

NEW ATTITUDES, The NORVANA Newsletter

September 2009

From the Editor: Tons of submissions this month, crammed in as many as I could, some will run next month. .

Short quiz (answers on p. 4):

1. When and where was the first NA World Convention?
2. When and where is the next WCNA?

More on Unity

Recently we read an article in "New Attitudes" about the topic of *unity*, ("Special Interest Meetings"-Aug 2009) and it made me think of other things we may be doing that dilutes our (group) message to people new in recovery. I've begun to see a trend within some of the meetings that I have attended and I feel compelled to write about it in an effort to provoke thought.

I've noticed some group consciousnesses have elected to end they're meetings with the Christian prayer commonly referred to as, "The Lord's Prayer". While I find the practice personally offensive (I'm Jewish), I'm also enabled within my personal (multiple year) recovery to simply choose other meetings to go to that do not follow this practice. Actually our long un-spoken tradition to break with other twelve-step programs of recovery, omitting the Lords Prayer at the end of our meetings was one of the reasons that attracted me to making NA my primary and only means of recovery.

That said I'm increasingly concerned that many groups/meetings have been adopting this prayer as it may dilute the group's message of recovery for those **new** to Narcotics Anonymous. Even a semblance of lending the NA name, either directly or indirectly, may send a message to new addicts in recovery that NA is *by proxy* a religious rather than a spiritual program. We must ask ourselves, "Does saying this prayer help our *group* to carry the message of recovery or does it (albeit indirectly) promote Christianity and possibly offend those new to recovery thereby giving them an easy excuse not to try the NA way?" If the latter is so (even remotely), then the *group* has failed in its primary purpose, *carrying the message of recovery*. Naturally whatever an *individual* member has chosen as they're Higher Power is none of NA's concern, however as a group we must all be concerned when the groups primary purpose is even remotely endangered.

Would it not be more unifying if the "Third Step Prayer" were more widely used? We created it. It's developed for addicts in recovery, by addicts in recovery. And best of all it's so vague that I can't imagine how it could be offensive to anyone, nor be construed as aligned with any particular religion. Since the matter does seem to affect NA as a whole (Tradition 4-"Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or NA as a whole") I feel we should begin a dialog of open discussion both within our group consciousnesses and at the level of the Area Service Committee. I would invite and challenge the *individual* group consciousnesses to re-visit the following Traditions in reference to this practice:

Tradition 6. "An NA group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the NA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property or prestige divert us from our primary purpose."

Tradition 1. "Our common welfare should come first: personal recovery depends on NA Unity."

I also challenge the *Area Service Committee/s* to open a dialog at the level of Area Service to be creative in addressing this potentially dangerous practice in a way non-intrusive to the various individual groups. Perhaps creating a new annotation for the area's meeting list with "**LP**" (Lords Prayer) for groups who have elected to include this prayer as part of their individual group's tradition? In this way, people new to NA would have an opportunity to be fore warned about each group's independent tradition to have adopted this Christian prayer and for any others who would otherwise be unaware or offended, an opportunity to choose another meeting without having wasted time actually going to the particular meeting having adopted the prayer. Finally I would remind us all to place principles over personalities, as I know my concern will no doubt prompt controversy. While I'm aware that some members embrace Christianity and within the context of Christianity there is a tradition of proselytizing, NA is not the place for it, either in-directly or directly. Remember-these Traditions are not negotiable.

(Anonymous)

NEW ATTITUDES, page 2, September 2009

Special Interest Meetings and Womens Meetings

As was pointed out in last month's issue, there are "special interest" groups in our area. There has been a woman's meeting in this area since the spring of 1985. It was called The Women's Network and that's exactly what it was, a network – the meeting changed its name to Women's Choice in 1990 and I might add that it has had a GSR and made donations to the ASC on a regular basis for 24 years. I do not believe that special interest groups are the biggest or most frightening issue that this area faces today. The Women's Network was started when NORVANA was a small cohesive fellowship - there were fewer meetings and fewer addicts seeking recovery and yet a minimum of 90% of the meetings had GSRs at every ASC meeting and all of their service positions filled. If a GSR didn't show up, more than one person was at the "absent" meeting just to make sure everything was alright. Every service committee was full of volunteers, 12 step lists existed at every meeting and within every sub-committee, we had our own helpline, the newsletter was 8 pages with much smaller print – why was it different "back in the day"? Because our sponsors told us to do service work, it was a part of recovery – where the devil did that message go? At the August ASC we had 28 GSRs (55%) at the beginning of the meeting and 21 (41%) by the end of the meeting and we voted on policy issues and installed newly elected Trusted Servants. All of our service committees are struggling and outright begging for support - what does that tell you might be a BIG, IMPORTANT issue to consider bringing up? I think that we have issues facing this area that might warrant consideration long before we get all wound up about those special interest groups – like groups that have been around for a long time but haven't had a GSR at the ASC for years, meetings that show up to buy literature and don't stay for the ASC, meetings that use "NA money" to buy cakes and balloons but rarely, if ever, donate to the ASC, meetings that can't fill any service positions. This is what I know, not what I think or believe, what I know - NA works. My experience is that we lead by example. When people ask me how I have stayed clean "for so long" my answer is the usual "don't use no matter what, sponsorship, step work and above all else is doing service work. Well into double digit recovery, I only go to 3 meetings a week on a regular basis – all three of those meetings are represented at the ASC, have all of their service positions filled, actually have a good number of people show up for their group conscious and make a donation to the ASC when possible. I serve on two sub-committees. I sponsor several women – they all are active in the service structure of NA, be it on the group, area or regional level. Again, we lead by example. How many meetings a week do you attend on a regular basis – meaning that when you aren't there someone calls to find out why not. Do those meetings have all of their service positions filled? Are they represented at the ASC? Do they have an "active" group conscious core? Do they make a donation to the ASC whenever possible? Do you support any of NORVANA's sub-committees? How many people do you sponsor? Are they involved in NA service work? What is the message that you carry? What is the message you are passing on?

The first question might be why do so many women feel the need for a "woman's meeting"? I don't have the answer to that all I do have is my experience so I will share that as best I can. When I arrived in the rooms of Narcotics Anonymous I did not have women friends. I had no use for women and I knew how to use men. A very wise sponsor suggested that I go to the Women's Network (formed in 1985 and changed names in 1990 becoming Women's Choice). She told me that the men might be the first attraction that got me through the doors of NA but that the women would be the ones who kept me in the rooms. How true that was and still is for all the generations that have followed. Our meeting is focused on recovery in Narcotics Anonymous. We don't talk about "women's issues" if that's what you think or imagine. We talk about recovery – our meeting pulls a spiritual principle out of a bag and that's our topic for the meeting – there is no whining, woe is me story telling that seems so prevalent in many meetings. The women in our meeting are black and white, old and young, professionals and "blue collar" and there is no separation, no division and no label other than addict. It is women in recovery sharing their strength, hope and experience. That is the SHE of the program. Many women, young and old alike, come into our rooms without much self esteem, they are bruised and battered, physically, emotionally and spiritually. Many have sought love and validation from inappropriate people and places. To be honest, men can be a real distraction – "dick is dope" as one of the old timers has often said. So here they are, in a room that is filled half with enemies (women) and half with a new assortment of drugs (men). They are lost, scared, confused and hungry for someone to tell them they are okay in a language they understand. The parking lot is where these women end up stuck in the crosshairs of some men with appreciable time as well as those that are new. The women's meetings give them a break from the "drug dealers" that have populated their lives. They come to a women's meeting and the people there truly want nothing from them other than that they give themselves a chance. I have been a continuous member of that meeting for a long time and you are right, there is a lot of double digit recovery in that room – most of them came to that meeting in their early recovery at the direction of their sponsor or with a friend who found a real connection with the women there. We're addicts, we don't go back unless the dope is good and we shy away from the dope dealer that steals our money and leaves us with baking soda. There are several questions that come to mind regarding your premise that the women with long term recovery don't attend enough meetings. To be perfectly honest, I think that a lot of long term recovering PEOPLE – men and women, black and white, whatever label you wish to use, do not attend as many meetings as they once did. Why is it that PEOPLE with long term recovery don't find the meetings you are talking about interesting or inviting? What can those meetings do to make themselves more attractive to PEOPLE with time? (Anonymous)

NEW ATTITUDES, page 3, September 2009

On Women's (and other Special Interest) Meetings

Like William C. last month, I believe that special interest meetings do not belong in NA. The rationale is pretty clear cut in our literature. "Anyone may join us, regardless of age, race, sexual identity, creed, religion or lack of religion." (What is the NA Program?) "The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop using." (Tradition 5). Let's look at the first statement. Perhaps we have spent our recovery where there were womens (and mens, and more recently other special interest) meetings, and are used to them. Well, in the history of our country, people grew up used to: slavery, women unable to vote, segregation, and (still ongoing) a lack of equal civil rights for non-heterosexual lifestyles. Eventually these things were seen as contradictory to important spiritual principles, and were/are changed. It is my hope that that will happen in our fellowship in the future. Let me put it this way: can you imagine the firestorm that Christian or Muslim meetings, or only people under the age of 25 meetings, or (my favorite) WHITE ONLY meetings would cause? It's the same principle with single gender or other special interest meetings.

OK, that's the doctrinal argument. I have a more personal story as well, from my own experience. One of the things I loved about recovery when I arrived was that for the first time in my life, I was part of something where I felt I belonged and was welcomed. My whole life prior to recovery (family, school, work, even my social life) I always felt like I never quite fit in. There were always conditions, and being human I could never meet all the conditions. Recovery was the first place that I felt like I completely belonged and was at home. As an example, for years I would time my departure from family holiday events to go straight to a meeting and restore my sense of belonging and worthiness. I have been part of the same home group for a long time. For many years, a wonderful woman (who still sponsors many women in NORVANA) was part of that home group. We got PhD's at roughly the same time, participated in group consciences together, spent time at each other's houses, even argued a few times, but she was/is a dear friend and when she moved to

Texas, I was very sad to see her go. It was a part of life, but it was a loss. Her anniversary fell shortly before Christmas, and its celebration was usually one of our best meetings of the year.

It turned out that she continued to commute weekly for several years between Texas and her job here, and would go to meetings during the week, although she was not in town on the night of my home group, and did not come there any more. But I would have gladly attended her anniversary at another meeting if the opportunity arose.

A few months after she moved away, I was at a meeting and heard during announcements that this woman would celebrate her anniversary on a date near Christmas at a women's meeting, which I cannot attend! (Ladies, don't insult my intelligence by saying "oh of course you can attend a women's meeting". We both know I would not be fully welcome there. Put it this way: would you ever consider asking me to lead a women's meeting? I didn't think so.) The one place in my life I had always felt at home – NA – now did not feel that way. I was excluded because of my sexual identity: the fact that I am a man.

While this is the incident that sticks most strongly with me, it was not a one-off event. Many weeks at meetings I hear an announcement about a woman celebrating an anniversary at a women's meeting. And every time I feel like someone has stuck a pin through my heart. I'm hearing about something in our open, inclusive fellowship that I can't attend. THIS is what the problem is with special interest meetings. THIS is why William, myself and others feel so strongly about it. As I said last month, united we stand, divided we fall, and these meetings divide us by excluding people for reasons that our literature and traditions say should NEVER take place.

Jim S.

Answers to NA quiz:

1. 1971, Southern California.
2. 2011, San Diego, California (there are unconfirmed rumors that the 2013 convention will be held in Philadelphia, PA)

NEW ATTITUDES, page 4, September 2009

Delusions

Many years ago when I first started attending NA meetings we had very little delusions about recovery. I think it may have been because the level of desperation was so high back then. There weren't any treatment centers...just a handful of detox places. What that equated to were bottoms much more severe than what I commonly see today. It was rare back then to be in a meeting and not hear someone sharing that they had AIDS and that they were going to die...soon, or some other tragedy that was truly heartbreaking. That level of desperation impelled many addicts to be much less lackadaisical about the recovery process and as a result relapses were not nearly as frequent back then as they are today.

To a degree I think that many new to recovery and with bottoms not as severe as they were in days of old have deluded themselves because they aren't quite as desperate. It's not a bad thing on the whole (having bottoms not as severe as back in the old days), so don't be under the impression I'm pointing the bony finger of an old timer...it just is what it is. With the advent of treatment centers and NA's popularity, peoples bottoms simply aren't as severe as they used to be.

So, what's the delusion? **The delusion is that you can actually get away with a relapse.**

Really really bad shit hasn't happened YET (Your Eligible Too) and as a result your not "entirely ready" or willing to "go to any lengths". Oddly enough, you don't need to *actually* experience really really bad shit to become entirely ready or willing to go to any lengths. When you hear in the meetings you attend other peoples stories, rather than relating out; relate IN and think, "that tragedy could have been me". In short, if you continue to play Russian roulette, eventually you will get a bullet.

Let's break this down at a street level. The real delusion is while your probably pretty convinced you're an addict, you think "It'll never happen to me and if it does I'll just OD". Don't be naïve. I've been around a long time and I can tell ya that its fairly rare relapses end in actual overdoses. What really happens is that someone will put a bullet in they're head and fail, thereafter living a life with very limited options. Or someone will veer off the road in a nod and kill a family of five, and then live with the guilt of having taken innocent lives (and more than likely in a prison cell). Or you will overload your heart and suffer permanent damage that affects the rest of your life. Maybe you lose a limb, or your eyesight, or you're disfigured for life. Maybe your loved one dies because you stole their meds. Maybe your baby is born mentally retarded. Will you be so lucky to romantically die with a spike in your neck? Doubtful. Don't be deluded friend. You're afflicted with addiction. Deadly, dangerous and very real. While you may have yet to have really bad shit happen...Your Eligible Too.

(Anonymous)

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NEXT NEWSLETTER:

Dating, Sex and Making Major Decisions

19%