

Alcoholics Anonymous Holds Virtual World Service Meeting – *First Time in History*

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Attention: Journalists, Producers, Editors, News Media

Subjects: Alcoholism and Addiction, Global Health and Wellness, Recovery

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Delegates representing Alcoholics Anonymous from around the world gathered via videoconference November 28-30th for the 26th World Service Meeting (WSM), hosted by the trustees of the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous in the U.S. and Canada. Because of the Coronavirus pandemic, the three day event was held virtually for the first time in its history, attended by 69 delegates from 44 countries.



Originally scheduled as a face-to-face event, numerous logistical and technical challenges had to be overcome once the shift to a virtual meeting had been determined in response to the global pandemic. Since its inauguration in 1969, the WSM has provided a continuing international forum for sharing experience and ideas on carrying the Alcoholics Anonymous message of recovery around the globe. Its success in bringing together A.A.'s far-flung service centers reflects a final vision of A.A. co-founder Bill W., who believed that there could be "one world for A.A." to assure that help would be available to suffering alcoholics, no matter where they are or what language they speak. Currently, an A.A. presence can be found in more than 180 nations worldwide with membership estimated at over two million.

Traditionally, the meeting alternates on a bi-yearly basis between New York and locations as diverse as Durban, South Africa and Cartagena, Colombia. Circumstances, however, ushered in an historic opportunity this year and, despite being multiple time zones apart, most delegates found fellowship and connection via their computer screen,

a sense that, as Toby D., a first-term delegate from Denmark, said, “We are not alone with the problems of the pandemic. You see that the feelings of the Fellowship in each particular country are felt all over the world, and it’s good to know we are trying to figure things out together.”

“This has been such a challenging year for everyone,” says Mary C., acting international desk coordinator at the A.A. General Service Office in New York, who led the team which hosted the virtual WSM. Nevertheless, she noted, “It’s especially important to communicate openly with each other and to share ways in which we can keep A.A. sustainable and available to everyone.”

Simultaneously translated in Spanish and Japanese, workshops, presentations and general sharing sessions addressed such issues as developing A.A. literature in multiple languages; the importance of women’s participation in A.A.’s service structure; and maintaining A.A.’s traditional anonymity in an age of social media. A strong focus of delegates was on the effect the pandemic has had on Alcoholics Anonymous in terms of members’ ability to meet face-to-face as well as the ability of newcomers to find and connect with A.A. In some countries, the virtual meetings that have become a staple of pandemic era A.A. are not possible due to lack of consistent Internet connectivity, creating new challenges for A.A.’s existing structures to reach those who are still suffering.

In large measure, however, the rise of virtual meetings has allowed thousands of people to find help from Alcoholics Anonymous during the current crisis and many of these virtual meetings are expected to continue when the pandemic is over.

Trish L., a delegate and A.A. trustee from Canada, adds that how A.A. carries the message and how we best structure ourselves and are using technology to connect will be one of the most important issues discussed across the A.A. universe as Alcoholics Anonymous moves forward into a fast-changing future.

Nevertheless, with the onrush of technology and its impact, it was hoped by many delegates that the next World Service Meeting, scheduled for 2022, will be taking place in person. As selected at the 26th WSM, the 27th meeting of delegates from around the world will be taking place in Japan, the first time this meeting will have been held in Asia.

For more information, contact the International desk at the General Service Office at international@aa.org or call (212) 870-3021.