is a big change for me. When I first came to AA, I came late and often left early or in a hurry to leave when the meeting ended. Today's life is a better way for me to live.

Helping others is rewarding and a privilege and I am learning to mind my own business and also realise that I can't fix everything. Often people just want me to listen and then do nothing. Nothing is a hard thing to do when you love somebody. But it is possible.

*John*

# Awakenings

I was most probably weeks or just days even away from becoming another dead victim of this disease of alcoholism, when I had, as we recognise in AA, a spiritual experience or awakening.

I have witnessed so many awakenings in the rooms over the past sixteen or so years in sobriety, even though the participants of these awakenings may have been unaware of them themselves. Don't ever doubt that they are in existence. They are the very core of the Fellowship, the keys to lasting sobriety and a happy peaceful life. They are the very personal part of the AA programme and hard to share as they are almost impossible to explain – especially by a fully paid up former heathen like me.

Prior to my very own spiritual awakening, I had reached my final rock bottom. My family and friends had all turned their backs on me; I had been homeless for two years; and I was using a disused warehouse as my home. Was I an alcoholic? Most definitely.

For thirty-two years of my life, my past had become the whip that drove me to near self-destruction. Can I explain my spiritual awakening? No, not really. For me it was like a trap door being open slowly at the far end of a long, long corridor.

I had felt a great peace come over me, but can I explain it? 'No'. I accept that.

## I sought help and the rest is sixteen years of solid sobriety.

That is a miracle, and I have witnessed so many such miracles take place in the rooms. I am not a religious man in any sense of the word, but my belief in a Higher Power is the force that keeps me sober and grateful for what I have today. My belief is total.

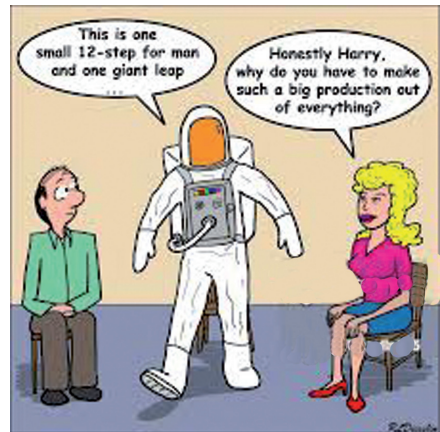
I remember well during my early years in the rooms an old timer kept repeating to me after every meeting, 'just keep on moving towards the light'. That is all he ever said to everyone. God bless him. I understood.

Anon

Up to date information about Online meetings available on our website at [www.alcoholicsanonymous.ie](http://www.alcoholicsanonymous.ie)



# AA Cartoons



"We're sober . . . it was a good day"

# My name is JP and I am a member of Alcoholics Anonymous...

I started drinking at fourteen years of age because I thought it would be fun. By the age of twenty I knew I was in trouble with alcohol. For the next 28 years I drank alcoholically, and it ruined my life. Many parts of these years I do not remember.

At that time, I never considered or looked for help because my pride was a big part of my life. I am a member of the traveling community and felt ashamed to look for help. My neighbour who was witness to some of my drinking convinced me to go to a meeting of A.A. I went along with him as he was a long-time member and understood my situation.

As a member of the traveling community I was very frightened of those meetings because at the time I thought I would be judged. For the first few years I was in and out of meetings as I found it hard to share about myself.

At the age of 48 I had had enough of the sickness and with the help of my doctor I made a

decision that I would return to A.A. and take it seriously. My first year was tough but I stayed at the meetings and listened and learned to share about myself. The last four years have been the best of my life.

**A.A. gave me the confidence and strength to live again.**

I got a sponsor who is very important to me. Today I am proud to be a member of A.A. because I feel the fellowship saved my life. I have met some fantastic people on my journey who are just a phone call away if I need them.

The reason I decided to share my story is because there may be some person who might read it and identify with my life. It may give them the hope and the courage to reach out to A.A. and discover peace and happiness in their lives.

*From a sober AA member in recovery*





# Grateful in Recovery

**Y**ou're an alcoholic!' My best friends mother told me when I was fifteen, and although it was to take me twenty years to say that aloud to another person, I knew she was right. I could never drink enough to fill the gaping hole inside of me, nothing could take away the emptiness. I was full of plans, great ideas, but I could never get it together to really build anything solid.

At twenty-three, I married a good man and drank through the six years of our marriage. I had two beautiful children and was only half present for those early years. I was often suicidal – but I couldn't leave that legacy for my children. I couldn't let them think that their mother didn't love them enough to stay alive for them.

I moved then, away from my husband and took the children to live with my sister, near the place I grew up. I battled with alcohol, trying to control it, trying to stop but failing again and again.

I lived in a zombie like state where the world seemed very far away and any demand of life was an imposition. I depended on my family to help me to mother but I never spoke about what was going on, I hid it as much as I could.

I last took a drink ten months ago. Five months after that I had

a row with my new boyfriend, I was full of resentment and I was jealous of his success. I destroyed that relationship. But there was something that came from my absolute heartbreak when I lost him. I had to get into AA. There was nowhere else to go. And it was the last place I wanted to go.

It can't have been dark yet I remember that May night as dark and wintry. A group of men sat on uncomfortable chairs in a small room. I was no sooner in the door than I wanted to turn and leave. But hands extended a welcome as if I'd been expected. Tea was poured and biscuits shared and the meeting began. It was like coming home. Pieces of my life were woven into the stories I heard. I managed to say my name and admit that I was an alcoholic. No one told me I was in the wrong place. People gave me their phone numbers and said that phrase which has become a kind of mantra; keep coming back. I was given a list of meetings and a starter pack and in a gentle act of kindness someone handed me a big book, told me to pass one on to someone that needs one some day. That was my introduction to AA.

I'm pretty raw still and my heart is still broken. But I'm not drinking. I'm handing my day over to my

higher power and I have a long list of gratitude, the first of which is my sobriety. I'm building my relationships with my children and I have the privilege of sharing other people's stories

on this new journey of mine. The depression I have lived with for years has lifted. I'm slowly waking up, for today at least, slowly and gratefully recovering.

*Anon*

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## The Best Listeners

I have bored my sponsor to tears and she has never once complained. She just let me go on and on.

Since I myself sponsor several women, I've been on both sides of the telephone, hearing the same stories over and over gain until the days turn into months and then become years of sharing. This sponsoring business requires patience.

To my own dear sponsor, I have repeated the trials of my marriage breakup so many times that I bored even myself with it. She never once gave me the feeling that I was annoying her. In my attempt to stay sober, I've confessed my deepest secrets in a Fifth Step to her and admitted my drink signals when they came. She was always available to listen to me anytime I called.

I've heard a number of Fifth Steps in my own living room and across my kitchen table – stories of alcoholism, dependency,

shameful past experiences, and enormous pain.

The process of one alcoholic confiding in another has without a doubt saved my life. Nowhere else have I ever found such devotion and understanding as with AA sponsoring.

Who else, other than an A member, would accept a phone call in the middle of a busy day to listen to: "I'm sorry to call you at work, but I'm terrified at this moment. I don't think I'll make it through the day without a drink. What should I do?"

What is most miraculous in this scenario is the fact that this person had some to call instead of picking up a drink, and that is how it works.

We AAs are the best listeners in the world – that is, when we are not talking!

*LM*



# The Road Back magazine is available online

Dear Reader,

The Road Back magazine has entered an exciting new period in its long and honourable history of bringing the AA message of hope and recovery to all who want it! The phasing out of the earlier format is well under way and we want to keep you, the reader, fully in the loop.

The Road Back magazine is now fully available, free of charge, on our website – [www.alcoholicsanonymous.ie](http://www.alcoholicsanonymous.ie) ...**free of charge**.

Those without access to modern communication platforms may still have a printed copy of the Road Back posted to them. Simply telephone the General Service Office on 01-842 0700 to request a copy. This, too, is provided **free of charge**.

We are no longer taking subscriptions for the Road Back, but we continue to honour subscriptions due to cease during 2020.

Again, we take this opportunity to sincerely thank you for your continued support and we hope you will continue to enjoy the benefits of the Road Back magazine well into the future.

Yours in AA.,

*The Road Back Team*

Ireland

# The Twelve Steps

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 practice these principles in all our affairs.

# The Twelve Traditions

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 non-professional, but our service centres may employ special workers.
9. A.A., as such, ought never be organised; 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.



We, *The Road Back* Editorial Team, look forward to hearing from you with your stories, snippets of amusing things overheard at meetings, indeed anything that carries a message of sobriety to our readership.

*Your contributions can be emailed to:*  
roadback@alcoholicsanonymous.ie

*or posted to:*  
Alcoholics Anonymous  
Unit 2, Block C  
Santry Business Park  
Swords Road  
Dublin 9

Up to date information on forthcoming Conventions and One Day Events can be viewed on our website at  
**[www.alcoholicsanonymous.ie](http://www.alcoholicsanonymous.ie)**