

WE AGNOSTICS - INTERGROUP PRESENTATION

My name is Dave, and I'm an alcoholic. I have been given this opportunity to tell you a little bit about an AA meeting called We Agnostics, which, since July 8, 2013, has been meeting on Mondays at 5:30 p.m. at 711 St. Mary's Road in Lafayette.

The reason I am doing this is because this group, Intergroup as a whole, after discussion in all of your individual groups, is going to be asked to vote as to whether or not the We Agnostics Meeting should be included on the Contra Costa Meeting Schedule.

I am doing this presentation from a prepared text because our We Agnostics Group wanted to make sure that what I say to you tonight is consistent with what the group wanted me to say. Further, I have made copies of this presentation and I will hand those out so that you will be able to tell your groups precisely what I said. In addition to the copy of this talk, I have also attached a Grapevine article from 2010 entitled "Spirituality and 'God-Talk'" which was written by Reverend Ward Ewing who is an Episcopal Priest and at the time he wrote the article he was the Chair of AA's General Service Board and a longtime non-alcoholic trustee of the General Service Board. While I commend the article to your own reading and interpretation, he seems to be expressing the opinion that traditional religious aspects of AA are hurting AA's chances of helping non religious alcoholics.

When I am done, I will answer any of your questions to the best of my ability. If I don't have an answer to any questions, I will be happy to give any of you my email address and I'm sure

our group can satisfactorily resolve any questions you may have. If you would like me or any other member of our group to come to your meeting and answer questions we will be happy to do that as well.

Back to the group itself. In August 2013, the We Agnostics group elected a General Service Representative who made contact with GSO in New York, advised GSO of the existence of the meeting, requested formal recognition and that recognition was granted. Our Group Service Number with the General Service Office of Alcoholics Anonymous is 709678-06-08. Since the beginning, our General Service Representative has regularly attended GSR meetings locally.

We collect “7th Tradition” money by passing a basket. As most of you know the suggested distribution of that money is 70% to the Central Office here in Walnut Creek, 20% to New York, 5% to CNCA and 5% to District 8. If a local group is not listed in the Contra Costa list of meetings, it is not recognized by our Central Office and donations from any such group are not accepted. As a result, our group voted early on to distribute collections 60% to New York and 20% each to CNCA and District 8.

As for the “Pink Can” the address where we meet is the Little League Hut and the Pink Cans in that building are shared by all of the fourteen or so weekly meetings in that building and one person, not of our group, is charged with collecting and distributing that money.

Before each meeting the following “format” is read:

Good evening everyone. Welcome to the We Agnostics group of Alcoholics Anonymous. My name is _____ and I am your secretary. This is an open meeting of A.A. The stories you hear are told in confidence. They should not be repeated outside this meeting. This group maintains a tradition of free expression. We neither oppose nor endorse any particular religious or philosophical point of view. We encourage everyone to follow whatever path is most consistent with their own background, experiences and personal beliefs.

If you are new to this meeting, we would like to get to know you. Usually, members identify themselves by their first name only. Is there anyone attending their first, second or third A.A. meeting that would like to introduce themselves?

Anyone in their first 30 days of sobriety?

Anyone from outside the area or at this meeting for the first time?

Are there any A.A. birthdays this week?

Are there any A.A. related announcements?

I have asked _____ to read our opening excerpt from Chapter 3 of the big book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*.

OPENING READING

From Chapter 3 "More About Alcoholism"

We alcoholics are men and women who have lost the ability to control our drinking. We know that no real alcoholic ever recovers control. All of us felt at times that we were regaining

control, but such intervals - usually brief – were inevitably followed by still less control, which led in time to pitiful and incomprehensible demoralization. We are convinced that alcoholics of our type are in the grips of a progressive illness. Over any considerable period we get worse, never better.

We are like people who have lost their legs; they never grow new ones. Neither does there appear to be any kind of treatment which will make alcoholics of our kind like other people. We have tried every imaginable remedy. In some instances there has been brief recovery, followed always by still worse relapse. Physicians who are familiar with alcoholism agree there is no such thing as making a normal drinker out of an alcoholic. Science may one day accomplish this but it hasn't done so yet.

Despite all we can say, many who are real alcoholics are not going to believe they are in that class. By every form of self-deception and experimentation, they will try to prove themselves exceptions to the rule, therefore nonalcoholic. If anyone who is showing inability to control their drinking can do the right-about-face and drink normally, our hats are off to them. Heaven knows, we have tried hard enough and long enough to drink like other people!

- adapted from *Alcoholics Anonymous, 4th Edition, pp 30-31*

(gender specific language changed to gender neutral language)

The format of this meeting is for the secretary or another member to speak briefly or share something on a topic relevant to recovery from alcoholism. This is followed by open discussion. No one will be called on. We do allow crosstalk but not interruptions.

We will now observe our 7th tradition. There are no dues or fees for A.A. membership. The money collected in the basket is used to pay the expenses of this meeting and to support AA General Services. The H&I pink can is passed separately. H&I donations are used to provide literature for people in hospitals and institutions who would otherwise not have access to it.

I have asked _____ to read our closing excerpt from Chapter 5 of the big book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*.

CLOSING READING

From Chapter 5 "Into Action"

And we have ceased fighting anything or anyone – even alcohol. For by this time sanity will have returned. We will seldom be interested in liquor. If tempted, we recoil from it as from a hot flame. We react sanely and normally, and we find that this has happened automatically. We will see that our new attitude toward liquor has been given us without any thought or effort on our part. It just comes! That is the miracle of it. We are not fighting it, neither are we avoiding temptation. We feel as

though we had been placed in a position of neutrality – safe and protected. We have not even sworn off. Instead the problem has been removed. It does not exist for us. We are neither cocky nor are we afraid. That is our experience. This is how we react so long as we keep in fit spiritual condition.

- *Alcoholics Anonymous, 4th Edition, p 85*

For those who would like to join us we will now close the meeting by reciting the First Tradition of Alcoholics Anonymous: *“Our common welfare should come first, personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity.”*

So that is our format. As we all know, AA’s 5th Tradition states: “Each group has but one primary purpose - to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.” There were quite a few of us at about the same time that got to thinking that a “We Agnostics” meeting was a good idea. Each of us has our own story, but since I was chosen as the “presenter” tonight I will share a bit of my experience.

I had my last drink on February 28, 1984. As a kid, I had gone to church on and off but didn’t really have a strong religious background. I jumped into AA with both feet, went to a thousand meetings in my first two years and still regularly attend six meetings a week. There has never been a period in my sober life where I wasn’t extremely involved in AA. I have a regular step meeting I go to, I sponsor men, I have been a GSR and an IGR,

have done H&I work in treatment facilities and in maximum security prisons. I have contributed articles to the Grapevine. I have started meetings, I have secretaried meetings, I have been coffee guy, treasurer, grocery boy and greeter. I met my sponsor when I was 35 days sober and for 19 years thereafter he and I spent hundreds and hundreds of hours together. He died on January 13, 2003, and he remains the greatest human being I ever met.

When I first got sober despite what some of the literature said and despite what people told me, it seemed to me that in order to be a "real" member of AA I was ultimately going to have to believe in a Judao Christian God. I prayed, I meditated, I always had a prayer book with me, I tried going to church but ultimately, I realized I just couldn't get my arms around any kind of higher power or God. I knew my sobriety was not a result of my doing. I knew that a miracle had happened to me. I knew that I had been graced and that the fact I was sober had absolutely nothing to do with anything I did, anything I deserved or anything I didn't deserve.

Once I was about six months sober, I realized that the Judao Christian God thing was not working. For lack of a better term, I call myself a non believer . . . don't ask me what that means because I can't tell you . . . other words don't seem to fit . . . atheist, no, agnostic, no, religious guy, no . . .

I have been to thousands of meetings in hundreds of places. I listen carefully and I know that my experience is not unique. There are many, many people who just can't seem to get the

religious thing. Ultimately, many of those do get their arms around it, but many of them do not.

We have all heard new people say that the religious thing is a turn off. When you couple that with the fact that the vast majority of people get here before they're ready to quit drinking it makes things extremely difficult. They've tried AA, they think it's religious so when they're perhaps a little closer to their bottom they think they can't come back so they get stuck and I am convinced that a lot of people that could get sober in AA don't because they don't come back.

We often talk in AA about sharing our experience, strength and hope. My sponsor used to say "We share our experience and thereby our strength and hope." In other words, the sharing of our stories with one another necessarily shares our strength and hope.

I don't know how many of you were there, but last March at the big speaker meeting in Danville, Nancy Mack was the speaker. Nancy is here tonight because I asked her to be here and those of you that know her well, know that she does stuff like that. For years I have said that if you want to know what a wonderfully devoted AA member does, just follow Nancy around for a week or so and take notes. At one specific meeting when I was less than a year sober she spoke, something nearly inexplicable happened and my life was changed. She has been a hero of mine ever since.

At any rate, on that Saturday she shared her experience and

thereby her strength and hope. Nancy is an agnostic and that night she talked of that fact unapologetically and with clarity and directness. There was no rancor, no anger, just dignity and beauty. I'm pretty sure that for most everyone in attendance, it was a spectacular night. I know her talk was recorded so for any of you that missed her that night I strongly suggest that you get a copy of that talk and listen to it. I suspect it is available through the Central Office website and if not I will be happy to put you in touch with whoever it is that records the Danville talks.

Our meeting has been in existence for more than 15 months. Our regular attendance is between 25 and 35 people. I have been to most all of the meetings since we started and we have welcomed many people who express great appreciation that our meeting exists. At every one of the meetings I have attended more than 50% of the people in attendance have been sober for more than 10 years. We think we fill a need and we think we offer something that is not readily available. Our meeting certainly is not for all people, but no meeting anywhere is for all people. We have had our fair share of sub optimal meetings but we have also had very wonderful and moving meetings.

I'm not absolutely sure why it is that our meeting has not yet been listed. I suspect it is because it would appear that some members of AA hold to the notion that without God or a Higher Power a meeting really isn't an AA meeting. I think that certainly is a legitimate belief on a personal level, but in the larger scheme of things we believe our meeting is indeed a legitimate meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Bill Wilson, our co-founder, used the Grapevine to advance his ideas that we needed the 12 Traditions in addition to the twelve steps. He was a prolific contributor to that Magazine always, but particularly in the 1940's and early 50's when he was trying to sell the Traditions. In the July 1946 Grapevine in an article entitled "Anarchy Melts" he said the following:

"In fact, our Tradition carries the principle of independence for the individual to such an apparently fantastic length that, so long as there is the slightest interest in sobriety, the most unmoral, the most anti-social, the most critical alcoholic may gather about him a few kindred spirits and announce to us that a new Alcoholics Anonymous Group has been formed. Anti-God, anti-medicine, anti-our Recovery Program, even anti-each other—these rampant individuals are still an A.A. Group if they think so!"

Later, after the Traditions were adopted, when AA was much more accepted and after it had received great acclaim, in my opinion, he repeated the same message, but by this time he realized that reaching out to new people, a la our 5th Tradition, was critical. In a 1965 Grapevine article entitled "Responsibility is our Theme" Bill Wilson wrote:

"Newcomers are approaching AA at the rate of tens of thousands yearly. They represent almost every belief and attitude imaginable. We have atheists and agnostics. We have people of nearly every race, culture and religion. In AA we are supposed to be bound together in the kinship of a common suffering. Consequently, the full individual liberty to practice any creed or principle or therapy whatever should be a first consideration for

us all. Let us not, therefore, pressure anyone with our individual or even our collective views. Let us instead accord each other the respect and love that is due to every human being as he tries to make his way toward the light. Let us always try to be inclusive rather than exclusive; let us remember that each alcoholic among us is a member of AA, so long as he or she so declares.”

So there you have it. We are an AA meeting, of that there can be no doubt. We are asking you to allow our meeting to be listed in the Contra Costa Meeting Schedule. We believe that such listing would help us and would help other alcoholics find us and give them a chance to recover from this disease.