

Steering Committee Statement on the choice of Reverend Ward Ewing as a Keynote Speaker

The AA program teaches us to face our fears in order to work through them. As we have worked to spread the word about the convention we have discovered an overwhelming fear many WAFts have with respect to traditional AAers. For many it is a fear born out of harassment, isolation and god bullying which has caused many WAFts to feel the entire AA world is against them. This is just not true. Many AAers are committed to saving all alcoholics and are not aware of the damage they are doing to non-believers when non-believers leave the rooms and don't return. The fact is we have many friends inside and outside of the program and as a fellowship we need to embrace them and not allow our fears to overrun us.

The Steering Committee did not seek out Ward Ewing as a keynote speaker. From the beginning we have asked the fellowship for suggestions as to who should be the keynote speakers as was stated in our August 31st meeting announcement:

Do you know of notable speakers you would like to hear at the convention, whose stories reflect those of the WAFt fellowship or are sensitive to the unity concept in AA's fellowship? Someone who can speak to the theme of the convention, "Many Paths to Recovery?" Can you also provide contact information for those individuals? We are very aware of the anonymity issue, so please know that we will respect that in the way of AA traditions.

In private emails and personal conversations we constantly heard the Reverend's name. Thomas B. of Seaside, Oregon, who recently formed a group in Portland, suggested Reverend Ewing. He wrote: Reverend Ewing "strongly advocates that AA cannot become religiously dogmatic and ritualized. He has stated he was 'shocked' when the San Antonio World Conference in 2010 was closed with the Lord's Prayer." Sasha, founder of the Happy Heathens group in Colorado Springs, Colorado, wrote and described the Reverend's talk at Unity Day 2011 as "very inspiring and heart-warming talk - on (the) need for AA to be in Unity rather than Uniformity." Joe C., the webmaster of [Rebellion Dogs Publishing](#) and one of the founders of Beyond Belief in Toronto, Canada, recommended Ward Ewing as a speaker whom he knows personally and has interviewed several times. Curtis C. in Kalamazoo, Michigan, the founder of the [Atheist AA Google Group](#), told me this story and would later rewrite it for his google group:

I had the chance to hear Ward Ewing blast some 'in your face Christians' at a Forum. ... The local group working the registrations desk are avowed Christians. So they wore their printed T-shirts with God slogans on them, and many people, not knowing the men were local, thought they had come from New York--with these T-shirts! One man got up to complain that he didn't like the 'in-your-face' religion at the forum, that if he wanted it, he would go to a religious meeting or to church. Ewing stood up and said he didn't like to see it either, that it bothered him, that such attitudes had no place in a 'spiritual' AA--but he admitted that every AA group has the right to be wrong.

Initially there was concern that people might take issue with Mr. Ewing's title of Reverend. Yet in looking for speakers and listening to others we kept hearing people with long time sobriety who are also atheist

/ agnostic / freethinkers within AA endorse Reverend Ewing. It was clear to us that the fellowship wanted Ewing to speak.

When we announced our first keynote speaker Marya H. who is an open atheist, accomplished author and educator, people were upset because they thought Marya H. broke her anonymity in one of her books for the sake of her career. There were demands on the Steering Committee to uninvite her. We were reluctant to do this but believed it was important to hear peoples' concerns. The people who were most concerned about Marya H., approached Reverend Ewing to ask his opinion. The Reverend's response was this:

I can see why she is an appropriate speaker for this Convention. At least online I did not find any reference to AA – 12 Steps, but not AA directly... One thing I have learned in my association with the Fellowship is to trust the group conscience. As you know, it takes time and lots of discussion to reach an informed decision, and decisions about anonymity must be made in the context of Traditions 4 and 5. So, whatever you decide I believe it will be the right decision for this Conference at this time, and I will be honored to participate in the Conference with any other speakers you invite. Sorry I cannot be of more help, but I really do trust the planning committee, and I know you will work this out.

Sincerely, Ward

Reverend Ewing's humility and faith in the WAFT fellowship and his gratefulness to be asked to be a part of this convention were inspiring. Since the announcement of Ewing as a keynote speaker there have been responses like these:

We are real AA. Agnostics and atheists in AA can't be the only ones saying we are a part of and not separate from AA. Choosing Reverend Ewing as a speaker can reinforce that reality.

Roger C. of [AA Agnostica](#)

or

Having Reverend Ewing, as former member of GSO speak, gives us credibility.

Rich, co-founder of the [Maui We Agnostics Meetings](#)

We are committed to hearing the voices of other WAFTs even if we don't agree with what is being said. Our decision to ask Reverend Ewing to speak was based on listening to the fellowship. Not everyone will agree with our decisions; yet if we tried to please everyone there would be no convention. We believe that these debates demonstrate in real terms that there are "Many Paths to Recovery."

In the end our only goal is "to assure suffering alcoholics that they can find sobriety in AA without having to accept anyone else's beliefs or deny their own."

WAFT IAAC STEERING COMMITTEE

Pam W.

Jonathon G.

Dorothy H.