2015 PRAASA Report Back

The Pacific Region Alcoholics Anonymous Service Assembly was held in Layton, Utah the first weekend in March 2015. The General Service Conference theme of “Celebrating 80 years of Recovery, Unity and Service – The Foundation of Our Future” was the theme for the conference, and the basis for 10 Panels of presentations lasting 1-1¼ hours each. (Area Highlights, Leadership in A.A., Carrying the Message, Traditions, Service, Inventory, Communication, Recovery Today, Past Trustees, Ask-It Basket.)

This was my 5thopportunity to actually attend PRAASA. My first PRAASA experience was 20 years ago when the DCM for District #5 asked me to listen to a cassette tape of one on the panel presentations and give a summary at that PRAASA Report Back on Maui. Although I didn’t attend that year, had no idea what PRAASA was, or what happened there, I was able to learn from listening to the recordings and pass it on. I am grateful to that DCM for passing on how valuable PRAASA can be for A.A. as a whole.

If you have an interest in listening to any of these Panel presentations, you can probably borrow CDs recorded during the weekend. Ask around; our Delegate, many DCM’s, and A.A. members purchased a set of, or individual copies of the presentations.

What was it like? What happened? Joel C., the Pacific Region Trustee suggested that every PRAASA is different and encouraged each of us have our own PRAASA experience. Here are some of my experiences:

What’s the difference between A.A. then and A.A. now? What has changed in 80 years? Back then, alcoholism was more of a social stigma, and we had fewer referrals. Now it is less of a social stigma and lots of people are referred to A.A.

This year I was asked to be a part of Panel 3: Traditions- Our Primary Purpose, and share “How can A.A. members continue to share our message and prevent confusion with other fellowships?” While researching this, I learned disruptions helped us “evolve principles by which the A.A. group and A.A. as a whole could survive and function effectively,” and “A.A.’s Twelve Traditions are little else than a list of sacrifices which the experience of twenty years has taught us that we must make, individually and collectively, if A.A. itself is to stay alive and healthy.” I think it was a smart move on their part to call them “The 12 Traditions” and not “The 12 Sacrifices.” What moved me the most is how our third tradition, our only requirement for membership came to be: In A.A.’s second year of existence, they figured out protective regulations were fear based. Instead of creating a program of intolerance, A.A. made room for not just the pure alcoholics, but also for alcoholics who had what they called ”other stigmas.” From year two, all of A.A. service has been learning how to make room for more alcoholics.

Panel 7: Recovery in A.A. Today seemed to be the “hot topic” and panel with the most people in line to share at the mic after the presenters had spoken. Is there a need for a pamphlet for those alcoholics who come here with mental health concerns? Are we twelfth-stepping or just sending people to meetings? Do our meetings and literature reflect our changing population demographics, including transgender and gender nonconforming alcoholics? Do we make agnostics, Buddhists, etc. feel welcome? Do we need to revise the pamphlet titled “A.A. For The Woman?” Although the focus of the presentation was pamphlets, we heard a lot from members on how we could act and move towards more inclusion. What was stated the most at the microphone was, if the individual is an alcoholic, how can we help them recover from alcoholism?

The past trustee panel was another of my favorites. Several past trustees warn us to watch out for rigidity in A.A. Our steps were meant to show us how to stay sober and help others achieve sobriety. Too many are told they don’t belong here. Too many are uninformed, or given misinformation about A.A. Although we may have differences and/or other issues, all who have alcoholism are welcome.

No matter how different a person seems, the language of the heart gives a struggling alcoholic hope, so, pass on our solution. Keep the door to A.A. very wide open. We offer directions for the alcoholic. The desire to follow those directions is voluntarily and comes from the alcoholic. Encourage the newcomer who is finished to grab on to someone who is going where they want to go.

There’s more to say but I’ll finish with a few more comments that got my attention: we’ll find leaders without a title who make a difference in A.A. We are A.A.’s vision for A.A.’s future. It’s up to us to keep the steps, tradition and concepts. And, if we ever fail it will be because we cannot control our own egos; too much of a focus on our rights and too little focus on our responsibilities. We created A.A. It’s up to us to keep it safe.

Thank you for allowing me to be of service.

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