Below is the introduction to a pamphlet approved in 2014 by the AA General Service Conference, “Many Paths to Spirituality,” which is read aloud at many secular meetings of AA:

AA— a kinship of common suffering

“Newcomers are approaching AA at the rate 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 a kinship of 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.”

—Bill W. (AA Grapevine, 1961)
What is a “secular” meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous?

Many dictionaries define the word “secular” as “not religious.”

A secular meeting of AA is almost identical to every other AA meeting except the meeting format is slightly different. Like most other AA meetings, secular AA meetings begin with a reading of the AA Preamble which assures everyone that AA is not allied with any religious sect or denomination.

Because secular AA meetings are not religious, no one is asked to engage in any religious practices such as reciting prayers. This includes the Serenity Prayer and The Lord’s Prayer which comes directly from the Christian Bible.

As part of the meeting format, no one proclaims: “there is One who has all power — that One is God. May you find Him now! Half-measures availed us nothing.”

That means secular AA meetings don’t begin with a reading of a portion of Chapter Five of the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous, “How It Works.” Instead, other parts of the Big Book are read aloud.

Members of secular AA groups are encouraged to work the same Twelve Steps as everyone else in AA. And they work AA’s suggested program of recovery in exactly the same way as everyone else — imperfectly.

Other elements of secular AA meetings are the same as most other AA meetings: AA-related announcements, recognition of anniversaries, newcomers and visitors, and a 7th Tradition collection. Secular AA groups observe the same Twelve Traditions as any other AA group.

Secular meetings of AA frequently “close in the usual manner” with the AA Responsibility Declaration. This is the only recitation specifically named in the AA General Service Conference-approved pamphlet “The AA Group” as a recommended way to close any AA meeting.

In 2018, the AA Grapevine published its first-ever book devoted entirely to stories by secular members of AA.

The AA General Service Conference in 2018 approved AA’s first-ever pamphlet focusing exclusively on the experience, strength and hope of atheists and agnostics in Alcoholics Anonymous.

Many secular members of AA consider themselves to be agnostics, atheists, free-thinkers, secular humanists, or otherwise unconventional in the way they think about the role of spirituality or a higher power in their sobriety. Secular members of AA often feel more free to share their authentic experience, strength and hope at secular meetings of AA.

Anyone with a desire to stop drinking is welcome to attend secular meetings of AA and join a secular AA group.

Secular AA groups are recognized by the AA General Service Office. Secular AA is one of the fastest growing movements within Alcoholics Anonymous worldwide.