

GSO Area 03 Delegate,  
re: upcoming GSO conference  
From GSR John R, Group # 714321

Dear Kathy,

First of all, thank you for your service. I'm not sure if we have met, though I did serve the Area 03 committee back in the early 90s and as a GSR from the late 80s in Sedona, so perhaps we have met if you were in service at Area at that time.

Since I am not able to attend the pre-conference Area 03 assembly in April, I am writing on behalf of the *Freethinkers Living Sober Group* in Cottonwood to express a concern we would like addressed by the GSO Conference. While this is a relatively new group (since last November), most of the members are long-term sober folks (7 or 8 of whom are over 30 years sober, one with 54 years) who've been struggling with the ever-increasing rigidity and religiosity of AA. Most of our core group of about 14 members consider themselves non-theistic, agnostic, or atheist, though some of us are believers in some form of "God." We've started this new group with two meetings a week with the following format introduction:

*This weekly meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous attempts to maintain a tradition of free expression and conduct a meeting where alcoholics may feel free to express any doubts or disbeliefs they may have, and to share their own personal form of spiritual experience, their search for it, or their rejection of it. We do not endorse or oppose any form of religion or atheism. Our only wish is to assure suffering alcoholics that they can find sobriety in A.A. without having to accept anyone else's belief or having to deny their own.*

It is our group conscience that a pamphlet be published addressing the reality of agnostics and atheists finding and maintaining sobriety in AA.

It is difficult to imagine how many alcoholics may have been turned away by the insistence by many that the newcomer must accept a "God" to become sober. I feel so fortunate that there were agnostics and atheists in AA when I got sober in 1981 who assured me that I needn't have any particular belief in anything for this process to work for me; you see, I had already been "working for God" when I got to AA! So, I got here a drunk who believed in and served God. Therefore, if only God could get me sober, I reasoned, it must have been some "moral failure" or deep psychological defect that prevented me from finding sobriety. Happily for me, I was persuaded by AA that such was not the case; alcoholism is a physiological disease that manifests in many psychological/spiritual/physical problems, rather than a moral failing. It seems to me that the tone and open-mindedness that once typified AA meetings back then has been slowly slipping away to form of rigidity and AA "fundamentalism" that doesn't seem beneficial to the still sick and suffering alcoholic or in the spirit of our foundational principles. As we read on page 19 of the BB:

*...his whole deportment shouts at the new prospect that he is a man with a real answer, that he has no attitude of Holier Than Thou, nothing whatever except the sincere desire to be helpful; that there are no fees to pay, no axes to grind, no people to please, no lectures to be endured - these are the conditions we have found most effective.*

We at Freethinkers Living Sober are very disappointed in the fact that for nearly 40 years (since the initial recommendation by Trustee Ed S. for a pamphlet in 1976) the conference and the literature committee have consistently ignored, voted down, or passed over for "study" the creation of a pamphlet for the Agnostic and/or Atheist. We found some encouragement in the report that the PRAASA conference had a delegate acknowledge that the "*Many Paths*" pamphlet falls far short of that mark in this regard. However, in the November 2014 Quarterly Report from GSO, the trustees literature committee decided merely to "open a file" for input about a pamphlet by and for agnostics and atheists who have stayed sober for decades. Surely, a four decades old file should be easily compiled from the AA archives, since this issue goes all the way back many more decades to Jim Burwell and Hank Parkhurst. In addition, an even cursory reading of the historical articles at the [AA Agnostica](#) web site would make clear the issues involved and the traditions and historical support (not to mention *need*) for such a pamphlet.

AA has been able to include LGBT, Black, Native American, and many other sub-groups under its umbrella via publications, so why not include the experience, strength and hope of Agnostics and Atheists? It might go a long way to open the minds of some "AA fundamentalists" who insist that anyone who doesn't accept "God" is doomed to an alcoholic death or, if they stay sober, they are not real alcoholics! Believe it or not, these are comments many of us have heard over and over again.

We therefore make this appeal to you as our delegate to assist us in making the case to the conference, the trustees, and to those in our area for inclusion of non-theists, atheists, and agnostics as full members of AA, not merely those who might someday "get it" (as the Chapter "We Agnostics" seems to suggest).

We are aware that this issue is not on the agenda for the upcoming conference, but we wanted to make you aware that at least some of your constituents are concerned and want this issue to be addressed sooner rather than later. Thank you for your kind consideration in this matter, and for your service to Alcoholics Anonymous. Please feel free to contact me at any time about this or any other matter you may wish to discuss.

John R  
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