



**20th IAGSM**

**INTERNATIONAL AL-ANON  
GENERAL SERVICES MEETING**

Practicing Our Principles with 20|20 Vision



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## TWELVE CONCEPTS OF SERVICE

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1. The ultimate responsibility and authority for Al-Anon world services belongs to the Al-Anon groups.
2. The Al-Anon Family Groups have delegated complete administrative and operational authority to their Conference and its service arms.
3. The right of decision makes effective leadership possible.
4. Participation is the key to harmony.
5. The rights of appeal and petition protect minorities and insure that they be heard.
6. The Conference acknowledges the primary administrative responsibility of the Trustees.
7. The Trustees have legal rights while the rights of the Conference are traditional.
8. The Board of Trustees delegates full authority for routine management of Al-Anon Headquarters to its executive committees.
9. Good personal leadership at all service levels is a necessity. In the field of world service the Board of Trustees assumes the primary leadership.
10. Service responsibility is balanced by carefully defined service authority and double-headed management is avoided.
11. The World Service Office is composed of selected committees, executives and staff members.
12. The spiritual foundation for Al-Anon's world services is contained in the General Warranties of the Conference, Article 12 of the Charter.

## GENERAL WARRANTIES OF THE CONFERENCE

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In all proceedings the World Service Conference of Al-Anon shall observe the spirit of the Traditions:

1. that only sufficient operating funds, including an ample reserve, be its prudent financial principle;
2. that no Conference member shall be placed in unqualified authority over other members;
3. that all decisions be reached by discussion, vote, and whenever possible, by unanimity;
4. that no Conference action ever be personally punitive or an incitement to public controversy;
5. that though the Conference serves Al-Anon it shall never perform any act of government; and that like the fellowship of Al-Anon Family Groups which it serves, it shall always remain democratic in thought and action.

## STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

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The purpose of the International Al-Anon General Services Meeting (IAGSM) is to share the experience of Al-Anon national services around the world through its delegates. It will attempt to encourage the growth of a sound service structure while maintaining worldwide unity through the application of Al-Anon Traditions. It can also represent an expression of a worldwide group conscience.

Ultimately, this leads to the primary purpose of Al-Anon as a whole—to seek the best way to carry the Al-Anon message of recovery to families and friends of alcoholics amidst cultural and language differences.

# FOREWORD: A SPECIAL NOTE ABOUT THIS YEAR'S MEETING

The International Coordination Committee (ICC) is an advisory committee to the Board of Trustees for Al-Anon Family Groups, Inc. (the Board). It plans and coordinates the program for the biennial International Al-Anon General Services Meeting (IAGSM), but relies on the legal authority of the Board, in the form of a motion, to enter into contracts and other business commitments needed to fulfill these duties. In 2018, the UK & Éire General Service Office (GSO) submitted a bid to host the IAGSM in London, England on October 7-10, 2020. It was given traditional approval by the IAGSM Delegates followed by legal approval of the Board.

This foreword provides a summary of ICC actions to evaluate and revise its plans for the 2020 IAGSM given the unexpected global health and economic conditions that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic. This led to a recommendation to the Board for a new motion to create a different kind of IAGSM in 2020.

## Research, Planning, Communication

During several meetings in June, the ICC reviewed current (at the time) information about the status of program planning, operational priorities, travel and venue restrictions, financial obligations and projections, and potential impacts to the agenda. Members met to brainstorm and evaluate options in a lateral thinking exercise designed to gather a broad selection of options. The brainstorming activity yielded eight unique ideas. These were narrowed down to three ideas that were evaluated fully. A preliminary recommendation was shared with GSO representatives and IAGSM Delegates on AFG Connects. They were asked for responses to the following questions:

- Would your GSO be in favor of a smaller agenda and participation through online discussion for the 2020 IAGSM?
- Would you need assistance to be able to participate in an online discussion? For example, getting access to AFG Connects, learning how to reply to a discussion, or learning how to watch a recorded a presentation.
- Would you have the necessary equipment to participate in online discussions? For example, computer (or another device) and internet access?

Twenty (of 39) GSOs responded to the questions. (For reference, over the last 10 years the average attendance at an IAGSM has been 16 GSOs.) Nineteen GSOs said they would support participating in an on-line IAGSM. All respondents said they would support a smaller agenda and had the equipment to participate online. Some expressed a need for technical support. Some also offered suggestions for timely discussion topics—all of which the ICC took into consideration as part of its responsibility to plan the agenda.

## Recommendation

Feeling that there was strong traditional support from the international community, the ICC recommended to the Board in July that the 2020 IAGSM be held virtually, using the AFG Connects platform to host online discussions, over a period of time sufficient to allow Delegates to participate across all time zones. The Board unanimously approved the motion.

In a series of new planning sessions in July and August, the ICC decided on several program and format changes:

- There would be no live (video conference) component. Presentations would be posted in AFG Connects and Delegates would provide their comments/participation in writing as part of online discussions.
- WSO Staff would provide technical support and guidance in advance of the IAGSM to prepare all Delegates for online participation.
- The agenda would be reduced to the four or five most important topics. Several of these would be revised based on GSO/Delegate feedback received in June and July.
- Discussions would be held over several days (instead of hours) so that Delegates could be active in their own time zones and have enough time to translate what they are reading and what they would like to share. (By consent of the Delegates, the IAGSM is conducted in English.) This was also done to accommodate Delegates who would have work, family, or other personal obligations to attend to at the same time as the IAGSM.
- There would be no cost to participate in the 2020 IAGSM.

## Looking Ahead with Prudence

Financial obligations were a significant component of revising the plans for the IAGSM. The host GSO had invested time and resources in securing a venue for the 2020 meeting and the WSO had paid a significant deposit to reserve it. To our great fortune, the General Service Board for the UK & Éire Structure affirmed its interest in hosting the IAGSM in 2022, the Delegates voiced their traditional approval of this, and the WSO was able to revise the terms of its contract with the venue at no additional cost. Therefore, the next IAGSM will be held in London, England from October 12-15, 2022.

*—Respectfully submitted by the members of the 2020 International Coordination Committee*

# ATTENDANCE

The IAGSM was attended by 40 Delegates representing 26 structures living in 26 different countries.

## Admissions Committee

It is the practice of the IAGSM to require a vote of admission for any Delegate who wishes to represent a service structure that has never before participated. The IAGSM has created an Admissions Committee to be responsible for reviewing the information provided by the ICC and making a recommendation to the IAGSM. This year, three Delegates representing two structures requested admission to the IAGSM. Two members of the ICC served on this year's Admissions Committee together with one Delegate each from Argentina, Australia, Brazil, France, and Iceland. Following a review of the requirements to participate and their qualifications to serve, Nicaragua and Slovenia were admitted. (See Motion #1.)

The following structures were represented at the 2020 International Al-Anon General Services Meeting:

Name	Service Structure
Mabel N.	Argentina
Lois A.	Australia
Tanya J.	Australia
Veronique G.	Belgium (French-speaking)
Nilce T.	Brazil
Ann W.	Denmark
Anne L.	Denmark
Eila L.	Finland
Sanna R.	Finland
Paul G.	France
Johane M.	France
Edith H.	Germany
Angela S.	Germany
Margét S.	Iceland
Una S.	Iceland
Ranjana M.	India
Upvinder S.	India
Mario B.	Italy
Víctor D.	Mexico
Rosario R.	Mexico
Julie W.	New Zealand
Joan G.	New Zealand
Fátima N.	Nicaragua
Raquel M.	Nicaragua
Elvira M.	Paraguay
Débora M.	Perú
Renata A.	Poland
Ola F.	Poland
Vida A.	Slovenia
Madelein O.	South Africa

Name	Service Structure
Uthica A.	South Africa
Miriam L.	Spain
Marie F.	Sweden
Blanca G.	Switzerland (French-speaking)
Patricia Y.	Switzerland (French-speaking)
Pierrette P.	Switzerland (German-speaking)
Miriam M.	United Kingdom & Éire
Lynette K.	United States/Canada
Gail G.	United States/Canada
Myriam V.	Uruguay
Jean L.	International Coordination Committee
Vali F.	International Coordination Committee
Diane B.	International Coordination Committee
Marsha W.	International Coordination Committee
Kerri K.	International Coordination Committee

### The following structures were not able to be represented:

Austria	Japan
Belgium (Flemish-speaking)	Korea
Colombia	Netherlands
Costa Rica	Norway
Ecuador	Portugal
El Salvador	Venezuela
Guatemala	

# OPENING SESSION

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## Welcome

*Jean L., IAGSM Chairperson*

The 2020 IAGSM opened Sunday morning, October 4 with a welcome message from the Chairperson:

Hello! My name is Jean and I am a grateful member of the worldwide fellowship of Al-Anon Family Groups which includes Alateen. I also am currently serving as the Chairperson of the International Coordination Committee (ICC) and for this week I have the privilege of serving as the Chairperson of this IAGSM. I would like to welcome each of you to this IAGSM. As we begin our week “Practicing Universal Principles with 20|20 Vision,” I know each of us has a great deal to share and to learn. Being part of the very first virtual IAGSM is both exciting and perhaps a little intimidating, but we all have a Higher Power that will guide us with 20|20 vision. This is new for everyone and I know we will have growth along the way. Each Structure here today has unique strengths and challenges, but the universal principles of our Al-Anon program are the same no matter where we attend our meetings. We have all been affected by someone else’s drinking. Our work of recovery using the Steps, Traditions, and Concepts of Service has helped us gain happy and serene lives. This is our common bond.

Jean, and Co-Chairperson Diane, incorporated a daily update to the meeting routine as a way of simulating an in-person experience. They shared daily welcome messages, discussion highlights, reminders of the agenda, and bits of IAGSM trivia—a surprisingly popular feature! By the end of the week there were more than a few Delegates applying themselves in trying to answer the day’s question. There was quite a bit of enthusiasm as Delegates tried to guess the answer before it was revealed. As Jean concluded her Welcome remarks, she shared this simple message of gratitude: “As we proceed to share our experience, strength, and hope, I would like to thank you all for participating. I am glad you are here.”

## Introduction of Delegates

In lieu of the traditional roll call and flag ceremony, WSO Staff put together a slide presentation with photos and short personal histories (one or two sentences) provided in advance by each Delegate. This, together with personal photos linked to each member’s online profile, gave everyone a chance to meet the people they would be spending the week with.

# KEYNOTE ADDRESS

## Practising Principles with 20|20 Vision

Miriam M., UK & Éire

On a memorable visit to WSO in 2018, one of the first things I saw was the plaque in the foyer which reads: “We the members of Al-Anon Family Groups earnestly pledge to carry on the work of Lois. Her memory will be sustained with each new generation of families and friends of alcoholics everywhere. She leaves us the legacy of the Al-Anon program and we will continue to search within our hearts to meet each new challenge, with the guidance and inspiration that Lois had provided. Her life has been a blessing and her work is kept alive each time there is one more newcomer to the Al-Anon fellowship.”

What struck me was the simplicity of the message, and the commitment to continue to ensure that as Al-Anon grows, and faces new challenges, the spirit of the program is alive. And also, that each newcomer feels the welcome that Annie S. offered when she said “Come in my dear. You’re with friends now – friends who understand.”

Al-Anon is a worldwide fellowship spanning 133 countries, embracing members with many different languages and cultures. Each brings its own richness and colour to the tapestry, while maintaining our primary purpose of helping the relatives and friends of the alcoholic.

The fellowship has been endowed by the Higher Power, and through the generosity of A.A., with a spiritual program. In following these Legacies and principles, we remain true to the spirit of the fellowship and to the legacy of our founders. The gifts of recovery and serenity are given to those of us who are willing to embrace the program today, just as our predecessors did in the early days.

Change and the momentum of change is a challenge to all of us and this is true too for Al-Anon. How do we practise the principles of Al-Anon in a changing world and remain true to the spirit of the fellowship? Do we need to update/modernise or do the principles remain the foundation stone? Can we adapt to a changing world without diluting the principles? At the World Service Conference in 1971, Lois wisely pointed out that, “As

new service needs and problems arise in the future, and new generations of world servants see a need for improvements, the Concepts are a frame within which needed changes can be made. If unwise radical changes disregard the Concepts and result in bad blunders, the Concepts will be there to guide a safe return.”

When I reflect on the growth of the fellowship worldwide and my own personal recovery, I learn so much from the legacy, spirit, and wisdom of the members who have gone before me. I also see in my own experience of service, where the Traditions and Concepts are used with the guidance of the Higher Power, the fellowship grows and thrives.

Tradition One tells us that our common welfare should come first; personal progress for the greatest number depends upon unity.

The unity of Al-Anon as expressed in Tradition One is vital to the growth of groups and the worldwide fellowship. “Within a loving, spiritual community, each of us has the best chance for personal progress and Tradition One sets the foundation for creating and maintaining that community” (*Paths to Recovery* [B-24], p.135). A unified group where people contribute is a healthy group where the person grows and Al-Anon is alive and energetic. Our unity is essential to the survival of our fellowship.

In Tradition Two, we see that as trusted servants, we rely on the guidance of the Higher Power through the group conscience. Recently it was brought home to me how every member is a trusted servant. While filling up forms for the registration of Al-Anon as a charity in Éire, we were required to record how many active volunteers were in the fellowship. By definition, every member is a volunteer/trusted servant. As trusted servants, each of us is responsible for the health of the group and the wider fellowship. No leader or leaders have the right to govern. The inversion of the triangle when it comes to the right of decision making would make many governance and management theorists believe this was structured to fail. What makes it work? Tradition Two looks to the combination of the guidance of the Higher Power and the group conscience. In all decisions in Al-Anon, we look to the guidance of the Higher Power and to the wisdom of the members through a group conscience. We can all reflect on



the importance of the group conscience and remember times when disagreements were resolved through trust in the Higher Power and honesty in the discussion. More enlightened decisions are often reached with the wise input of a minority view. The greater good of the group is thus enriched. When the Higher Power is not allowed to work through the group conscience because of domination by a personality, or a clique, or for other reasons; then the consequence is damage to the group.

There is unity in diversity according to Tradition Four. No group is an island; each is part of the greater fellowship. In our personal recovery, *From Survival to Recovery* (B-21) tells us “We cannot do it alone because the betrayals and losses occurred with people and we need people to heal us.” (p.63) This is true for me in my recovery; I know I need meetings, my Sponsor and my Al-Anon program to guide me and to support me as I heal. I need to make decisions for my growth, but I also try to find the balance between my autonomy and my responsibility to others. Balance is not always something I find easy to achieve. Without the program, I can easily lose the balance of freedom and control. This is equally true for the wider fellowship. Tradition Four suggests that we need to consider the implications of our decisions on the well-being of Al-Anon or A.A. as a whole. *Paths to Recovery* counsels: “However, the Tradition cautions us to be sure that decisions made by our group do not affect another group adversely or present an unfavourable or inaccurate picture of Al-Anon or A.A. as a whole.” (p.163) There is great strength in a loving understanding and members’ willingness to be obedient to the unenforceable.

Concept Four reminds us that participation is the key to harmony. Concept Four, in my personal recovery, ties in with Tradition Four. I am not an island entirely by myself. Participation in my group and service are crucial to my personal recovery. Why do I do service? I do service so that I may grow, to fill my spiritual well in a deepening relationship with my Higher Power, and to give back in gratitude for the gifts that were so freely given to me. By getting involved in service, I am no longer isolated but am fortunate to meet many members who willingly share their experience, strength, and hope enriching my spiritual journey. My Dad often referred to his fellow A.A. members by the Scottish term “my ain folk”—my own people. For me this is also true—Al-Anon gives me the sense of a deep spiritual belonging. I know that I still have much to do

and to learn, but today I am able to say this with a sense of wonder and hope, unlike the child who anticipated each day with fear and anger. Just as I am not an island, neither is any group, District, or Area; we all belong to the fellowship in unity and equality. Our participation is pivotal to the future of Al-Anon.

Warranty Three: “that all decisions be reached by discussion, vote and, whenever possible, by unanimity” links to the principles of participation in Concept Four, and recognises the importance of discussion, and protecting the rights of minorities to be heard, in Concept Five. It also ties in with the importance of unity in diversity in Tradition Four. The wisdom of the pioneers led them to recognise the importance of participation and consensus in decisions. However, they were also practical enough to realise that it is unlikely that each decision will receive 100% support, but with the guidance of the Higher Power and substantial unanimity, decisions will be made for the greater good of Al-Anon. “When we keep our focus on our spiritual principles, even in the face of strong controversy, we will discover our protection is in God’s hands.” (*Paths to Recovery*, p.326)

Within our service structure, Al-Anon’s ideal is of a working partnership. No part of the worldwide fellowship is lesser than another part. All of us have a responsibility and a right to participate. Lois tells us that “Anyone can start a movement but that does not make them special. The special people are the ones who keep the movement going” (*Many Voices, One Journey* [B-31], p.233). Are we the ones who keep the movement going? How do we meet the challenges presented to our generation of trusted servants? As Lois so wisely said, the Concepts can be our guiding light in the changes we need to make to fulfil the service needs of a growing fellowship in a changing world.

Challenges face the fellowship. For many structures and countries, the challenges are similar; for others they are very different. This diversity epitomises how the universality of the principles can be applied by all Al-Anon members in all structures, with the awareness of the Higher Power’s guidance, clarity of vision, and the leadership of trusted servants.

The Higher Power’s guidance is vital to our personal recovery and to the future of Al-Anon. When I came into Al-Anon I quickly learned that in order to follow the spiritual program and to find the serenity which was there for me, I needed to let go of the God in my

life. I thought I knew what I needed and He was only required to fulfil my instructions. Not only that, but I thought I knew what others needed and I instructed Him on their needs also! The God of my understanding, when I came into the fellowship, was very small and, I presumed, under my direction. Today I have a God who knows my needs better than I do and all I need to do is ask for guidance. I always get far better answers that I could have envisaged. I also learned to leave others to their Higher Power and mind my own business. When we ask, this guidance is there for us as a fellowship also. As we seek to meet the challenges of a new era, practise the Al-Anon principles with 20|20 vision, the Higher Power will guide us in the changes we need to make. All we need to do is ask and be open to the answer.

Clarity of vision reminds me of the World Service Board's Mission Statement: "Anticipate the future and Al-Anon's place in it and ensure that the necessary resources are available." In ensuring a clear vision, we as trusted servants must remain open to Concept One: "The ultimate responsibility and authority for Al-Anon World Services belongs to the Al-Anon Groups." By listening carefully to the membership and the needs of groups and structures, guided by the Higher Power, and the wisdom of group conscience, options become clear and decisions can be made.

Bill W. in his leadership essay reminds us that,

"No society can function well without able leadership at all levels and we are no exception. A good leader originates plans and policies for the improvement of our fellowship. In new and important matters, he never the less consults widely before making decisions. Good leadership knows a fine plan or idea can come from anyone, anywhere. Now we come to the all-important attribute of vision. Vision is, I think, the ability to make good estimates, both for the immediate and for the more distant future. Some might feel this to be heresy. But the valuable principle of 'One Day at a Time' really refers to our mental and emotional lives and means that we are not to repine over the past nor daydream about the future. As individuals and as a fellowship, we shall surely suffer if we cast the job of planning for tomorrow on a fatuous idea of Providence. God has endowed human beings with

considerable capability for foresight and evidently expects us to use it. Therefore, we must distinguish between wishful fantasy and thoughtful estimate. This can spell the difference between future progress and unforeseen woe. We must think about our service needs, as they relate to general economic conditions, group capability and willingness to contribute. We often must try to think months and years ahead. Thank God that our service leaders, at all levels of operation, are blessed with the attributes of tolerance, responsibility, flexibility and vision."

—Al-Anon Family Groups, UK & Éire *Service Manual*, p.154

In order to live a full life, I need to grow. As a member so wisely said, "The softer chairs are harder to get out of. If I choose to take the easier, softer way, I will never experience the depth and richness of the spiritual program." As the child of an alcoholic father, I spent much time trying to find a comfort zone and that soft chair. I just wanted the fear and uncertainty to go away. In Al-Anon I realised that to find serenity and to grow as a person, I needed a more radical way, and the Al-Anon program offered it to me. All I need to do is be willing and thoroughly follow the program.

Al-Anon, too, to fulfil its primary purpose of helping the families of alcoholics, must grow. There is no comfort zone and there is no standing still. Either will lead to regression. The Higher Power has gifted the fellowship and each of us with a program and a way of life that is dynamic, energetic, and challenging. With this gift comes the opportunity to share the program and the spirit of Al-Anon which is so precious in all our lives. As this is true for each member, so too is it true for the worldwide fellowship.

As we face a new decade in a rapidly changing world, we realise that Al-Anon's future depends on us being willing to be unafraid of challenging ourselves. In facing these challenges, we seek a clear vision that allows Al-Anon to remain true to its principles while embracing the future with openness, hope, and enthusiasm.

"It's always forward that we have to look, and let our gratitude be for those to come. The people who have been in the past were just doing what they wanted to, and what they loved to do – and what you yourselves are doing. So here's to the future of Al-Anon!" (Lois, 1976 WSC)

## GENERAL SESSIONS

### Practicing Our Principles—2020 Challenges and Success

*Gail G. and Lynette K., US/Canada*

How appropriate this year's IAGSM theme has been—Practicing Universal Principles with 20|20 Vision. When this theme was chosen, could any of us have imagined what kind of a year 2020 was going to be or how invaluable the principles of this program would be?

We have learned from past experiences that our challenges can lead us to greater heights. 2020 has provided new, and in some cases, unforeseen and unanticipated situations. We have had to draw on experience, strength, and hope, and use our many skills to explore new directions and accelerate and expand our adaptability.

Today, let us look at some of the challenges that arose and share the new and creative ideas and methods we have used to manage them. At the end of the presentation, there will be an opportunity to share some of your 2020 challenges and your solutions to those challenges.

For the first time in Al-Anon's history, the members in the World Service Conference structure were unable to meet face-to-face for recovery. This situation created numerous challenges such as how to hold a recovery meeting; how to provide support for members, such as hugs and one-on-one conversations after the meeting; and how to welcome newcomers, hold business meetings, and deal with finances. We could not have foreseen some of the impact that groups not meeting face-to-face would have over the next several months.

The members responded to these new challenges by thinking big. Some of the new solutions required members to get out of their comfort zones and be willing to try something new. Many groups started meeting virtually using different platforms. Meeting virtually created a whole new set of challenges, some of which will be talked about in this presentation. Members figured out different ways to make contributions because there was no "passing of the basket" at the virtual meeting. The very first virtual/electronic World Service Conference was held, which allowed the Board of Trustees to fulfill their legal obligations. This was no small feat

since the decision to hold the World Service Conference virtually was made about six weeks prior to the start of the World Service Conference. The Board of Trustees, Executive Committee, and Finance Committee have been successfully holding their meetings virtually since April.

### Let's explore some other scenarios in more detail.

#### Challenge: Welcoming Newcomers to Temporary Online Meetings

- Unable to distribute paper information
- Provisions of the reprint license
- Maintaining anonymity for newcomers

One challenge faced by groups worldwide was welcoming newcomers to temporary online meetings. Traditionally, newcomers are welcomed in face-to-face meetings by providing them information that might include pamphlets, a newcomer packet, a meeting list, or a contact list for the group.

When groups stopped meeting face-to-face and started meeting virtually, it became challenging to share "paper" information with newcomers. Groups were also challenged with sharing books with the members attending the virtual meeting who did not possess the literature, that would allow them to read or to follow along. The provisions of the reprint license only allow for small excerpts, up to one paragraph, to be shared which restricts members from sharing an entire page or pages from the literature.

For some groups, the only way of sharing paper information with newcomers is by email or postal mail. This results in the newcomer having to provide an email address or the address where they receive mail. Some newcomers are uncomfortable providing this information because of a wish to protect their anonymity.

## **Solution: Welcoming Newcomers to Temporary Online Meetings**

- Website—free online resources
- Welcome email

One solution in the World Service Conference Structure for welcoming newcomers to temporary online meetings was to create a “welcome letter” that newcomers could request online. Members can share a link to the World Service Office website either verbally or by using the “chat” feature available in most online meeting platforms. Newcomers can click on the link to sign up to receive the electronic newcomer welcome, which includes a list of our free online resources available on the al-anon.org website.

When these links are shared, newcomers are not required to give out contact information such as an email address if they are uncomfortable doing so.

## **Challenge: How to Ship and Receive CAL**

- Many LDCs, Offices, and GSOs were closed
- Getting literature orders to members

With many Literature Distribution Centers (LDCs), Al-Anon Information Offices (AISs), and General Service Offices (GSOs) having to close, challenges arose with shipping Conference Approved Literature (CAL) and with how to receive and process orders for CAL. Individual members also were challenged with how to purchase CAL for use in their recovery since they no longer had access to in-person meetings, GSOs, or LDCs.

## **Solution: How to Ship and Receive CAL**

- WSO shipping
- WSC structure members order directly from WSO

One solution implemented by the World Service Office was to modify the usual practice of only shipping to the General Service Office address. In at least one case, the World Service Office shipped an order to a General Service Office staff member’s home address so the GSO could re-supply.

Another solution offered was to encourage World Service Conference members to order CAL directly from the World Service Office. To help members

ordering directly from the WSO, the flat rate shipping has been reduced on individual orders of less than \$50 for the US and Canada for a limited time.

Even though members have been encouraged to purchase literature from the WSO, these sales have not been sufficient to make up the financial deficit.

## **Challenge: How to Generate Funds**

- Service arm events cancelled
- Local events cancelled
- Groups not “passing the basket”

This year many events all over the world that help Al-Anon members raise significant revenue had to be cancelled due to local restrictions. Cancellation of these events has led to the need to revise yearly budgets. Groups were not meeting face-to-face which resulted in there being no opportunities to pass the basket. The decrease in contributions to groups, Areas, AISs, and Districts eventually had a large impact on donations to the World Service Office.

## **Solution: How to Generate Funds**

- Special Appeal Letter
- Continuing communication about WSO financial situation

One solution to the decrease in donations to the World Service Office was to send out a special appeal letter (in addition to the appeal letters that are sent out in February, May, August, and November) to all groups in the World Service Conference Structure. In the spirit of transparency, the World Service Office continues to update groups regarding its financial situation.

## **Challenge: Electronic Events Not Connected to a Service Arm**

- Trademark issues
- Impact on GSOs/international structures

The World Service Office registers face-to-face and electronic meetings. It does not register events, such as conventions or workshops. The World Service Office does share information with members about events that are hosted by service arms such as Areas and Districts. A challenge that arose from Al-Anon meetings being

held virtually is the formation of events not connected to a service arm that could be attended by members from around the world. Currently the World Service Office is unable to register or license these international events which results in the events using our trademark and copyrighted materials without permission. There are several questions still to be answered about these types of events. One of the questions is about how registration/licensing of the event in the World Service Conference Structure will impact GSOs and Evolving Structures.

### Solution: Electronic Events Not Connected to a Service Arm

- Letter to explain current policy
- More will be revealed

When events which are not connected to a service arm take place, the typical approach from the World Service Office is to write a letter to the event organizers to explain the current policy. In the letter the event organizers are asked to stop using the Al-Anon trademark and copyrighted material and are offered an opportunity to have a conversation with the World Service Office.

More will be revealed as the World Service Office and the Board of Trustees work to find solutions for electronic events not connected to a service arm.

#### The presentation closed with the following suggested questions for discussion:

- What have been some of your challenges?
- What have been your solutions to the challenges?
- What solutions did not work?
- What was your biggest success?

The Delegates had 72 hours to share their comments.

### Discussion

The table below shows the most frequently mentioned challenges faced by the service structures in 2020 and the solutions to address them. Many of the challenges this year were unique, but not all of them. Delegates shared about both new and ongoing challenges when they shared their experiences of 2020.

#### Top Challenges

Office Closures/  
Event Cancellations

#### Top Solutions

Continuation of Recovery Meetings and Services Using Online Platforms

Decreased Sales of CAL and Increased Copyright Violations

Application of Traditions and Policies

Finances/Contributions

Technological and Financial Innovation

Fears or Lack of Information About Online Meetings

Application of the Traditions and Technological Innovation

Declining Membership Problems Exacerbated

- As with the WSO and WSC, most countries around the world experienced some kind of national quarantine measures in 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many Al-Anon offices, from the national to local level, experienced closures and many structures found it necessary to cancel in-person events such as national service conferences, conventions, and recovery meetings. The solution for many structures was to begin hosting recovery and service meetings using phone and online platforms. Some events were cancelled, but many were postponed until alternate arrangements could be made.
- The cancellation of events and the move to online recovery meetings had a significant financial impact on many structures. For many structures, the annual convention is a significant source of revenue. In the first half of the year, many of these events were cancelled (not rescheduled) so the revenue was lost. Literature sales also decreased in many structures and/or the ability to distribute literature was impacted by the interruption of courier, postal, and other delivery services. Members were not attending face-to-face meetings where they could purchase CAL and many Literature Distribution Centers (including Al-Anon Information Service Offices) were closed for several months.

- The combination of decreased access to CAL and decreased demand for CAL created financial strain and also led to other problems, including increased violations of Al-Anon's copyrights. Many Delegates reported that their structures saw an increase in the illegal distribution of electronic literature this year and had mixed results with their attempts to discourage this and enforce the policy.
- Fear or lack of information about the safety and efficacy of online meetings led some structures to delay in supporting these as a temporary solution to not being able to meet in person. Consistent application of the Twelve Traditions helped to overcome many of these challenges while innovation helped to overcome others. Delegates reported that members responded by making technical guidelines available to each other, by creating new "tech support" service roles, by providing members with new ways of making financial contributions and how to use them, and by learning about and addressing problems and concerns over privacy and security.
- Several Delegates reported that their declining membership problems were exacerbated by the move to online meetings. In spite of it being easier than ever for some members to attend meetings, in places where there is a lack of technological infrastructure, i.e., strong broadband networks, or unfavorable attitudes about online meetings, attendance at meetings did not improve.

### Solutions That Did Not Work

- Requests to Discontinue Copyright Violations
- Publishing Electronic Literature
  - ◆ In spite of communicating directly with Group Representatives and other members about the importance of respecting the copyright, some groups continued to disregard this.
  - ◆ Publishing e-books was not the solution that some structures were hoping for because structures are not licensed to publish editions of electronic literature unless the original has been published in an electronic format.

### Biggest Successes

- Continuation of Recovery Meetings/Continuation of Services
- Welcoming Newcomers/Thriving Newcomer Meetings
- Welcoming/Welcoming Back Remote and Home-bound Members
- Mobile Pay Options
- Public Outreach
  - ◆ The greatest success many Delegates reported was the continuation of recovery meetings and business functions in spite of all the other challenges the structures were experiencing. Some even reported that their GSOs were able to continue operations without having to use the money in their Reserve Funds.
  - ◆ Ironically, "welcoming newcomers" showed up as one of the biggest challenges of 2020 and one of the biggest successes. Many newcomer meetings started and are thriving. One structure even has a six week newcomer program.
  - ◆ Many structures welcomed people from remote communities who were new to Al-Anon and some who were not new, but had been unable to attend face-to-face meetings for some time prior to the pandemic due to their remoteness from a meeting or other factors that had isolated them, such as transportation or age-related health conditions. Many of these took advantage of the increased availability of electronic meetings and the technical support available from other members to return to Al-Anon or "pick up an extra meeting or two."
  - ◆ Some Delegates reported that members in their structures were already very familiar with online and mobile pay options and this helped them to avoid financial shortages when meetings could not meet face-to-face. This also enabled CAL sales to continue.
  - ◆ Other structures reported success in developing or updating GSO social media pages, conducting outreach to professionals, and staying in communication with our friends in Alcoholics Anonymous to let them know that Al-Anon was continuing to meet.

## Cooperation Between Structures

*Rosario R. and Víctor D., Mexico and Débora M., Perú*

### My service as International Delegate and my participation in a meeting outside my structure

We recently received the commission to be the International Delegates of our respective structures. We participated in the 2019 Ibero-American Zonal Meeting held in Mexico with different responsibilities but with great enthusiasm for service beyond the group, beyond the zone, beyond our structure, and beyond our country. This has allowed us to see the greatness of our fellowship.

Everyone, at some point, has received the invitation to participate in service for the first time, and perhaps, fear invaded us. We made some mistakes, but we did it and we did it because, surely, next to us was a sponsor—with experience, support, and through the discovery of capabilities that we did not know we had. Today, with this new assignment at the IAGSM, we have once again felt “stage fright,” but today, like yesterday, we know that we are not alone. The Higher Power is with us and it always has been. We only ask Him to use our voice, mind, and heart to convey what He wants for our worldwide fellowship.

### Importance of participating in international meetings

Sharing with structures in other countries that have other experiences, but that follow the same principles is extraordinary; it allows us to see the application of Al-Anon principles from another perspective. The Fourth Tradition tells us that we could have situations that affect Al-Anon as a whole; that is why international service meetings allow us to reflect on issues that may affect us in some way. There are structures that have managed to resolve many of these difficulties that have not yet been achieved in others, but if we share the achievements and even mistakes with each other, we will learn from one another—letting ourselves be guided by the principles and experience of others.

## Al-Anon as a whole

If I only look at the members of my group, I can think that Al-Anon is very small; when I think of the groups in my country, my thought is: Wow, Al-Anon is great! But by knowing that Al-Anon’s help is available in so many countries and multiple languages, I can tell: Al-Anon is immense!

Our first experience in the zonal meeting taught us the meaning of the phrase “Al-Anon as a whole.” It allowed us to understand that we belong to a greater structure, a global structure, and that the objective that unites us—to carry the message of help and hope—goes beyond our group; because the disease of alcoholism has no geographical limits, ideological barriers, or anything else.

We became aware that communication between countries is vital, and to take advantage of all the means that we currently have to do so. This begins with a reliable and updated registry of the members who serve in the different GSOs around the world. Continuing with these types of meetings, where we have the opportunity to meet and share as a fellowship, we can fulfill our purpose of providing help to the families of alcoholics.

### The sense of belonging

No one can live in isolation, nor in these times have we really been isolated. We need each other to live, we need our companions to face our problems. Alone we can’t do it, with others, we can (First Tradition). This is important at any level of service, so we need to organize our services (Ninth Tradition) and be self-sufficient (Seventh Tradition). From the moment we began to say “my group” and began to understand that in order to fulfill our sole purpose, we must recognize that we are part of this global brotherhood; until now, when we can recognize the importance and responsibility of service as an international delegate. We are committed to participate and share with other countries, listen and analyze our difficulties and achievements, and strengthen the growth of our structures—in the same way that the program teaches us—as a fellowship of mutual aid. The service structure is there to serve the groups, the groups are there to support the structure—mutual trust is the link that unites both.

## We cooperate and grow

Concept Four states that “participation is the key to harmony;” I can say that the cooperation between the structures is a clear example of the application of this Concept. At the 2019 Ibero-American Zonal Meeting, Mexico with great pleasure, shared projects that it has worked on, and of which it has obtained good results. Today, we cannot stop our mission—even given the health situation we are experiencing. Through *virtual* service meetings, we can demonstrate the love we have for our program, and the courage to grow and carry the message.

Perú is organizing the 2021 Zonal Meeting and has established communication with 20 of the 22 structures that belong to the Ibero-American countries. When we cooperate, the structures need to feel that we are serving each other—that compromise is growth.

## We all have something to say

We currently have several international service meetings grouped in several ways to facilitate communication, and all of them are important in achieving growth goals and getting the Al-Anon and Alateen message to more people around the world. We have difficulties but let us try to overcome them—so that the cooperation between the structures is greater and so we can work together. This may be a challenge and require a lot of effort—we will have to adapt to new ways of serving, tolerate ourselves more, understand that we are different—but know that we have more in common than what differentiates us. Let us listen with an open mind and humility, by practicing our principles in all our actions, expressing our unconditional love and gratitude, and serving and participating—so that even in these difficult times that we are going through, our structures continue to stand, grow, and evolve. Let us continue to cooperate and express our gratitude, so that communication does not break down and unity prevails.

No matter the size or experience of each structure, we have come to understand that we are a fellowship of equals and that we do not know where, or from whom, the answer we need may come. We all have something to say, and everything is important.

The Higher Power allows us to open our ears and hearts, to say what we believe, and hear what they have to say to us through the other international delegates.

## The Delegates had 72 hours to share their comments, which are condensed and summarized below:

- Delegates shared their success stories, with respect to cooperation between structures and also in a general way, providing insight to how the trusted servants in their respective structures are fulfilling the mission of the Al-Anon Family Groups in helping friends and families of alcoholics around the world.
- Some Delegates reported that their structures had reorganized in the preceding years to function more effectively, to accommodate the availability of volunteers, or to be better aligned with legal and financial policies in their countries or, in some cases, to further separate the legal and financial aspects of the corporations. Some had to seek legal advice and update their charters when it became necessary for General Service Boards to make legal decisions via electronic or virtual methods.
- Delegates shared about members supporting their structures and building trust. For example, TEAM events bring people together and online workshops on the Traditions and Concepts encourage members from different parts of a country to attend. One Delegate stated, “It has been important to remain open-minded especially during this time when emotions and fears come into so many discussions.”
- Some Delegates provided suggestions for how the structures can be more involved in the decisions made at the World Service Conference that affect Al-Anon as a whole. These included: staying connected to each other through the IAGSM and Zonal Meetings; being present at the World Service Conference with voice and, possibly in the future, vote\*; open and prompt communication on both sides; more opportunities to exchange information between the International Coordination Committee and the GSOs; using AFG Connects to express concerns and ask questions of other IAGSM Delegates and the WSO; reducing or eliminating language barriers associated with attending the WSC; and decreasing the financial burden of attending the WSC.



- Many Delegates had ideas about how to move forward including formalizing their cooperative relationships and exploring attendance at Zonal Meetings for those who don't currently attend them. Many Delegates acknowledged the help they had received along the way from neighboring structures and the WSO as well as members active in service at other levels of their service structures (not just the Board or GSO/WSO). Many shared about the rewards of being able to pass it on now that they have some experience, strength, and hope to share as a structure.

\*The current World Service Conference Charter does not recognize representatives of other structures as voting members. Representatives have voice, but no vote at the WSC.

## Public Outreach

*Edith H., Germany*

The Public Outreach presentation provided an overview of what is being done, considered what the effects were, and identified what was, and was not, successful.

### Basic information about Public Outreach:

- It's the responsibility of the groups
- There should always be two members speaking for Al-Anon
- Good communication skills are needed when in contact and exchange with doctors, professionals, local authorities, and other official institutions
- Sharing of experiences with members that are only beginning to serve in public outreach is necessary
- There needs to be commitment and time
- To keep the benefits of the Al-Anon program, I have to give the message away

The following methods and media are used for communication:

- In person
- Internet
  - ◆ homepage
  - ◆ forum
  - ◆ Facebook
  - ◆ Al-Anon blog

- ◆ email
- Literature, newspaper
- Visual tools
  - ◆ posters / billboards
  - ◆ little cards
  - ◆ displays / roll-ups
  - ◆ screen displays
- Radio

### What is being done?

- Information stands at fairs or markets (e.g., "self-help days" or "health markets")
- Radio interviews
- Newspaper articles or repeated advertisements in newspapers that publish meeting info (those are usually free of charge), in local bulletins or in newspapers focusing on self-help
- Display of flyers or contact information cards in public buildings, public transport, universities, libraries, or hospitals
- Public outreach events in schools or hospitals (often in cooperation with A.A.)
- Public outreach and consistent correspondence with the local police
- Youth welfare services and health offices
- Organizing public outreach meetings to celebrate a meeting's birthday/anniversary
- Involvement in networks dedicated to self-help
- Involvement in regional commodity councils that deal with the topic of alcoholism
- Exchange with professionals or volunteers working in the field of addiction
- Exchange of information with "NACOA Deutschland e.V." — a German association for children growing up in families in which addiction is present
- Hotline
- Taking part in research projects with a university—which focus on families and friends of addicts
- Public outreach meetings in rehabilitation centers

- Designing shop windows (e.g., pharmacies)
- Display of posters in the city or the public transport (Berlin)
- Exchange with the German central office for addiction issues (Deutsche Hauptstelle für Suchtfragen)
- Participation at a conference with the topic “addiction aid #digital.” The aim of the conference was to have an informed discussion about addiction self-help and how it has changed with the rise of new technical possibilities. The conference also facilitated the exchange of information, and personal exchange, via presentations and forums. Other participants were representatives sent by companies, public agencies, public companies, and public services (e.g., the police).

Digitally, we are represented in the world wide web with a Facebook page and our blog. With the COVID-19 crisis, the participation of members has increased, and we are receiving more articles written for publication on the blog. The articles are reviewed by the blog team. They are written to attract potential members. We have a comment section for each blog article. The comments are checked before publication (and some are not published).

#### A few examples of special activities and events:

In Germany, public service announcements that are free of charge do not exist. However, an Al-Anon group from Berlin managed to organize a campaign anyway. Al-Anon celebrated 50 years in Berlin and the groups wanted to put something special together—a poster campaign in the public transport. But the funding needed for the poster campaign (cost: 1.963 €) was missing. The region (Area) decided to support the idea and the meetings and the region began to collect voluntary donations for the project starting in February of 2018. By September the needed money was collected and the agency organizing those campaigns in the public transport was contacted. Starting in December 2018, an Al-Anon poster was displayed in some selected subway trains. The campaign ended in February 2019. The campaign reached thousands of “Berliner.” It was a great experience for the organizing group to realize the project together and to overcome the challenges working together—which is a success as well.

Here is an example of the poster in the subway:



A second example of a public outreach event that involves a lot of commitment: The “Michel Meeting” in the city of Hamburg has been an established event for 20 years. It takes place yearly with interesting speakers. The meeting designed its own roll-ups, posters, and flyers.



The flyer especially, has been met with approval inside and outside of the community. Additionally, the public event has been announced twice during rush hour in the subway (cost: 300 €)



Another example—the participation at a public health fair:

The idea was to fill little bowls made out of wood with inspirational thoughts (e.g., a slogan or sentence out of Conference Approved Literature) which could be taken by the attendees of the fair. The bowls were an ice breaker which made conversation much easier as well as helped attendees to overcome reservations.



### What was the result?

Unfortunately, the result cannot be measured; and despite all public outreach activities the number of members is shrinking. Individually, it is a positive service experience to be able to share one's experience and to carry the message together with others—like the Eleventh and Twelfth Traditions suggest. Furthermore, regular contact to professionals and experts is established, who themselves are multipliers (ones who can pass the message to others).

### What was successful?

- Openness of professionals was achieved and observed
- A regularity of public outreach events in hospitals and services dealing with addiction was established
- Continuous contacts
- Participation of adults that have grown up in an alcoholic family, or of husbands of alcoholics. This is great because the complexity of the family disease is reflected
- “Aha!” moments experienced by therapists that were not aware of the effects of the disease

### What didn't go well?

- Al-Anon is often not recognized as an organization independent from A.A.
- “Co-dependency”—professionals lack the awareness that the relatives need to change their attitudes and reflect their behavior, in order to take responsibility for their own recovery
- Lack of measurable results
- Public outreach and the use of the new media—there is a lot of insecurity that has increased due to COVID-19
- Lack of willingness of the members to participate

### Discussion

The Delegates had 48 hours to share their comments, which are condensed and summarized below:

Regarding the question “What is being done?” — The experiences shared by the Delegates indicate that many traditional methods, audiences, and media outlets continue to be popular, but that Structures have also adapted to using newer methods that take advantage of technology or non-traditional media outlets to reach the public and professionals.

- These include:
  - ◆ Radio and television
  - ◆ Print media
  - ◆ Web-based media, including websites and multiple social media platforms
  - ◆ Telephone hotlines
  - ◆ Banners, posters

- The primary purpose of outreach continues to be:
  - ◆ To inform the public, professionals, and government agencies about what Al-Anon is, who it can help, and how to reach a local service arm
  - ◆ To help the public and professionals to distinguish between Al-Anon and Alcoholics Anonymous
- Essential elements of public outreach are to:
  - ◆ Protect members' anonymity while informing the public about the organization
  - ◆ Sharing a few simple, central ideas about the program and how it works
  - ◆ Sharing personal experience
  - ◆ Delegating outreach from national or regional committees to local members

Regarding the question “What was successful?”—Many Delegates report that one of the biggest challenges their Structures face is knowing whether efforts are successful. These are the things they have confirmed:

- They can use the “open rate” of newsletters, website traffic, and “group count” to measure trends over time
- Cooperating with A.A. at conventions and other events helps inform and attract new members
- When newcomers report how they heard about Al-Anon, local members are able to reinforce those successful outreach strategies or pivot to new ones
- Roll-up posters are attractive and help members and professionals to find meetings, conventions, and other outreach events
- Providing information to government agencies has led many of them to list Al-Anon Family Groups as a resource for citizens affected by alcoholism

Regarding the question “What didn’t go well?”, the Delegates reported:

- Google Ads were too expensive for some, time consuming, and did not result in increased traffic to the GSO website
- Changes in governmental agencies make it difficult for Al-Anon Family Groups to get consistent recognition

- Lack of volunteers in many Structures makes it difficult to put ideas to work
- Volunteers staffing outreach desks at hospitals were not taken advantage of; changing to establishing a liaison to provide support and information
- Cancellation of most public events this year provided an additional challenge

## **Leadership Skills as Tools for Conflict Resolution**

*Paul G., France*

Many leadership principles are described in the text of Concept Nine on pages 193-198 in the *2018-2021 Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual* (P-24/27) version two (2).

1. Any Al-Anon member has, by definition, been affected by the behaviors of a practicing alcoholic, whether parent, spouse, boss, or other person. These alcoholics are, almost inevitably, models of bad leadership. Equally, the effects on the Al-Anon member can create a legacy of self-defense, “fight or flight,” passive/aggressive behaviors, fear of change, and fear of consequences, which destroy their personal capacity for good leadership.

My own incapacity to take a lead in handling conflict has been, and continues to be, a difficult journey. I have confused what I thought were strong principles, with what was, in fact, an angry personality. Throughout my 28 years of increasing pain living with an alcoholic, I railed against the injustices of the world and my workplace, while denying the anger and resentments I felt against my wife. Some of that rage still flares up, but now I have tools to identify the source and seek peaceful resolutions.

Living with alcoholism made me fearful of change, distrustful, impatient, disappointed, sarcastic, and self-reliant. I was a husband and a boss, but not a leader! Working the Steps with a loving, patient Sponsor gradually brought me to a “Let It Begin with Me” approach which targets my own character defects and seeks to understand that others are struggling too. I can now hear you and see you, when previously my pain blinded me to anything you needed.

The process of recovery aims to repair these wounds and enable us to function at a higher level of personal

competence and respect for others, even in the face of conflict and criticism. As stated in *Reaching for Personal Freedom* (P-92), good personal leadership is based on spiritual principles.

As we study Bill W.'s essay, it is salutary to remember how, although the inspirational founder of A.A., he was, as he admitted himself, still a difficult personality in sobriety. He was dominating, full of madcap schemes and struggling to achieve humility. It was not for nothing that Lois needed Al-Anon to promote her own serenity. As he grew in recovery, he eventually took the wise and difficult step in 1955 to hand over his leadership to the membership operating under A.A.'s new Legacies. As he left, he declared: "Alcoholics Anonymous was at last safe—even from me." (*Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, p.48, 1997, ed.)

2. Outside Al-Anon, we all have experiences of good and bad leadership, whether it be our teachers, employers, religious leaders, or politicians. Personally, in a 40-year career in large multinationals, I only ever worked for two people who felt to me like true leaders as opposed to just "bosses," and I have had several truly awful bosses. The majority of leaders were just average, not inspirational in any way.

My first hero, while I was still living with alcoholism, was a rather austere German, who worked standing upright at a tall desk. In the first few management meetings he chaired, we would typically complain about our problems and the failures of others, to which his reply was always: "How interesting. Now you go away and come back to the meeting in two weeks with analysis, options, and solutions to this issue. I will expect you to lead the implementation of the solutions." Very soon nobody was complaining. He was never our friend, but he was definitely leading.

The second leader I admired was an austere Frenchman. Tall, crewcut, thin, and intellectually frightening, he could quote a conversation he had with you five years ago, verbatim. He seemed humanly distant. He came to address hundreds of us at the height of the financial crisis of 2008, at the same time an employee in our department had committed a massive fraud that almost destroyed the company overnight. He was calm and frank about the level of the problem. He encouraged us to learn from what had gone wrong and to plan for business recovery. He assured us that we would survive and that he would be leading us, all the way.

In fact, as the company's crisis rolled on and scapegoats were being pursued, he took personal responsibility and resigned, unlike others below him who were directly responsible. I was, by now, in Al-Anon and was trying to live out the principles of the Steps. So, I wrote him a grateful email as he left. Although he hardly knew me, and while he was buried under many immediate and stressful problems, he nevertheless took the time to reply and thank me personally.

What were the qualities which inspired my trust in these men? Truthfulness at all costs, curiosity, openness to others, trust in the capabilities of their staff, knowing when to get out of the way, and acceptance that "the buck stops here."

3. Al-Anon Leadership Skills as Tools for Conflict Resolution.

The vision for personal qualities of leadership in Al-Anon is built on Tradition Two "Our leaders are but trusted servants—they do not govern." Tradition Twelve "...ever reminding us to place principles above personalities." and Concept Nine "Good personal leadership at all service levels is a necessity. In the field of world service the Board of Trustees assumes the primary leadership."

The principles set out in Concept 9 are:

- Consultation before implementation of plans and policies potentially resulting in changes to a leader's initial ideas
- The "statesman/woman" model:
  - ◆ Applies discrimination in implementation
  - ◆ Applies discernment about domination by majorities
  - ◆ Applies courage to stand against strong opposition
  - ◆ Applies persuasiveness to effect changes
- Clarity, explaining reasons
- Flexibility: the ability to compromise in a good spirit. Must be carefully balanced by discernment, so as not to give in when convinced of doing the right thing
- Courage in the face of criticism:
  - ◆ Particularly important to continue to listen
  - ◆ Even those who are loud and disruptive might not actually be wrong

- ◆ Discernment about the personalities, motives, and weaknesses of any opposition is key
- ◆ Strength to stand against destructive behaviors
- Humility, especially in the ability to listen despite the inappropriateness of the others' behaviors

Given the worldwide nature of our fellowship, I also believe that the following are increasingly important to many distant and sometimes lonely structures:

- Reactiveness
- Cultural sensitivity
- Linguistic sensitivity

4. France can share two experiences of world service level issues, which hopefully illuminate the pertinence of the above ideals.

The first concerns the period of reduction in international participation by Al-Anon France. For ten years beginning in 2004, Al-Anon France did not formally send any delegates to the IAGSM or European Zonal Meeting (EZM). Nor did it forward the annual gratitude collection, which seem to have reflected the Annual Conference's opposition towards WSO as well as disagreements with the French Board. Votes to participate internationally were rejected by the Annual Conference in 2010 and 2012. Disagreements on other topics occurred between some Regions and the Board.

A substantial number of members seemed to want Al-Anon to follow a definitively "French" path, write a purely local *Service Manual* and interpret the Steps and Traditions in meetings in a manner which reflected French cultural preferences. Consequently, some meetings exhibited issues of domination, control, low levels of service rotation, and crosstalk. In the same vein, English-speaking meetings were deemed to not be French, and to "belong" to the GSO in London, not Paris. This rejection was mirrored by the English-speaking meetings, which, for many years, had not considered themselves to be part of Al-Anon France.

At the same time, communication continued between WSO and French GSO, with occasional visits from representatives of WSO and the Board of Trustees. Also, absent a formal vote for an International Delegate, French Board members participated informally in meetings of "Francophonie" (French-speaking Al-Anon) in 2005 and 2007 and the "European Talk" of

2009. This was a precursor to the EZM and had started in 2007. A French Board member then attended the first EZM of 2011.

Thus, the situation evolved slowly, with continued, patient contacts from WSO and equally patient efforts by the French Board to inform and convince a reluctant Annual Conference. Over time, rotation took place among Group Representatives at Region as well as in Regional Delegates to the Annual Conference. In 2013 the ICC offered structures a reduced cost to incentivize participation at IAGSM, but this letter unfortunately only arrived at the GSO after that meeting.

Slowly, France had started to rethink its ideas about international participation. This process finally succeeded in 2014, when the Annual Conference voted to appoint an International Delegate. France has now participated in every IAGSM and EZM since 2014. France also voted in 2014 to recommence sending gratitude collection funds to WSO. Bridges had been rebuilt.

Further leadership care and advice was provided during a visit from the WSO's Executive Director and Chairperson of the Board of Trustees in 2015. During this visit the French Board felt encouraged and informed by the visiting leadership. Discussing the conflict between tight funds and international participation, the visitors relieved and enthused the French Board with the simple suggestion that, instead of sending the money to WSO, France should use the "frozen" funds of the gratitude collection to finance International Delegate costs; thereby avoiding incremental cost to the French membership.

Even though France has suffered severe financial stress over the last few years, this solution has been implemented and has allowed the participation of two Delegates in the 2017 and 2019 EZM and one Delegate in the 2018 IAGSM. In addition, the funds were also to be used to send the Chairman of the French Al-Anon Board to the WSC in 2020, but this was sadly cancelled due to COVID 19. The substantial change in French outlook can be seen in the fact that despite a clash between the dates of the 2020 WSC and the Al-Anon France Conference, the Al-Anon France Board re-arranged the date of its own Annual Conference, so that the Chairman could attend the 2020 WSC.

Another flexibility initiative which made the French Chairman's planned participation in WSC 2020 possible, was the decision of the Board of Trustees to implement a three-year trial to provide

(verbal) interpretation starting with the 2019 WSC when French-speaking and/or Spanish-speaking WSC Delegates attending Conference request this service. When available, this service is provided at no additional cost to French-speaking and Spanish-speaking GSO Representatives who attend.

In summary, the WSO, the Board of Trustees, and the French Board all demonstrated leadership qualities which won over an isolationist tendency in France using communication, patience, good counsel, personal outreach, innovative thinking, and generosity.

5. The second example of World Service interaction which concerns France is current and raises different issues.

The subject concerns whether our current form of international representation conforms to our principles in the Legacies. This seems a key issue, worthy of self-examination by the WSC, the Board of Trustees, the ICC, the WSO, and national structures. It is by definition, an issue concerning world service.

Unlike our gratitude for the previous example, Al-Anon France remains somewhat perplexed by its experience so far. While our current topic of effective management of crises emphasises qualities such as listening, sensitivity, good communication, attention to minorities and their encouragement, we have found aspects of the handling this initiative disappointing. To be precise:

- Long delays for each part of the process
- Application of a 2+ month reply deadline, following a 9+ month preparation period
- Changes to the report in IAGSM minutes by insisting on limiting communication to GSO's and WSO, specifically requesting structures to not discuss with each other on AFG Connects
- Document in English only
- Use of an unfamiliar KBDM methodology
- Absence of communication on the subject directly with France by the WSO, Board of Trustees, or the ICC

We have questions about the degree of cultural diversity invested in the process and are unclear about the world-wide completeness of its distribution. AFG Connects is apparently not universally available to structures, such that the hosts of EZM 2019 confirmed that they had not seen the document by September 2019.

We are not clear what attention was paid to ensure that the question was presented in an accessible form/language to all 36 national service structures and 17 evolving structures. Was it published in English, French, and Spanish? If not, why not? Is the response rate of 14 structures not just an indication of structures interest, or lack of it in the question? Or could it also have been a function of incomplete distribution and/or incomprehensibility of the format/language?

Beyond the formal process, as the initiator of a complex and important subject, we are perplexed that, over the 21 months since the matter was raised, none of the French Board or the French Delegates have been contacted for a discussion on the matter by any member of the WSO, the Board of Trustees, or the ICC.

## 6. Conclusions

We have experienced excellent guidance from our leaders, for which we are genuinely grateful, but in the spirit of the Tenth Step, we are mindful of the need to exercise ongoing self-analysis in order to avoid self-satisfaction, cultural presumptions, and errors. The Al-Anon world is continuously diversifying—geographically and technically. Sophisticated leadership is key to widening our horizons to meet the challenge of enormous unmet need.

## Discussion


The Delegates had 48 hours to share their comments, which are condensed and summarized below:

Delegates listed several attributes of leaders and leadership.

- Good leadership is never manipulative, listens to the groups conscience without forcing ideas on it, and wants the best for the whole. A good leader is guided by forgiveness, tolerance, and the desire to find a solution to conflicts.
- A leader should establish goals; have a plan; be informed, confident, optimistic, determined, passionate, and humble. A leader can work as a team, sharing authority and responsibility, and trust in others. A leader can let go of controlling and perfectionism and instead give others the dignity to do a job.

Some Delegates shared about applying principles to shape our future leaders.

- We are aware that to create future leaders we need to continue to maintain an environment of mutual



trust, humility, and courage through exposure to multi-cultural models of leadership in Al-Anon. This has now become possible due the virtual connections enforced by the pandemic. Also, for us, the issue of leaders versus bosses has become more visible through expanded discussion forums. Electronic meetings have made available larger pools of experience, strength, and hope bringing more awareness regarding the desirability of bypassing ‘personalities.’ We place great faith in the leadership initiatives of the WSO, its flexibility, and wisdom to respond to and understand concerns of minority voices.

- We must practice leadership to be able to transmit and awaken members who do not yet know their abilities and therefore have not dared to commit to a service role. Leadership is a trait that one acquires over time: tolerance, humility, and acceptance of the spirituality of the program. We always keep in mind that the principles are more important than the leading role we would like to have. Leadership is something that is earned, not imposed. We all have something to offer.
- No one needs to be a born leader to learn leadership skills. By practicing the program, being honest in my Fourth Step work, and be willing to learn, I can put into practice the skills I need to lead without imposition, without passing the buck when something goes wrong, while being tolerant of other people’s mistakes and apologizing when I make a mistake myself.
- Our Structure is only as good as our understanding of how Al-Anon works and how we can each work our program. We hope that with our Service Handbook we will learn more about how to work in service and be able to support all levels of the service structure, especially recognizing that the groups are the leaders in the Al-Anon structure.
- We learn about leadership skills by taking on service, especially guiding meetings and in other service positions. Our Higher Power is always with us, helping us and supporting us to learn leadership skills and resolve conflicts.

Some Delegates shared examples of leadership and Al-Anon principles to resolve conflicts between service arms, service boards, and trusted servants.

- Members demonstrated a willingness to cooperate and share in the responsibilities for tasks that needed to be carried out to keep Al-Anon going. Applying these principles consistently over time led to a resolution of many of the conflicts and generated renewed feelings of unity. Today the Al-Anon office is in a new place with a new general secretary. The cooperation between the board of trustees, the general secretary, the GSO, and the whole fellowship is working in the spirit of Al-Anon. The leadership of the new board of trustees made it possible for the Al-Anon fellowship to stick together and since then we have had a pleasant and relaxed atmosphere in the service conferences and other national meetings.
- Several years ago, when I started my Al-Anon service on national level, I was the witness of conflict between servants. The whole Annual National Service Conference was touched by it. There were deliberate delays in implementing a solution, but two things changed the balance. These things were: spreading information and rotation in service. Giving information and detailed explanations are necessary in decision making, which is based on knowledge. The group conscience should be an informed group conscience. Rotation in service allows for refreshing methods of service work to emerge and is crucial for growth in Al-Anon.

Other Delegates shared about the importance of listening to all voices, including a Higher Power.

- My Higher Power gave me quiet confidence. As my mind slowed down, I realized I had to Keep it Simple. The minority voice needed to be heard, regardless of whether everyone was ready for it. Our guidelines needed to be adhered to regardless of how I or anyone else thought a solution should happen. I acted quickly and detached from the outcome and did not give an opportunity for personalities to surface. I guided and instructed the members to use the process available in our structure and the result came from the members. I was able to stay calm (on the outside) and carried on as if this were the usual thing to do. We used the anonymous voting feature, and it was successful.
- I am grateful that I have been shown many good examples in my Al-Anon service of how to handle conflict. When I am faced with conflict, the first



thing I do is take a deep breath ask my Higher Power for guidance. I try to remain calm (hopefully I look calm on the outside). It is important to make sure that everyone's voice is heard. Depending on the situation, maybe the conversation can continue at a later time. I do know that if I trust the process, listen to the guidance from my Higher Power, remain open minded, and let the group conscience work, the outcome will be exactly what it is supposed to be.

One Delegate spoke about staying in reality and accepting that conflicts are bound to occur, but do not have to dominate our experience.


- We have to recognize that we have weaknesses that can always be overcome, providing we agree to look at them. In our lives, conflicts will always happen, but we believe or hope that this would not be the case in Al-Anon! Although we aim for a friendly relationship, difficult moments will arise; personalities should not overtake the benefit of the whole. Good leadership skills are a key for solving conflicts: maybe we should more often remind ourselves of those qualities. Any of us should be able to take leadership in Al-Anon. A first quality is to be able to face disagreement and conflicts in our service roles.
- The majority of conflicts seem to occur due to insufficient or incorrect information. The more information members have about the principles that underpin our service structure, the less opportunity there is for conflict to arise. The correct information and application of our principles can be provided by the GSO, enabling the Areas to solve future problems themselves. When this is not possible, they know that they can invite someone from the GSO either in person or electronically, to help them resolve their conflicts. Areas have access to our General Secretary via phone and email to reason things out using the principles of the program. The General Secretary and other Board members have attended Area Assemblies to speak to members about how to resolve conflict using the principles and tools of the program. One way of helping to solve conflicts in Areas is for the GSO to provide suggestions based on the store of shared experience and by offering GSO staff to attend Area assemblies.

Delegates gave examples of the Concepts of Service as tools of leadership and conflict resolution.

- Concept Three teaches me about mutual trust. Each trusted servant has been granted the right to vote according to conscience. This means that I have a responsibility to gather as much information as possible, keep an open mind, seek spiritual guidance, and try to make the best, informed decision that I can. Concept Four teaches me how to participate. Participation is not the same as interference. I have a responsibility to participate at the level that I have been elected to and my participation is welcome after I have been invited into a conversation. I have a duty to support and encourage other trusted servants even when things aren't going my way. It helps me learn a balance between micromanaging and shutting down. My ability to participate fills that deep spiritual need for belonging. Concept Five teaches me I have the right to be heard, but I do not have the right to be right. This Concept brings me freedom from trying to control all the outcomes! It allows me to voice what is in my head and on my heart without worrying about whether everyone will be agreeing with me or not.
- Since making corrections to some badly mistranslated wording of the Concepts of Service, our Structure has made an effort to continuously inform the members of the third Legacy of the Al-Anon program and of the recovery found in doing service work. This effort is now proving to be working in that awareness of the Concepts among members is rising—and members are recognizing the growth in recovery they can get from these Concepts.

One Delegate shared facing unresolved conflicts.

- Conflict can originate from feeling misinformed, misunderstood, unheard, or unappreciated. An unresolved conflict keeps coming back, often making dealing with it much harder. It starts small and as it gains momentum, grows in intensity, and becomes agonizing. The person who feels slighted will, instead of using the tool of talking to each other and reasoning things out, be inclined to gossip or criticize to members not involved, seeking to influence, and lobby for their support. The principle is no longer the issue; but, creating a neutral



safe space to meet, talking to each other and reasoning things out, and using the Serenity prayer to start the discussion is grounding. Agreement on boundaries of the discussion—to avoid the possibility of raised voices and personal attacks—is crucial to resolving the matter. Using facts instead of opinions is beneficial to all. When it is agreed that no middle ground is achieved by discussion and compromise, then the group conscience should prevail.

# THE BIG QUESTION

## Electronic Meetings

*Vali F., International Coordination Committee*

Good morning, afternoon, and evening, IAGSM Delegates and welcome to the 2020 IAGSM Big Question. Our goal for this session is to have a forward-thinking conversation with the IAGSM Delegates regarding registration of electronic meetings and the need for, and impacts of, creating a World Service Conference (WSC) Area to support them.

### Background

According to the current “Digest of Al-Anon and Alateen Policies” (Policy Digest), the World Service Office (WSO) is responsible for registering all electronic meetings, regardless of language. As a trilingual organization, the WSO supports English, Spanish, and French languages. Therefore, although the WSO is responsible for registration, Staff require the member registering an electronic meeting to communicate using one of the three supported languages. Meeting information is displayed in English only.

Electronic meetings are currently differentiated from Al-Anon Family Groups, aka face-to-face groups, in that they do not belong to any service structure although they register with the WSO.

In 2017, the WSO Policy Committee established a Virtual Meeting Work Group to begin investigating how meetings held electronically might be incorporated into the service structure. That Work Group evolved into the Electronic Meeting Work Group (EMWG) which, given the expansive nature of its charge, has become a workgroup of the Board of Trustees of the World Service Office (WSO). The EMWG helps electronic meetings fulfill Al-Anon’s primary purpose. It fosters communication and supports electronic meetings by providing clarity on Al-Anon’s spiritual principles. It supports WSO Staff with electronic meeting questions or issues.

In its role of helping electronic meetings fulfill our primary purpose, the EMWG supported WSO Staff in organizing regular “business meeting” gatherings of the registered electronic meetings. These gatherings allow members serving as Current Mailing Address (CMA) for the electronic meetings to share experience,

strength, and hope and obtain information from the WSO in its role as a clearinghouse.

Through these gatherings, the EMWG recognized the electronic meeting CMAs were being asked to take on responsibilities closely aligned with the Group Representative position for face-to-face groups. They were serving as a vital link between the WSO and the meetings. Unlike Al-Anon Family Groups, whose voice is heard through their Group Representative, the CMAs for electronic meetings did not have the authority to vote as representatives of their meetings.

In January 2020, the EMWG brought to the Policy Committee a recommendation to create an Electronic Meeting Representative (EMR) position. The recommendation provided electronic meetings with the opportunity to have an elected voice. The recommendation did not address the challenge of service structure representation across geographical boundaries. EMRs would be provided the opportunity to vote at the gatherings of electronic meetings with WSO Staff. Staff would continue to serve as the electronic meetings appointed trusted servant at the WSC.

The Policy Committee discussed the recommendation. Committee members raised questions as to whether electronic meetings were substantially different than face-to-face groups and whether a new service role was needed. EMWG was asked to continue its investigation and conversation.

Further reflection led EMWG members to recognize electronic meetings were functioning very similarly to face-to-face groups. They appeared to be fulfilling the primary purpose of Al-Anon Family Groups but without having their voice represented by an elected trusted servant.

Since that time, the electronic meeting landscape has altered drastically. The pandemic created an opportunity for members previously uncertain about the benefits of electronic meetings to join and find recovery. In the WSC Structure, the WSO began posting Al-Anon Family Groups temporary electronic meeting information. The number of permanent electronic meetings registered at the WSO is growing exponentially. As of August 31, more than 140 new electronic meetings have registered to date and the number is climbing. National structures have reached out to the WSO to discuss

the requests they were receiving to register electronic meetings formed in their geography or language.

This new information led the EMWG to consider whether it might be time to recognize electronic meetings as Al-Anon Family Groups and to pursue the idea of creating a new Area to support electronic meetings. EMWG researched and discussed many roles and responsibilities of the Al-Anon Family Groups as outlined in the *2018-2021 Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual* (P-24/27). Its research confirmed the understanding that electronic meetings are functioning as Al-Anon Family Groups. It also identified the growing challenge for the WSO to support electronic meetings in languages other than English, Spanish, or French.

Similarly, EMWG evaluated the implications of creating an Area to support electronic meetings. Because electronic meetings cross global geographical regions, EMWG recognized the need for a conversation with the national structures to gain clarity on implications and considerations beyond the WSC Structure.

The conversation regarding both recognition in the Policy Digest that electronic meetings qualify as Al-Anon Family Groups and creation of an Area for groups that meet electronically is an ongoing one which ultimately will require approval by the Policy Committee, Board of Trustees, and the WSC.

### Frame

As electronic meetings evolved from being Public Outreach opportunities to being gatherings of relatives and friends of alcoholics “for mutual aid,” the Third Tradition states that they may call themselves Al-Anon Family Groups. Converting electronic meetings to Al-Anon Family Groups implies that they deserve a service structure to turn to for support and guidance as is available to Al-Anon groups that meet face-to-face.

In the WSC Structure, this means groups form into Districts, may form Al-Anon Information Service Offices (AIS), and do become part of an Area. Face-to-face groups, most Districts, AISs, and Areas are usually defined by geographical boundaries, although some Areas have also formed “overlay” Districts based on language.

Outside of the WSC, face-to-face groups may be serviced by a national service committee or General Service Office (GSO). National structures are also usually defined geographically, although sometimes by both geography and language.

As the Internet has made it easy for electronic meetings to have members attend from almost any geographic location, it gives rise to the need for a structure that is not defined geographically. The EMWG is trying to understand the implications on national structures of defining an Area as part of the WSC to serve those Al-Anon Family Groups which meet electronically and may be worldwide in scope.

### Questions for IAGSM Delegate Consideration

- Registering non-English-, non-Spanish-, or non-French-speaking electronic meetings
  - ◆ Have members been asking your GSO to register permanent, native language electronic meetings?
  - ◆ What challenges and benefits might be created for your GSO if electronic meeting registration became the responsibility of the national structures?
  - ◆ Could you visualize a way that GSOs and the WSO could work together to support WSO registration of non-English, non-Spanish, and non-French electronic meetings?
  - ◆ If you are an English-, Spanish-, or French-speaking GSO, can you imagine any unique challenges and benefits related to WSO registration of English-, Spanish-, or French-speaking electronic meetings?
- Creating an Area or Areas to support groups which meet electronically
  - ◆ If electronic meetings became Al-Anon Family Groups and registered in their native languages, how would you foresee these might be represented in the WSC Structure and/or national service structures?
  - ◆ If an Area was created in the WSC Structure, would its language be English only or English, Spanish, and French (given the WSO only supports these three languages)? How would the Area support languages that were not English, Spanish, or French?
  - ◆ If Areas were created in multiple national service structures, what would determine where, i.e. within which Area, an electronic group would register?

We appreciate you taking the time to provide as much insight as possible into your current policies and procedures as well as ideas about how we can meet the needs of this new segment of our worldwide fellowship together.

## Discussion

Delegates shared the following thoughts on registering non-English-, non-Spanish-, or non-French-speaking electronic meetings:

- Very few GSOs had been asked to register electronic meetings prior to COVID, whereas, now most have been asked to register both temporary and permanent electronic meetings. Several structures have begun registering permanent electronic meetings and posting these on their websites in addition to listing the temporary electronic meetings created as the result of COVID.
- Challenges and benefits might be created for GSOs if electronic meetings became the responsibility of national structures. For example,
  - ◆ Challenges:
    - Potential financial issues with managing registration of these meetings
    - Adherence to the principles and the need for these meetings to be connected to a local, native language structure to ensure there is connection with the larger group conscience
    - The need to protect members' anonymity, uphold spiritual principles and "obedience to the unenforceable"—some structures require members to be invited to join electronic meetings; in these cases, meetings are often listed on an Al-Anon website but without electronic meeting details
    - Lack of visibility at the global level for these electronic meetings (see Opportunities below)
    - Difficulties and/or additional burden to facilitate trademark and copyright issues—not only from the WSO perspective but from perspective of literature sales, which are an important form of self-support for GSOs as well
    - GSOs may need to re-learn what the WSO has already learned
  - ◆ Benefits:
    - Connection with the local culture and language
    - Meetings currently flying “under the radar” could begin registering, giving structures better visibility and an opportunity to offer support to those meetings as well as having a wider pool of meetings to which to refer newcomers
    - Incorporation into the existing structure
    - Ensures that electronic meetings will know how to practice the Seventh Tradition; specifically, to send contributions to the local GSO providing native language literature and other services
    - Provides the ability for native language, local, website listing for better visibility for those still suffering
- If the GSOs and the WSO could work together to support WSO registration of non-English, non-Spanish, and non-French electronic meetings, it might result in cooperating to list meetings in both places; inviting electronic meetings to choose where to register, i.e., with the WSO to attract a global audience or with the GSO for a local focus; organizing electronic meetings by “linguistic concept” and providing representation at the IAGSM
- Delegates from English-, Spanish- and French-speaking GSOs imagined the unique challenges and benefits related to WSO registration of English, Spanish, or French electronic meetings, such as helping meetings determine where to register and the potential disconnection from a local structure if meetings are only registered with the WSO. Some were in favor of the current policy of WSO registration.



Delegates shared the following thoughts on creating an Area or Areas to support groups which meet electronically:

- If electronic meetings became Al-Anon Family Groups and registered in their native languages, Delegates felt they should be treated the same as any other Al-Anon Family Group, i.e., represented through the local/national structure with typical service roles such as GR and treasurer as well as technical support service positions
- Some GSOs have been registering permanent electronic meetings and are already tying them into the existing local service structure
- Several structures suggested that allowing these meetings to be represented in their national service structure would enhance and deepen the national group conscience.
- Regarding creating an Area for electronic meetings in the WSC Structure, Delegates suggested that native languages needed to be represented in the Conferences of the structures with the same languages; there was a question about how to achieve this for electronic meetings in languages not yet represented by a national structure
- A concern was raised that only having an Area within the WSC Structure for electronic meetings would effectively give more voting authority to members attending electronic meetings internationally than those who attend face-to-face meetings internationally since their structures do not have vote at the WSC
- If Areas for electronic meetings were created in multiple national service structures, several Delegates suggest the meeting be offered a choice about where to register; a Delegate suggested the determination be made based on where the substantial portion of the meeting members were located
- Another Delegate warned that it would be very important to ensure that whatever structure(s) would be created to support electronic meetings remain part of Al-Anon and not become an opportunity for separation and loss of unity

## BUSINESS MEETING

There was a Business Meeting session that sought to address two topics. The first was a continuation of the discussion started in 2018 regarding international representation, with voice and vote, at the World Service Conference. The ICC provided a summary of the discussions that have taken place since 2018 and opened the meeting for 48 hours of discussion.

Many Delegates shared the results of the Knowledge-Based Decision Making discussion they held in their own Structures. As in previous conversations, there were a variety of opinions related to representation, participation, autonomy, relevance of the WSC agenda to local members, inclusion, financial burden, logistical challenges, cooperation, difficulty of finding qualified and willing candidates to fill existing service roles, and different ways to apply Concept Four.

Given the difficulty of reaching consensus in a dialogue limited to written communication shared in an

electronic format across 12 time zones, no resolution was reached. Yet several solutions were offered regarding ways to improve communication, enhance the IAGSM, develop or leverage technology to facilitate participation, and share information and explanations about current systems of voting and representation.

The other item of business was to provide news about the 2022 IAGSM. The Board of Trustees voted in support of the Delegates' expressed interest in holding the 2022 IAGSM in London, England given that it was not possible to do so this year. The ICC reported that the WSO has signed a contract with the original venue, the Royal Foundation of St. Katharine. The meeting will take place 13 October through 15 October 2022. Because of the full days of the agenda most Delegates should plan to arrive no later than 12 October and leave no earlier than 16 October.

## MOTIONS

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Motion #1: The Admissions Committee unanimously recommends that the 20th International Al-Anon General Services Meeting admit the representatives from Nicaragua and Slovenia, who have met the criteria in the Admissions Committee Guideline.

37 eligible voting Delegates; 22 votes needed for a valid result

26 YES      0 NO      MOTION PASSED

Motion #2: Recommend that the Board of WSC appoints an equal number of international representatives to the ICC sub-committee reviewing the International Representation question. Appointees will be chosen from among international IAGSM delegates. The sub-committee will prepare a summary of proposals from 2020 IAGSM responses to the International representation question, conduct a vote or votes on them among the international structures and ICC will present the vote results to the Board.

40 eligible voting Delegates; 27 votes needed for a valid result

23 VOTES      RESULTS ARE VOID



# UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

Delegates had the opportunity to post questions to each other and the ICC throughout the week. The following topics have broad application:

## Zonal Meetings

### Question:

How do the Zonal Meetings operate? Who organizes them? Where are they held? What would the agenda be like? How long are they and how often? What are the benefits for those participating?

### Response:

Zonal Meetings provide an opportunity for established and evolving service structures, within close proximity and with similar service needs, to meet and discuss service ideas. Zonal meetings occur in the years in between when the IAGSM meets. Zonal Meetings are organized by a host GSO. The WSO participates by invitation, with voice but no vote.

There are three Zonal Meetings comprised of structures in the European Union (the European Zonal Meeting or EZM), the Spanish-speaking structures in Central America (known as RECACSA), and the Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking structures of Europe and South America (known as RIASA). The oldest of these is RIASA, established in 1996, followed by RECACSA (2003), and the EZM (2009).

Membership is somewhat loosely defined and some structures have the opportunity to participate in more than one. For example, Spain, as a member country of the EU, is routinely included in the EZM, but, as a Spanish-speaking structure, is also welcome to attend RIASA. Mexico also has attended both RIASA and RECACSA.

The agenda items are varied. There are some familiar topics such as Public Outreach, Alateen, and CAL, but there are also things like legal registration of the Al-Anon charity, finances, Board composition, and other items that are specifically of interest to some smaller and newer structures. The WSO finds them extremely beneficial for understanding “local” issues that sometimes do not get much attention. It is also a way to establish contact with new and evolving structures. As observers, it is a wonderful opportunity for us to listen and learn.

## Group Registration and Records Processes

### Question:

What are your group registration practices? How do you keep track of active and inactive groups? What do you do with active groups that do not participate in the service structure and when do you remove inactive groups from a meeting list or website?

### Response:

The WSO will mark a group inactive when notified by someone from the group or a trusted servant who has verified the information. The WSO retains active and inactive meetings in its database. However, inactive meetings are not listed on the meeting search and after three years, if they are still inactive, they are deleted from the database.

The WSO implemented a feature on its website called “Reported Not Meeting.” Members who attempt to go to a meeting and discover that it has moved or is no longer meeting can use this feature to report it to the WSO. When that happens, it is automatically removed from the website until Staff can verify if the meeting has moved, has disbanded, or there was just a mistake. Members use this a great deal, and it has helped Staff to update many records.

The WSO also sends an annual request for group updates and receives a poor response, but we take an easy approach to this. Unless the meeting is reported as not meeting, Staff assume that it is and do not try to track down an update. However, local trusted servants, such as District Representatives, are encouraged to visit every group in their Districts every year. This is a great source of information about which groups are actually meeting and it is an opportunity for the District Representative to invite the group to get connected and active at the District.

## Alateen

### Question:

How does Alateen function? Especially the use of AMIAS (Al-Anon Members Involved in Alateen Service)?

### Response:

The question was too broad to be answered fully during the IAGSM; however, the recommendation was to read the Alateen policy, beginning on page 93, and the 2003 Alateen Motion from the Board of Trustees, beginning on page 228 of the *2018-2021 Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual* (P-24/27) version two (2). These are the minimum standards and policies the WSO encourages every GSO to have in place.

## Anonymity in Mixed Face-to-Face and Electronic Meetings

### Question:

We have experienced some groups meeting face-to-face meeting with possibility for members to also participate by phone or other electronic form (e.g., Skype). Some members raised question about how to keep anonymity under these conditions. Do others practice this form of meetings in your countries?

### Response:

Many Delegates reported similar situations. Delegates shared that members use first names or a pseudonym to maintain their own anonymity. If joining a meeting online, members are asked to join from private location, use headphones, and turn video off to protect the anonymity of other people in the meeting.

## CAL

### Question:

Can the WSO consider new systems of buying and selling CAL to ease the burden of shipping costs and to make it possible for members to buy CAL in their preferred languages?

### Response:

The ICC has taken this topic under advisement and been discussing it for a few years already. Going forward, it will be referred to the WSO for additional follow-up.

### Question:

Our structure is dealing with a problem of unapproved translations of CAL showing up on meetings and our GSO is taking action about it. Are other structures were facing similar challenges?

### Response:

Many Delegates reported they had found the same violations. The WSO is aware of these as well and relies on local members for support and enforcement. Staff appreciate the work that is already being done in this area and support these ongoing efforts.

### Question:

Can CAL be posted in electronic meetings? What about guidelines?

### Response:

CAL cannot be displayed in meetings unless the meeting is a registered electronic meeting that has been given a license to do so. Even then, only very small excerpts can be displayed and nothing is ever to be posted in any permanent way, even free downloads. Excerpts from the *Service Manual* can be displayed, but the whole thing should not be transmitted or posted. It is better to display it from al-anon.org. Guidelines can be shared.

## Social Media

### Question:

How can we ensure anonymity of members on our social media platforms?

### Response:

The WSO moderates every post to every one of its social media platforms. Nothing gets displayed on its social media pages without being reviewed first by a staff member. If it is inappropriate or violates the Traditions or policy, it will not be posted. This is a significant investment of resources because it takes time and familiarity with Al-Anon principles to make a decision regarding whether to post.

## Online Events

### Question:

Can we have clarification of the policies regarding international online events? Is every online event considered an international event? Do events have to be hosted by a service arm? Can they use the Al-Anon name and CAL?

### Response:

No, not every online event is truly “international” in nature; some are just online versions of local events, especially during COVID.

GSOs have permission to use the Al-Anon name and CAL by virtue of having been through the process of becoming a GSO. Service arms, such as Regions, Areas, Districts, etc., have permission (traditionally, not legally) to do the same by virtue of this connection. Conventions/rallies/events that are not connected to the service structure do not have this permission. They are, in effect, outside entities.

Members have permission (traditionally, not legally) to photocopy Conference Approved Literature (and The Forum) for use in Al-Anon/Alateen meetings or workshops without written permission, provided that:

- the photocopy is for one-time use (such as for a meeting topic)
- the photocopy is limited to the number of members attending and what can be reasonably discussed within one meeting
- the material is not for sale or being distributed beyond the group, and
- the copies are collected and destroyed afterwards.

Members are asked to include the appropriate copyright credit.

The requirements for an event to be supported or hosted by a service arm are a matter for local discussion and group conscience. There should be cooperation between the event and the service structure. See also 2016 WSC Summary, Policy Committee conversation on “Conventions and Other Events” and page 91 in the 2018-2021 *Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual* v2, under “What to Announce at Meetings.”

It is not adequate for a group to be the entity that supports or hosts the event because a group is not a service arm. Groups are places of recovery, where members gather together for only that purpose. Service arms have some other function to perform--selling CAL, publishing meeting information, informing the public and professionals about Al-Anon, etc. and they are supported by a larger group conscience than what most groups have. They do this as part of an Al-Anon service structure and using Al-Anon principles, but their primary purpose is not the same as that of an Al-Anon group.

## Finding Qualified Candidates to Serve

### Question:

How do other structures find suitable candidates to fill positions on the General Service Board?

### Responses:

Many structures have a Nominating Committee charged with this responsibility and some Delegates shared their Nominating Committee Guidelines. Contact the WSO for Nominating Committee Guidelines, if interested.

## The Lord's Prayer

### Question:

Many of my country's Al-Anon Members have experienced Al-Anon Groups in the U.S. using the Lord's Prayer at meetings. For us, this prayer is a very religious prayer. How can this prayer be aligned with Al-Anon which is not a religious program?


### Response:

Many Delegates shared their experiences with this particular style of closing the meeting.

## Listing Electronic Meetings

### Question:

Some members in our country have registered electronic meetings with the WSO and did not inform our GSO. Other meetings that registered with the WSO and informed the GSO have been listed on the GSO website. For groups that did not inform the GSO, we



wonder if we can provide information about them on our website? Does the WSO inform GSOs about meetings that register with them?


**Response:**

Yes, GSOs can choose to list WSO-registered meetings on their websites if they think local members or newcomers will have an interest in them. Any Al-Anon member can attend any Al-Anon meeting, but there is no expectation that GSOs will list all meetings registered worldwide or duplicate the work of the WSO.

The WSO does not notify GSOs of meetings that register with them. Electronic meetings are required, under the current policy, to register with the WSO because they are not a part of any other structure; therefore, the WSO would not have any other entity to notify. Face-to-face groups that exist in a country with a service structure are referred back to that service office to register.

## SHARING ABOUT THE IAGSM EXPERIENCE

- Living as a son of an alcoholic made me feel that I was different from others. With Al-Anon I learned to live differently. By serving I felt different but better. The pandemic has forced me to live differently. This has been a different meeting. During these days it has been difficult for me to be connected to the meeting because, in the place where I live, there was a tropical storm and a hurricane, but the knowledge I gained is invaluable. Thank you for the opportunity to be a part of this great experience. The Higher Power bless you. I hug you from a distance, until we meet face-to-face.
- First of all, I would like to express my thanks to the organizers of the meeting—you have done a great job and managed to create a framework for active discussion while maintaining the spirit of Al-Anon. I will miss the international Al-Anon fellowship when my period as a Delegate ends in March 2021. Of course, it would have been fun to meet you all face-to-face, but a pandemic is something we cannot change. We just have to accept it. I wish you all happiness in your lives and hope that you will have success in sharing the message of Al-Anon in your countries.
- The IAGSM has been a great experience for me. It helped me open my eyes and ears to other cultures and behaviors in Al-Anon. I believe we learn so much from each other. I am always full of ideas when I report back from my Zonal Meeting and the IAGSM. My Al-Anon fellows wait impatiently for the report and some of the ideas are discussed during service meetings or the Conference. I hope in the future we will be able to progress on the topic of electronic meetings as I see this as an increasing need. Sharing good and bad experiences would be good to continue. Still pending is the issue of literature sharing among countries with the same languages, but I am sure our Higher Power will help us find a solution. Feeling part of a worldwide organization with such a warm and friendly support is an unforgettable experience. Thanks, to all of you. In addition, I want to thank all those that dedicated time for us to meet electronically this week, and all those that took some of their time to prepare agendas, messages, technical details, etc. I hope to see you one day for a big hug. In the meantime, take care of yourselves.
- Thank you to everyone who has had a part in making this very first virtual IAGSM meeting a huge success! I am grateful to be a part of it. Thank you to all the Delegates for your very informative and thoughtful sharings. I have learned so much in the past week about what is happening worldwide in Al-Anon. One day I hope that I can meet some of you face to face. I am sending all of you love and hugs.
- For me, I have become aware of other structures challenges and success which I can learn from. I am surprised at the problems being discussed about literature distribution and availability. The common threads of discussion help me see that we are not alone in the challenges we face, and it is possible to reach out to others for assistance and get a warm and helpful response. This has been extremely daunting with so much to read. I commend those of you who have English as a second language—well done keeping up with comments. This journey of representation is a privilege for me and has invigorated my desire to learn more and to work with others to improve our structure, where possible, and to ensure our primary purpose is always a top priority. When so many organizers, chairpersons, technical support people, WSO Staff, Delegates, speakers, and presenters can come together for a common purpose I feel proud to be a member of such and warm and friendly fellowship. This has showed me that even in disagreement we can be united in purpose.
- Thank you to everyone for your part in making our first virtual IAGSM a great event. As Lois W. said in 1983 at the WSC “Al-Anon is a program of love, and love is the primary motive in all our activities.” This is truly the feeling I am experiencing with all of you. I really miss the opportunity of having a coffee or sharing a meal with each of you as that was our time to share and find the heart-to-heart connections, but I am so happy to read the names and see the familiar faces I have



met from past international meetings, and I am excited to get to know a little bit more about the first-time Delegates. I will forever be grateful to have had the opportunity to learn more about Al-Anon in your part of the world. Whenever I introduce myself as a member of the worldwide fellowship of Al-Anon, you are with me!

- It's been my pleasure and privilege to be at the IAGSM once again. It has been wonderful to see the passion and dedication of the ICC and the WSO Staff in keeping us on task and on time. Importantly, it was heartening to see the dedication and love for Al-Anon coming through in the Delegates' posts. I can see that Al-Anon is in good hands and the willingness for you to carry the message is as vibrant as ever. Long may it continue.
- Participating in this form of an event is new to me. I found it rather convenient, even though I couldn't escape from my work, and I could spend only evening hours here each day. I would love to express my gratitude to all the participants for preparing interesting and important presentations, as well as for all the voices in the discussions. I remember many of you from previous meetings, but I am happy that I have the possibility to meet new friends. Undoubtedly, photos of faces help all of us to feel more familiar. Special thanks to those friends who kindly responded to my questions, and of course, big thanks to our "good spirits" from WSO and ICC. I still remember the 2018 IAGSM visit to the WSO, when I met you in real life and received the warmest "Welcome" I have ever experienced! This year, for the first time, I am not alone as the Polish Delegate—Ola accompanied me here and I am really grateful to my Higher Power for this support. I am hoping that my Higher Power will make it possible for all of us to meet face-to-face in the future.
- The closing is almost here! I am feeling grateful to be part of the IAGSM fellowship. I have seen first-hand the labor of love that the WSO team has invested in reinforcing the principles with a vision that is spiritually 20|20. It's been a treat to respond to the well-thought-out general sessions and presentations with delegates from different corners of

the planet. May we keep marching together on this road to recovery through unity and service!

- This is my first IAGSM and I must admit I regret that it hasn't happened in London as planned, because I know that being there would have been much more beneficial, and so much easier to concentrate, and would have allowed me to be wholly dedicated to it without everyday life distractions, work, or tasks. Also, on a personal level, I find listening to people easier than reading and certainly less time-consuming and more pleasant, but here we are!  
Having said that, the most important thing for me now is to thank each member of the WSO team for your combined efforts and your brilliant organization of this IAGSM in this completely new format. Well done!  
I also want to thank each Delegate for their written discussions through which I have learned an enormous amount. And last, but not least, I also want to thank all the people, like myself, whose first language is not English—I did find all that reading quite something! And very intense indeed!
- Thank you for an amazing week in the first virtual IAGSM. I missed welcoming you to London and the hugs, coffee, and chats. However, I have learned so much about our fellowship throughout the world through the discussion papers and responses. Being part of the IAGSM is a gift in my recovery and service for which I am truly grateful. It was lovely to share with delegates whom I have met before and to make new Al-Anon friends. To those of you who will not be coming to London in 2022, I hope we meet again—you will always be in my heart as Al-Anon friends. To those who will be coming, we in the UK & Eire really look forward to meeting and welcoming you. To all the ICC members who worked so hard to make this IAGSM happen—thank you so much.  
It has been an amazing week of love and fellowship.
- I want to thank my Higher Power for giving me the opportunity to participate for the first time in the IAGSM, those who were in charge of the organization for their great service, and all the Delegates for their participation. My vision was opened, and I saw the Al-Anon brotherhood as

the vastness of the sea. Working for Al-Anon worldwide is a privilege and a great gift. I loved the opening speech, the Serenity Prayer said by Débora from Perú with her sweet voice, and Tanya from Australia with such a beautiful setting and listening to Eila's experience. I believe that my Higher Power is in charge of this mission that She entrusted to us and that Her presence is among us.

- Thank you for this set up and all the work, the preparation, the presentations and sharings from all of you. Even in this special time, we can still be strong. When I first read through the concept for this meeting, I was a bit disturbed (changes still don't come too easily). But it worked out very well and was convenient to read and to reply. I am grateful that this time we again have two IAGSM Delegates—this was very productive and inspiring.
- My deepest and most heartfelt “thank you!” to the ICC and all who were involved in organizing and planning this historic electronic version of the IAGSM. The format worked and we all gained new experiences from it. Well done! And thank you to all the Delegates for sharing their experience, strength, and hope from their structures. Yet again I learned so much, it is all a gift to me, and I cannot wait to share it with our structure. I missed getting the hugs, coffee and chatting to everyone, meeting new Delegates, and making new friends; however, the Al-Anon spirit of love and fellowship has been with us all during this meeting and I've felt the connectedness to you all and the sense of belonging as you are all “my people.” I will miss seeing you in London 2022. I hope we meet again, and you will always be in my heart as Al-Anon sisters and brothers.
- Thank you for the opportunity to reflect on the amazing experience of participating in my first IAGSM. Once I got used to it, I found the AFG Connects easy to navigate. Whilst I may have liked to have an extra day or two for each discussion topic, I think the meeting has flowed very well. What I especially like is that everyone gets an equal opportunity to share their submissions. There is no room for dominance, loud voices, and no one had to ask us fast-talking Aussies to slow down! Instead, I felt the love and the goodwill to support each other towards our common welfare

and that of our beloved Al-Anon fellowship. The Chairperson's remarks, daily updates, trivia questions, Questions and Answers, Serenity Prayer readings, Keynote Speaker and Spiritual Speaker were all fun, inspiring, and informative touches to the event.

During important events in Australia, our traditional owners, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, usually perform a ‘Welcome to the Country’ ceremony, in which they acknowledge and pay respect to Elders past, present, and emerging. I feel that the theme of our 2020 IAGSM ‘Practicing Universal Principles with 20|20 Vision’ captures this spirit. We have acknowledged the experience of the past, the strength of the present, and our hope for the emerging. Of course, I look forward to welcoming our international Al-Anon family to Australia.

I offer my sincere gratitude to all who have participated so enthusiastically in this unique 2020 IAGSM and particularly to the ICC and WSO Board of Trustees for putting together an amazing program. Of course, my thanks also to the Australian GSO and members for trusting me to represent our wonderful Aussie fellowship as a first-year IAGSM Delegate. My mind and heart have been truly expanded with knowledge and love for our worldwide fellowship.

- A heartfelt “thank you” to the team involved in the event at the WSO for the enormous effort they have put into getting this smoothly put together on time. Thank you also to all the Delegates for their experiences and ideas. It was really good to have so many participants, even if I did miss the face-to-face warmth of other meetings. I am perhaps the only one participating who is, at the moment, very near the original venue in London. Months ago, long before COVID-19 impacted plans for the “live” meeting, I had decided to come here at this time as my daughter lives here in England and my grand-daughter had her tenth birthday last week. Unfortunately, I am having to spend all my time here confined to the house because travelers from Spain have to spend 14 days in “self-isolation” on arrival. Perhaps that was my Higher Power's way of making it easy for me to be at the computer for hours at a time with no

temptation to go out! It has been a very intense week and I feel a deep sense of gratitude for having been able to be part of this historic meeting. We frequently hear in Al-Anon that we should always look for the positive side to a situation. This time it's easy for me to find it because my main problem with face-to-face meetings is trying to write down everything everybody says and not miss anything. How easy was that this time! Thank you all once again.

- This was my first IAGSM and it would have been so nice to meet you all in London, but these are things one cannot control. We all missed the fun part, but meeting in this way was definitely productive and it was also easier to follow the discussions for a non-native English reader since they were written down.

At least one Zoom meeting could have been a great option for closing, just to hear your voices and say hello! Thank you all for your interesting contributions and also for replying to our questions! And thanks to my dearest courageous co-Delegate Eila for her speech and our long daily Skype conversations. Hugs to all and hope to meet you in the future.

- It is such a privilege to attend another IAGSM representing Australia in this international gathering of the worldwide fellowship. I hope all the new Delegates enjoyed the experience of sharing in the combined wisdom of all the service structures present. I especially hope that the Delegates from the two new structures attending this 2020 IAGSM enjoyed the experience and received some useful information to help their structures progress. I hope the love of the worldwide Al-Anon Family Groups feels like a beautiful warm cloak to wrap around you.

It has been wonderful sharing with old friends from the international community and meeting new friends who are just starting out in this exciting new role of IAGSM Delegate. If we stay involved in service, we will meet again I am sure! Would you believe I can hear the song playing on the radio right now as I am writing this: "We are Family! Get up everyone and sing!" We are truly a wonderful worldwide Al-Anon Family.

- This was my first IAGSM meeting and I was totally unprepared. I was reading more than writing and I thank you all. I have received a lot of important information and a very strong spiritual vision. I thank the WSO.

- This is, and has been, an extraordinary journey—being brought together from all over the globe while possibly, like me, never even having left home. I have sat in my home office in front of my screen sharing my experience, strength, and hope and feeling my Higher Power's presence through this Group Conscience.

My fellow Delegate has been a teacher, friend, and companion. I became reliant on daily Skype calls to discuss, deliberate, and compose joint responses—talking to each other and reasoning things out. Learning much about each other, our structure, and the international structure.

I want to thank the other Delegates for your preparation, presentation, and participation. My mind and heart are full. To the ICC—thank you for your hours of preparation and dedication. Creating a safe environment and encouraging honest dialogue is a huge accomplishment. Well done! Without my Higher Power none of this would have been possible and for this I am indebted—to continue to learn, share, and pass on the message of love, hope, and joy.

- Thank you for the opportunity to be on this incredibly gratifying service journey with you all! So many voices, yet we are always reminded that it is all one journey indeed. I feel profoundly blessed to have been a part of this historic IAGSM 2020.

The virtual platform was a little daunting at first, however, with the help of my fellow South African Delegate I was able to navigate through the process with some sense of accomplishment. I love conversation, and the digital platform made me somewhat uncomfortable; however, since we Skyped every day for discussion and report backs, I felt so much more at ease. She and I also formed a very special bond, and for me, this was the greatest take-back!

This has been an immense learning experience for me, I have taken so much from all the presentations, discussions, and questions and answers. Today, I truly understand the concept: "together



we can make it!” This IAGSM theme of “Practicing Universal Principles with 20|20 Vision” came to life in these few days. We have been forced out of our comfort zones, and have had to consider so many new ways of doing things in order to ensure that the legacy that was left to us, continues to exist for those who have yet to come. In saying this I am reminded of a famous African proverb which reads, “When the roots are deep, there is no reason to fear the wind.”

My sincere gratitude to all the WSO Staff who have functioned so efficiently to ensure that the 2020 IAGSM continued despite the difficult circumstances we currently face. Thank you to all the Delegates and speakers for your tremendous contributions. Finally, I am most grateful to the AFG South African Structure for having faith in my ability to represent them at this meeting. My journey as a trusted servant is one that I will cherish for all my life. May I always remember that “I am because you are!”

- Thank you very much for a well performed 2020 IAGSM! Thank you for making this possible for everyone. It was a new experience in many ways for me. It was my first time participating and, unfortunately, my last one. It has been a great adventure. It was tough to sit at home and work during the daytime, and read, and reflect, and send responses within the given time frames, but it was nevertheless a very fruitful event. The energy and commitment from all of you has given me a lot of motivation to write my report to my GSO and to share a lot of ideas and hope. We have much in common, even though we have different cultures and laws to consider in each country.

I am very grateful for this journey. I look forward to continuing to share many more questions and thoughts with you, my dear fellow Al-Anon friends. Take care and stay safe!

- Thank you all so much for this special and historic 2020 IAGSM that will certainly be memorable for centuries to come. I express my gratitude to the organizers and to everyone who has had a part in making this first virtual IAGSM meeting take place. My horizon has been hugely expanded and I have gathered precious information that I will happily transfer to my Al-Anon members

in Iceland. This has been an immense learning experience, as the digital platform made me a little uncomfortable at first. I would have preferred the face-to-face communication, but my experience has taught me that with Al-Anon everything is possible. Our Higher Power is always at our hand, we only have to reach out for him as Concept Eight tells us. It is about letting go and trusting others. Much love and hugs to you all and thank you for having had the opportunity to be with you. Take care all of you.

- Thank you all very much for this so special and historic 2020 IAGSM that will certainly be memorable for all of us.

## SPIRITUAL SPEAKER

*Eila L., Finland*

When I was asked to give the spiritual speech in London during the 2020 IAGSM meeting, I was at first confused. This reaction was not unexpected because I have always been shy and unwilling to be in front of an audience. I asked myself “why was this opportunity offered to me? Was my Higher Power somehow responsible for it?” Then I thought that I should accept the invitation because this will be the last international meeting I would participate in as the Finnish Delegate. So, I said yes! The situation changed considerably during the spring due to Covid-19, and it was not possible to hold a physical meeting because of the excessive risks involved. At first, I thought with relief that, despite my promise, I might not need to speak. However, I asked about the situation again and received an answer that time has been set aside for a spiritual talk during the virtual meeting. Now, video would be used, and once again I thought it would not work for me. However, I am here, and I will tell my story as a member of the Al-Anon fellowship. Thank you for giving me this opportunity.

My reaction tells about my uncertainty, and at the same time, about my desire to be perfect in everything I do. In Al-Anon I have learned the slogan “Progress, Not Perfection.” In the book *One Day at a Time in Al-Anon* (B-14) under “Today’s Reminder” on March 24 is, “When I am able to accept the help of my Higher Power, it makes me feel capable of doing anything I am called upon to do. I am overcoming my fears. I am acquiring a comfortable new confidence.” (p.84)

I spent my childhood in North Karelia. My father’s family is from that part of Karelia which now belongs to Russia. They were evacuated during the war and some Karelian villages were established for them. They were somehow isolated from the other people in that area. My father was 16 years old when he came to Finland. My mother’s family was living in the area originally, and they had different religion and culture than the Karelians. Both my father and mother only attended elementary school. They met at a dance and got married at a young age. Over the next ten years, our family grew. My mother had five children – four daughters and one son; I was the second youngest. We lived in a post-war time where there was a shortage of many things. My childhood was still safe – enough food and cleanliness

and the presence of parents. My mother stayed at home and took care of a small farm with a few cows and pigs. My father worked as a lumberjack and carpenter. In addition, he was always ready to help neighbors by cutting men’s hair, slaughtering animals, shoeing horses, and more. Alcohol caused some quarrels at home; even though my father only drank on Saturdays after the work week and then played with us. My mother did not drink at all. She was deeply religious. I have a lot of great memories of my childhood and I could describe it as a pink rose.

As a child, I was shy and went into hiding when we had guests. According to my mother, I was also an easy child to care for because I could focus on games for a long time. I learned to read at the age of four by following my older siblings. So, when I started school, I was clearly ahead of the others and free to do something else while others were still learning the alphabet. I spent the time reading in the library. I still do not know if this was the reason I was bullied at school. Two girls in the same class isolated me and I was not accepted to participate in the games during the break times. During elementary school, I was unable to form friendships and felt different. I could not tell my parents or siblings about the bullying. I was trying to manage by myself and this made me mousy. Later, I thought, religion was the reason for the bullying. The Karelians belong to the Orthodox religion, and at that time, the children were baptized according to the religion of the father. My experiences during my childhood have allowed me to identify with immigrants who need to live in a foreign, and sometimes hostile, environment. From my childhood I inherited the faith in a Higher Power and later this helped me to use the Al-Anon idea with more confidence and results.

Grandparents and other relatives lived nearby, and we spent a lot of time with them. In addition to my parents, the most important person in my childhood was my grandmother Esteri, who had a warm heart and always had time for her grandchildren. She had a small picture on the wall of her bedroom and it included the text, “*Jumala suokoon minulle tyyneyttä hyväksyä asiat, joita en voi muuttaa, rohkeutta muuttaa, mitkä voin, ja viisautta erottaa nämä toisistaan.*” This text is the Serenity Prayer in Finnish. Grandma’s gentleness and

serenity have taught me a lot about attitudes. Her life was not easy. First, she lost her husband – my grandfather – who drowned in the river while intoxicated. My grandmother was left alone with nine children and she needed to take care of the farm and the cattle. In addition, my grandmother later lost her eldest son in the war at the age of 17 and the second eldest son – my uncle – became an alcoholic. This is my first experience with alcoholism. Later, when I had my own children, my dream was to become like my grandmother and Al-Anon is helping me achieve my goal by reminding me of serenity.

After four years in the elementary school, I moved to the middle school located in the center of the village. My bullies stayed in the old school. There were more students and I found some friends. The studies went well, and I received top grades in mathematics, physics, chemistry, and languages. After middle school, it was obvious that I would continue on to high school. I graduated from high school with excellent grades – only one point off from a perfect score. With my high grades, I had many possibilities to select a field of study at university. I chose the field based strongly on mathematics and physics. I was living in a student house. In the beginning of the second year we had a new roommate, and he was handsome with his brown eyes and dark hair. I fell in love immediately. We dated for a short time and when I got married, I was 23 years old. I was still childish and did not recognize how different our values in life were until 19 years later—our marriage was over. The reason was not alcohol, and we did not quarrel, but I was dominant. Among other things, all matters related to children were taken care of by me. Our divorce came as a surprise to our family members and friends because we had worked well as a family; but the relationship between my husband and I was missing. We did not have any intimacy – we were parents. However, during the marriage I gave birth to two lovely sons, whose custody was left entirely to me—even though my ex-husband was a decent man. So, I was alone with two teenage sons. I had a good job and no worries about money. My worry was how I could raise my sons into men without any help from their father.

During those days I was desperately worried about the future. In Al-Anon I have learned that if I manage to live “One Day at A Time,” I will not so readily entertain fears of what might happen tomorrow. If I am concentrating on today’s activities, there will be no room


in my mind for fretting and worrying. Today I can be grateful to my ex-husband, from whom I got two lovely young men. They are already married, and both have children – my dear grandchildren.

I was a 43-year-old, divorced woman with two teenage sons. We were living in our old flat when my ex-husband moved away. I knew nothing about alcoholism when I met the wonderful man I will call my husband even though we are not officially married. He was about my age, also divorced, and had one grown-up son. He seemed to be truly kind and we were interested in similar topics. He had the same education I had, and I could not imagine that he would later turn out to be an alcoholic. Our relationship progressed quickly and after six months of dating I invited him to my home to meet my sons. My younger son greeted him cheerfully, but my older son was glum about the meeting and did not come to have lunch together with us. The relationship progressed and I enjoyed spending time with him so much that sometimes I even forgot that my teenage sons needed an adult to be present at home. Later, I noticed that I was losing contact with my older son and this still affects our relationship.

Again, the Al-Anon program would have helped in these situations. The slogan “First Things First” says that our children are a top priority to consider. Our attitude is the key to a successful family relationship – and their normal growing up.

The next stage was ahead. After one year of dating – “should we buy a house or flat together?” At first, I was not excited to make this big decision so soon, but he was willing to find a common home for us. He sold his own apartment and moved in with me and my sons. At this point, I should have noticed that he often drank alcohol, but I was so in love that I did not notice it and didn’t listen to my eldest son when he tried to convince me saying, “Mom, he’s just a drunkard.” My son noticed what I did not see. Drinking greatly affected the relationship between my eldest son and my husband. I was blind to his drinking, even though it was clearly visible. Within six months, we found a suitable apartment for us and we had room for both my sons and, if need be, for his son too.

We had a gorgeous big home and a beautiful garden. The framework for a good life was in place. But after only two years, I began to wonder why we quarreled so much – especially during the weekends. At that point, I noticed that he drank a lot and it caused disputes



between us. He would leave me alone and either went to the bar or took a bottle with him when he left. It is hard to admit the emotional state I was in back then. I was both disappointed and angry at the same time. My previous marriage had ended in divorce and now I was in a relationship where the other one drank too much – at least I thought so. When he came back, I blackmailed him by threatening to kill myself. Many times, I sat holding a sharp knife to my wrist. I wanted to kill myself without thinking what it would have meant to my sons, my mother, and my siblings. Finally, I understood that I needed the support and help which I have found in Al-Anon. In Al-Anon I came to understand that the problems I was experiencing were caused by the disease, not the person afflicted with the disease.

I will always remember the day I attended my first Al-Anon meeting. That day is as important as my birthday. The meeting was held in the meeting room of the chapel on Wednesday, October 15, 2003. I remember that meeting and the people who were present at the time. But even today I still do not remember where I got the information about Al-Anon. I did not look at the internet, call the helpline, or have any person to refer me. Today I believe that my Higher Power led me to an Al-Anon meeting to get help and understanding about the disease of alcoholism. I have learned that I have not caused it, I cannot control it, and I cannot cure it. My duty is to take care of my own well-being.

When I was a newcomer in my homegroup it had far more members than it does today. I remember those members who were present during my first Al-Anon meeting: one hugging me very warmly, one asking me to visit at least five times before deciding if Al-Anon is for me, one with whom we later travelled together to the group, one who became my Sponsor, two founders of the group, one having experienced violence at home, two artists, and one with a smiling face and laughter. I went five times and then continued throughout the year almost every week. At that point, I thought I had more important things to do than sit in the Al-Anon meetings on Wednesdays. After all, I was quick to learn and I thought I had received enough information about alcoholism, and I could continue applying the Al-Anon program without the group – just reading the Conference Approved Literature.

My decision was not good for me. I went back to my old behaviors and the quarrels at home continued. My eldest son went to the army, and my younger

son started with symptoms and he started smoking as well as using alcohol. To me, my son was mean and disobeyed me. I was afraid he would be an alcoholic, too. The turning point in my son's behavior happened one evening for which I am grateful. He was meeting his friends and came home to pick up some game supplies. He was clearly intoxicated and planning to go out again. I tried to stop him, but he didn't listen to me. After telling him that I was worried about his drinking, he replied: "I do not drink alone like your husband – I enjoy drinking with my friends." After that, we sat on the floor, hugged, and cried. I asked him not to leave. But when he left despite my requests, I was convinced I had nothing to worry about. The Higher Power knows the path and everything happens for a reason.

The Al-Anon slogan "Keep Coming Back" helped me return to my homegroup. After that, I have never questioned the tremendous help the Al-Anon fellowship has brought into my life. After my return, I started to participate in service at the group level – opening the door, making coffee, leading the meeting, and finally attending the Area meeting as a Group Representative. At the Area meetings, I met other Al-Anon members and heard about their recovery. Although the situation at home became worse in terms of drinking—my own situation improved, and I was able to take care of my work and home. Coming from Karelia, it was important to me that I had opportunities to meet my relatives and friends frequently. I was ashamed of my husband's drinking so I didn't invite people over and they were afraid to come. Again, I found a solution by using the Al-Anon program. I met the families of my sons, my siblings, my mother, and my friends alone somewhere else. At first, I felt guilty about such arrangements because my husband got angry. Nowadays, I know that I can meet people who are important to me even though my husband is an alcoholic.

Although I was able to take care of my responsibilities, I narrowed down my own life bit by bit. I thought that if I were at home with him as much as possible, he would not drink so much. I gave up hobbies that were important to me, I stopped playing badminton—which I used to do three times a week, and I left the rowing team even though the team had a good chance at winning the Finnish long-distance competition. I noticed that my life went to pieces like an A4 sheet of paper, first torn in half, and then left with A5, then torn in half again and left with A6. In the end, I was left with

only a small piece of paper in my hand – my job somehow kept me sane. The work became more important to me, and the work days were long. I had a remarkably interesting job where I could immerse myself and continue working at home. I recognized that I was becoming a workaholic and started to have health problems because my sleep was intermittent, my mealtimes became irregular, and I was too tired to exercise. Even though I have a good memory, that too, started to react to my situation. I was losing interest in everything. I attended Al-Anon meetings regularly, but my behavior at meetings was not in the spirit of Al-Anon. In my homegroup I would sometimes yell at one member and then be kind to someone else. I realized I was not that kind of person. How had I become so malicious? Did I even regret my actions? I was lucky to have an honest and friendly Al-Anon Sponsor who kindly reminded me about the Al-Anon spirit. She said, “I cannot hurt others without hurting myself...It may be a momentary release for me, but it returns like a boomerang to increase my own discomfort...Impulsive criticism at an Al-Anon meeting can affect the unity of the group on which I depend for my help.” (*One Day at a Time in Al-Anon*, p.20)

In the book *How Al-Anon Works* (B-32) it is said that “Al-Anon does not promise that every alcoholic will get sober” (p.46). For my husband, drinking has increased during the years we have been together. At first, he drank on weekends and Wednesdays. Today, he drinks every night and even more during the weekends. Over the past year, the change for the worse has been rapid and I have had difficulties not intervening and controlling. Earlier, before the severe drinking, we used to spend the winter holiday week in the mountains of Lapland—cross-country and downhill skiing, enjoying the snow and the sauna. This has not happened for four years. Likewise, we have also rented a cottage for our summer holidays—fishing, enjoying the sauna, and swimming. This, too, ended a few years ago. We used to actively attend concerts and theater performances and enjoy long bike rides and walking trips. Now I do these things either alone, or with my friends. And during the fall we both used to be eager to pick mushrooms—I have even helped him to recognize the edible ones. In the last three years, he has not been able to go because of physical problems.

I had decided to retire immediately when it was allowed and, in my case, it was at the age of 63—five years

from then. The work was still meaningful, but I was no longer eager to learn new digital tools and new programs every year. I openly spoke of my retirement plan. In the Al-Anon program I was also somehow preparing myself for retirement by accepting the service role as an international delegate. I wanted to have something to do when the retirement began. My husband is also in the retirement age, however, he had other plans. He wanted to receive a better position and applied for it in another city. He got the work and tried to convince me to move with him. At this point, however, I was selfish and promised only to visit occasionally. I thought that it would be better to move permanently when we knew whether he would enjoy the work. He started his new job at the same time that I was retiring. He stayed in the new city on weekdays and came home with bottles on Friday nights. From Monday to Friday I had time for myself – I went to the gym, enjoyed outdoor activities, met my friends and grandchildren—I was happy, and no one blamed me for it. Then I started hearing nasty news about my husband’s behavior in his new job – he had come to work drunk during the probation period. As a result, his employment was terminated, and he returned home.

The next two weeks were challenging for both my husband and me. My Higher Power gave me the strength to cope alongside my husband when I was helping him to survive with both physical and mental crises. I held hands, spoke encouragingly, made good food, played his favorite music, watched the nights, and did everything to help him to cope with the disappointment. Why did I do all this? I still love him. However, the situation turned out not be as bad as we thought. Even though his dream of the new position failed, his former employer welcomed him back, even though they knew about the alcohol problem. After two weeks he started again in his previous job. It was around this time that Covid-19 escalated, and the authorities suggested remote working. Another challenging period for us was coming.

Although my husband is conscientious about the work and he had not been drinking during working hours, this changed when he was working remotely at home. It was too easy to hide in Teams and Skype meetings when no video connection was required. He has always been good at covering his drunkenness and has managed to lie to his colleagues—especially in phone conversations. I forgot myself when he appeared

in the middle of the workday stumbling from his room, holding onto the door frames and walls. That was the moment that I decided I would inform his superior immediately. I grabbed the phone and called his superior and told him that my husband is drinking during the workday and is no longer able to work. Why did I do this instead of leaving the problem to his Higher Power? Once again, after 16 years of Al-Anon, I was trying to control alcoholism. As a result of my call, my husband was referred to an occupational health substance abuse program.

What has happened at home and between us after my call? My husband became angry with me and began shouting at me. In Al-Anon I have learned that the words cannot hurt me, but this time I was afraid of his behavior. For the first time during our marriage, I arranged a place where I could go if I noticed a threat of violence. I tried to justify my call to myself—I just had to do something. In my own work as a superior, I managed to deal with similar alcoholic cases and the results were good. I thought that we would end up with a positive solution. Once again, I have decided not to intervene. If he loses his job because of drinking I am not the person who is responsible for it. I must constantly remind myself that I cannot control and prevent him from drinking. The only thing for which I am responsible is my own well-being and progress in the Al-Anon program.

I have often heard the question from my siblings: “why do you not leave him and buy a flat for yourself?” I have thought of doing it many times. Many things would get easier if I no longer had to face the problems caused by the drinking and the aggravation of alcoholism. My Higher Power brought us together about 20 years ago and I have had so many pleasant memories. Living with him has taught me a lot and forced me to change both my actions and attitudes. I had not previously recognized that I was controlling others. I have a hard job ahead of me to get rid of that fault. In my childhood, there was no arguing or shouting and the atmosphere was pleasant. My husband uses swearwords, humiliates me and my sons, and screams a lot. That lovely conversational “kitten” has turned into a “roaring tiger” in our living room. Earlier I was afraid because I was not used to shouting, now I realize that by shouting he is unleashing his own disappointments. I can choose to do something else and learn to understand myself first. To me, working on the Fourth Step has been the most

difficult part of the Al-Anon program and I still have a lot to do. While facing my own shortcomings, I will have the chance to also recognize my good qualities. Hopefully, I will be able to use these constructive qualities to eliminate the faults.

Al-Anon has become part of my everyday life. According to the *Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual* (P-24/27) the Twelve Steps suggest acceptance of four primary ideas:

1. We are powerless over the problem of alcoholism. If I can honestly accept this truth, it brings me a feeling of release and hope. I can turn my full attention to bringing my life into order. I can move toward spiritual growth and the comfort and peace that can be gained from the program.
2. We can turn our lives over to a power greater than ourselves. When my well-meant aid to the alcoholic has ended in failure, and my own life has become unmanageable, I realize that I cannot deal with my problem objectively and perhaps, not even sanely. In Al-Anon I have found a Power greater than myself which can direct my life into quiet, useful channels.
3. We need to change both our attitude and our actions. When I become willing to admit my defects, I begin to see how much of my thinking is distorted. I realize how unwise some of my actions have been, how unloving many of my attitudes. I try to recognize and correct these faults.
4. We keep Al-Anon’s gifts by sharing them with others. This sharing of gifts makes Al-Anon the vital, forward-reaching fellowship it is. Our great obligation is to those still in need. Leading another person from despair to hope and love, brings comfort to both the giver and the receiver. Let me always be willing to lead a newcomer by the hand and enlighten them to the latent courage and confidence that exists in every one of us.

In the end I would like to say that when we were in love, we were so close together that a drop of water would not have been able to pass between us. As the relationship progressed, the amount of water flowing between us first grew into a beck, where water flowed

in places calmly and occasionally swirling around the rocks. The situation was still good, and both could sometimes jump from rock to rock and reach through to the other. Walk some distance on the same side of the beck and then jump back to the other side. Gradually, the beck has grown into a river with rapids and waterfalls. However, the river is still so narrow that our hands can reach over it and come together. Recent events—my own intervention in his drinking, and my notification to his superior—have further increased the width of the river. Our hands are no longer close enough to touch. I have shown this vision to my husband, and asked him to tell me how he can see the river narrowing, and how we can come closer to each other again. I also express this wish in my prayers to my Higher Power and hope that the river will not turn into a lake, a sea, and eventually an ocean. We still live under the same roof and so I would like to continue.

Thank you all for giving me the chance to share my story with you!



## CLOSING

As I write this, I am filled with overwhelming gratitude for the opportunity to serve as the Chairperson of this IAGSM. Who would have thought that the fact that I love someone with a drinking problem would have put me in a position that has put me in touch with others from all over the world who share similar circumstances? I never want to forget that it is really that simple. That is why we are here.

This IAGSM will always be special in the way it was conducted. I feel we have practiced our universal principles of our program such as love, understanding, respect, courage, trust, patience and many others with the perfect 20|20 vision of our Higher Power. Although we may not always agree and we certainly have differing opinions, I feel all our discussions have been productive and inspiring. I hope everyone feels they are taking with them new ideas to share with your members. This new format may have been a struggle for some (myself included). I feel we have accomplished the goal of the IAGSM which is “to share the experience of Al-Anon national services around the world through its Delegates” (*Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual* 2018-2021 v2, p.77). Because of this format I believe we have been able to share expanded experience as two new structures have joined us (welcome again to our newest members Nicaragua and Slovenia).

After the close of this IAGSM, an evaluation form will be available in the 2020 IAGSM community. Please take a few minutes to complete this. Your input will help us make improvements in future meetings.

Nothing this amazing happens without a lot of work. I would like to personally thank my Co-Chair Diane B. for sharing in the Chair duties, Yadi McCoy (non-member) who worked tirelessly to help make sure the technical aspects of this IAGSM worked flawlessly, Kerri K. who basically has committed the last couple weeks of her life to make sure this event went as smoothly as possible, and the rest of the International Coordination Committee who put this forum together in record time after having to adjust the original plans. You have all done amazing jobs and are greatly appreciated.

Finally, I would like to thank the Delegates. Without your contributions and dedication to this process, no new knowledge would be shared and we could not grow. Whether you prepared a workshop, shared as a speaker, shared the serenity prayer, or contributed to

the discussions, your perspective and ideas are what makes this a vibrant, growing experience.

I would like to close with one of my favorite quotes from Al-Anon's Cofounder Lois W. from her talk to the 1987 World Service Conference *Summary*, p.1: “Anybody can start something, but carrying it out is the real challenge. And all the rest of you are doing that job. You're all founders in your own right, carrying the message.” Thank you, all of you, for carrying the message.



A popular feature of the 2020 IAGSM was the daily trivia questions posed by Jean and Diane. Many of the Delegates could answer quite a few of them. Now you can test your knowledge too!

## Questions

1 How many IAGSMs have there been?

2 Where was the first IAGSM held?

3 What was the original name of the IAGSM?

4 In what year was the first IAGSM held outside of the United States?

5 What was the theme of the first IAGSM?

6 At the first IAGSM, what was each Delegate given at the opening dinner?



**Answers**

1. 20 • 2. The first IAGSM was held in New Orleans, Louisiana in the United States. • 3. It was called the General Services Meeting (members voted at the first meeting to change the name to the International Al-Anon General Services Meeting [IAGSM]). • 4. The first IAGSM held outside of the United States was held in London in 1988. • 5. "Joy in World Unity" • 6. Each Delegate was given a commemorative pen set.