



ICSAA  
Secular AA

## BOARD MEETING

9 January 2018

2:00 pm Eastern Standard / 11:00 AM Pacific

<https://zoom.us/j/289124100>

Call To Order by the Chairman at 2:05 pm Eastern Standard / 11:05 AM Pacific

Roll Call by the Chairman

Present

Sam E. – Chair  
Martin D. – Vice Chair  
Joy R. – Treasurer  
Courtney S. – IT / Web  
Carol M. – Host Committee Chair – Toronto 2018  
Thomas B. – Outreach  
Dianne P. - Emeritus Member

Joined Late

Geri B. – Secretary

Absent with notice

Nigel S. – Newsletter

Other

Patrick Y. - reported to have resigned by Chairman.

Chair's opening comments

- Chairman reminded attendees that we should remember to be guided by our unanimously approved new mission statement and asked all to read the statement on their own:  
“Our mission is to assure suffering alcoholics that they can find sobriety in Alcoholics Anonymous without having to accept anyone else’s beliefs or deny their own. Secular AA does not endorse or oppose any particular form of religion or belief system and operates in accordance with the Third Tradition of Alcoholics Anonymous: The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.”
- Reminder of our current bylaws – Article 2: purposes item g) Our goal is to assure suffering alcoholics that they can find sobriety in Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) in a secular environment. Although we need to make some substantive changes to the bylaws these changes are for operational and legal necessity or improvement not to deviate from our primary (and founding) purpose.

- Adherence to AA Concepts, Traditions, Roberts Rules, AA Service Manual and our Bylaws as applicable.
- Committee process – Status reports at board meetings and set tasks to be done in committees. Board to function as oversight and hold committees responsible to the collective group conscious. Whenever possible work to be done in committee. Create opportunities to involve more of our full membership in service.
- Agenda - Because of large amount of topics, Chairman asked that the group be prepared to table new topics if needed
- Chairman reminded the Board of upcoming board meeting times (all to be confirmed)
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2018 (2pm EST)
  - 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2018 (Toronto, early dinner)
  - 24<sup>th</sup> August 2018 informal open membership at large Q&A during ICSAA 2018
  - 26<sup>th</sup> August 2018 formal open membership at large voting business meeting during ICSAA 2018
  - 26<sup>th</sup> August 2018 (Toronto with New Board)
  - 17<sup>th</sup> November 2018 (Last board meeting of this board, pass off to new board) possible in-person option in Las Vegas

#### Chair Reports/Updates

- A. Patrick no longer a board member, position vacant, welcome discussion or a motion to replace. Motion to accept resignation passed unanimously.
- B. Motion by Courtney, seconded by Dianne to replace Patrick with Jerry Finnegan.
  - 1) Discussion on skills and background for Jerry F supported by Courtney and Dianne. Jerry was involved in creating the Bylaws for WAFT and is running the Arizona regional conferences.
  - 2) Sam pointed out that current Bylaws preclude Jerry from serving consecutive terms, per Section 4 Term of Office (b). Also, there is no requirement to replace Patrick in the Bylaws.
  - 3) Discussion about the history of the methodology of the ratification of the current Bylaws, and need to understand how this board used the Bylaws to bring Dianne onto the existing Board. Dianne clarified that Jerry has indicated to her via email that he is willing to help with the current Bylaws, either as part of the board or not. Courtney stated he feels Jerry should be on the board with a vote. Thomas discussed the heavy male dominance of the existing board.
  - 4) Question called and the motion passed by 7 for and 1 against (Thomas). The minority was offered an opportunity to speak again, which was declined.
- C. Approval of Sept 2017 Minutes - Approved by unanimous vote.
- D. Vision Statement - Martin explained Patrick provided the work he had started, and Martin completed it. Thomas expressed concerns over the use of the word "treatment". Discussion ensued. It was decided that Martin will work on making a change, and circulate to the Board members via email for further discussion.

"Secular AA recognizes and honors the immeasurable contributions that Alcoholics Anonymous has made in the *treatment* of alcoholism and seeks to ensure that AA remains an effective, relevant and inclusive program of recovery in an increasingly secular society. The foundation of Secular AA is grounded in the belief that anyone - regardless of their spiritual beliefs or lack thereof - can recover in the program of Alcoholics Anonymous. Secular AA exists to serve the community of secularly-minded alcoholics by supporting worldwide access to secularly formatted AA meetings and fostering fellowship within a growing population of secularly-minded alcoholics."

E. Corporate housekeeping

- 1) Bylaws (Geri) – working meeting scheduled in Vegas for Friday Jan 26<sup>th</sup> 6pm
- 2) Board liability insurance (Joy)
  - i. Policy has been purchased and is in place for \$680.50
- 3) Events Liability Insurance – will be dealt with closer to the event. Quote of \$600. Courtney asked about the possibility of us being covered under the Hotel umbrella insurance. Nigel may have looked into. Carol will follow up.

F. Outreach (Thomas) - We are in process of being listed in Grapevine and in the publication "Box 459". Past problem in being listed in Great Britain is being worked on, and Courtney said that others are working on Europe and Asia.

G. Newsletter (Nigel) - No Report

H. IT (Courtney)

- 1) secularaa.net (Board Website) - site recently revised and is now better
- 2) Secularaa.com (convention website)
- 3) SecularAA.org (information, outreach and service website) Courtney clarified the definition of Unique Visitor as Individual single visitor (based on IP). Also, showed chart of most searched phrases. Most searched phrase: Sectarian AA, which was a surprise and will have to be added to back office to help people find the site. Also, the ICSAA website has almost as many visitors. Most visitors are from US, Canada, India, UK, then smaller countries.  
( see charts attached to Addendum I of the minutes)  
We have presence in all social media spaces: Facebook, Twitter. Courtney will publish any items submitted to him. Carol suggested that Joe C could tweet, and he has access.
- 4) Keeper of the Keys – there is a need to identify a board member to hold instructions to access our websites in case of emergency as well as a need to have a person or persons with enough expertise to do the job. Assistant webmaster now is Ed W. but he is not comfortable taking over at this time. Sam suggested Jesse and Dianne suggested Mikie, both of whom seem to have ability. Courtney discussed the need to have a committee with oversight for the website. Sam said we need guidelines and he suggested that John S. was dealing with similar issues with Beyond Belief and might be willing to start a document for guidelines. Courtney suggested it be under Outreach. Sam stated some of this issue was being addressed in the committee section of the new Bylaws. Sam asked if it would be possible to have a document with the passwords and other important information as a backup. Courtney noted that there are also over 50 software programs involved, each of which has a password, plus there is the

problem of phone authentication for some programs. Courtney will research how to start making a document for Sam and Martin to keep safe.

- I. Conference guidelines (Martin) - ongoing process. No report at this time
- J. 2020 ICSAA RFB document (Joy) - Document has been distributed for review. Motion to release the document passed unanimously.
- K. Treasurer's Report (Joy)
  - 1) Quarterly Financial Statements - all statements for 2017 are on Board Website and copies have been sent to all members.  
  
Joy is compiling names & email & physical addresses of registrants to be a permanent list for future use.  
  
Sam requested that everyone review the documents and let Joy know if there are any questions. We will then approve the reports via email.
  - 2) Budgets
    - i. Secular AA org - additional required document to Nevada SOS is unclear. Joy will complete research and resolve.
- L. ICSAA 2018 - Sam requested that all board members review the Budget that Joy sent out so that we can comment at next meeting.
- M. 2018 ICSAA Conference – Inclusion and Diversity (Carol)
  - 1) Registration - Nigel has information, but Carol thinks it is currently at 50 and hotel nights is 136. Of the 50 registrants, not many are from Toronto area. Joy can get the exact numbers.
  - 2) Attraction/promotion - Carol stated there are post cards available for marketing. Joe has been sending out to Canadian intergroups. Thomas related experience of displaying marketing material which seemed to "disappear" (be thrown away) at a regular AA event. Will send some to April Willow Conference in Northwest US. Otherwise, there is a PDF on the website for those in the states to print and distribute.
  - 3) Program committee update
    - i. Review proposed conference schedule (*See attached document Addendum II*)
      - **Friday evening** - Carol distributed current proposal for "Talk-a-thon" with initial speakers from countries outside North America  
  
Carol suggested geographical signs be used in the auditorium to help people to meet those from same area.  
  
Suggestion for John S. as leader and a woman, perhaps Dorothy.  
  
Welcome by Sam with Carol.  
  
Still investigating having some refreshments  
  
Will have the separate second floor Board Room for use for Bylaws workshop, and for other Board uses. From 9 am Friday morning.

Do not have Ballroom until 7 pm. Sam suggested we have a Bylaws workshop at 5 pm.

**Saturday** - Panel with Carol welcome and introductions of Toronto area people. Will invite President of Toronto Intergroup. Looking for ideas for activities on Saturday night, eg a Play, social event, dance?

**Food** - Our commitment to the Hotel is \$7000. Discussion on if we are budgeted for food for Lunch and Breakfast. Do not have to make commitment to hotel until July. Will wait for input from Nigel, who has the spreadsheet.

Will plan to publish agenda by March or April

**Sunday** - Membership meeting (two hours); rest of morning and afternoon would be workshops

ii. Review suggested speakers

Dianne suggested feedback she has received that Austin people were disappointed that there was no keynote speaker. Spoke in support of experience with Ann Dowsett-Johnson.

Dianne left meeting.

Motion made and seconded to ask Ann Dowsett-Johnson to be key note speaker. Discussion on what is Ms. Dowsett-Johnson's current belief system. Motion amended to invite Ann Dowsett-Johnson on condition that she considers herself to be a secular AA member. Vote passed 6 for and 1 (Courtney) against, Dianne having withdrawn from the meeting before the vote.

Want to be sure we have atheists represented in any panels

iii. Review suggested panel topics

- Need 59 to 70+ workshops topics (see attached)
- Now have about 30 suggestions; need more
- Discussion on several suggestions that are more important than others. Suggestion to have plenary sessions for the popular/important topics.
- Decided to not delete any topics at this time

Old Business

- A. AA, Religion and Secular AA article by Vic L's; consider adding to secularaa.org website <https://www.dropbox.com/s/d6keucsg7txtero/AA%2C%20Religion%20and%20Secular%20AA.pdf?dl=0>

Motion to include on website passed unanimously.

- B. Discuss adding a place on ICSAA registration form to donate separately to Secular AA (tabled from last meeting) No motion made.
- C. Special Purpose Group designation (tabled from last meeting) Discuss to see if we can have a consensus on the “special purpose group” identity which we have taken on the homepage of our website, personally I hate this designation and my thoughts follow the quoted text from our home page of secularaa.org :

The tradition of group autonomy assures that every AA group may conduct their meetings as they see fit, providing their actions do not affect other groups or AA as a whole. This gives AA a rich heritage of diversity and inclusiveness, and makes possible **special purpose groups** for Agnostics and Atheists, as well as **special purpose groups** such as : *Secular AA, [Gay, Lesbian and Transgender Alcoholics](#), [Native Americans in AA](#), [Lawyers in AA](#), [Medical Professionals in AA](#), [Pilots in AA](#), and [Young People in AA](#).*

Sam’s thoughts on the subject - *I have never been a supporter of special interest groups because I believe that the additional requirement (actual or implied) of membership is in clear and complete contradiction of AA principles. I’ve never been opposed to special topic meetings at our conferences, such as: women’s stags, LGBT, young peoples or even agnostics. I believe our board is 100% unanimous in our definition of secular to be inclusive of believers and “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 beliefs or having to deny their own” is often read at the beginning of many secular meetings. Every time someone mentions secular meetings are another special interest, or special purpose group, I cringe. Recently I realized that we are clearly not a special makeup group but we are merely a collection of AA members who prefer (and believe in) the format of our meetings to be secular (without religious prayer) and thus entirely inclusive. Therefore it is my belief that the purpose of Secular AA is to hold conferences that have secular formats and provide mechanisms, such as the website, to share experiences (personal recovery and group) of a secular nature. I believe the board of Secular AA is unanimous in our hope that our example will lead to universal acceptance in AA of agnostics and atheists (whatever they may call themselves), as well as those of religious beliefs that are outside the local cultural norms. Therefore I “pray” that someday (it is going to be awhile) we will be able to dissolve SecularAA.org and our ICSAA, as there will no longer be a need since we do not see ourselves as special. I recognize that a secular AA conference and secular AA meetings are attractive to the anti-god militant atheist types so I hope that we stay diligent on practicing our principle of inclusion and diversity as well as all the principles in AAs steps, traditions and concepts. I am asking the board, and ultimately our fellowship, to consider the perspective of defining ourselves not as a special purpose group but as AA members with a particular desire of, and commitment to, secularly formatted AA meetings and events. However, if need be, I am willing and experienced in living in the minority opinion.*

And here are Roger C.’s thoughts on the issue:

*Speaking to the issue of agnostics and atheists being "Special Purpose Groups" - perhaps the most debatable issue you discussed - I personally agree with the Literature Sub-Committee in 1979 which proposed a pamphlet for we nonbelievers in AA and quite correctly, I believe, stated, "This type of pamphlet does not fall under the category 'special groups of alcoholics' literature but concerns a more fundamental and worldwide problem that has resulted in much misinterpretation of the AA Fellowship." They continue with an explanation: "This pamphlet would affirm in clear and concise fashion that 'the only requirement for membership in AA is a desire to stop drinking' and that our founders and the group conscience of the fellowship does not and has never considered an alcoholic's spiritual beliefs as necessarily relevant to the achievement of healthy and happy sobriety..." So we are not a special purpose group but merely asking - insisting - that AA act in accordance with its primary purpose, its mission*

Motion to remove document with *special interest groups* and replace it with our Vision Statement and Mission Statement passed 7 to 0.

### New Business

- A. Discussion of a suggestion from a few secular AA members to adopt this statement to be read at ICSAA panels and workshops and posted as a guideline for sharing on the coffee shop, as well as general discussion on our Facebook Coffee Shop and recent complaints on the demeanor of some comments and how those comments were dealt with-

*Express what works for you in recovery. As we say in AA, share your own experience, strength and hope. Celebrate what works for you. Learn from others' differing experiences by "taking what you want and leaving the rest". We recognize and value that each of our paths to sobriety have their own uniqueness. We strive to adhere to our AA code of love and tolerance.*

Tabled until next meeting after everyone has had a chance to consider this.

- B. After discussion, Motion to pay for conference registration for Dorothy out of donations to ICSAA passed unanimously 7 to 0.

Adjournment 4:32 pm Eastern Standard / 01:32 pm Pacific

## ADDENDUM I - CHARTS

from Item "H" - IT report:

Search Keyphrases (Top 10)		
<a href="#">Full list</a>		
12 different keyphrases	Search	Percent
sectarian aa	2	14.2 %
secular alcoholics anonymous	2	14.2 %
aa traffic information	1	7.1 %
secular aa meetings	1	7.1 %
aa meetings on line	1	7.1 %
online aa meetings for women	1	7.1 %
646-558-8656	1	7.1 %
online secular services	1	7.1 %
secular aa	1	7.1 %
international conference of secular aa		

### SECULAR AA

Month	Unique visitors	Number of visits	Pages	Hits	Bandwidth
Jan 2017	29	78	478	1,604	54.41 MB
Feb 2017	398	752	4,560	21,757	820.27 MB
Mar 2017	2,867	3,876	33,228	142,411	4.80 GB
Apr 2017	8,819	15,437	78,484	222,919	7.48 GB
May 2017	6,660	9,285	50,276	195,429	7.13 GB
Jun 2017	4,721	6,104	45,519	191,730	6.37 GB
Jul 2017	8,135	11,250	81,702	340,370	8.44 GB
Aug 2017	8,117	11,073	88,715	311,047	7.71 GB
Sep 2017	8,442	11,651	86,494	244,781	6.95 GB
Oct 2017	8,329	11,361	73,773	223,415	6.52 GB
Nov 2017	7,650	10,529	62,148	190,217	5.86 GB
Dec 2017	7,054	9,944	72,007	201,076	6.17 GB
<b>Total</b>	<b>71,221</b>	<b>101,340</b>	<b>677,384</b>	<b>2,286,756</b>	<b>68.29 GB</b>

### ICSAA

Month	Unique visitors	Number of visits	Pages	Hits	Bandwidth
Jan 2017	25	82	140	707	16.80 MB
Feb 2017	79	283	676	2,276	36.25 MB
Mar 2017	89	381	998	5,016	159.11 MB
Apr 2017	1,210	1,560	11,125	23,406	788.66 MB
May 2017	2,505	2,857	9,813	19,819	643.96 MB
Jun 2017	2,092	2,494	9,351	15,936	432.69 MB
Jul 2017	3,876	5,409	16,250	26,396	607.04 MB
Aug 2017	3,918	4,493	17,019	26,055	691.65 MB
Sep 2017	4,229	5,882	40,154	61,976	1.37 GB
Oct 2017	4,279	5,940	19,767	32,549	845.73 MB
Nov 2017	4,293	6,305	20,999	36,967	965.16 MB
Dec 2017	3,325	4,370	18,701	31,386	868.61 MB
<b>Total</b>	<b>29,920</b>	<b>40,056</b>	<b>164,993</b>	<b>282,489</b>	<b>7.28 GB</b>



ADDENDUM II - DRAFT PROGRAM  
from Item M. 3) - Program Committee Update

ICSAA Toronto August 24 – 26, 2018

Toronto Downtown Marriott Hotel

**DRAFT PROGRAM**

Friday, August 24

9 am to 6 pm – Registration available in the lobby of the Hotel.

9 am to end of Conference – Richmond Room available on the second floor – Board meetings, “private” registration, other meetings (such as By-laws workshop)

6 pm to end of conference – Registration available in the lower level

7 pm to 10 pm – Ballroom – Welcome from Toronto Committee – Speakers from two geographically diverse areas, then a Talk-a-thon. Another possibility is to have a panel discussion then the Talk-a-thon.

Saturday August 25

9 – 10 – Ballroom

1. Welcome to Toronto – Carol M. Host City Chair (may not be necessary as Welcome has already been made on Friday)
2. Welcome to the Conference – Sam E. Secular AA Chair
3. Introduction of other invitees – suggestions that we invite the Toronto Area delegate and the Toronto Intergroup Chair, others?
4. Introduction of the Theme of the Conference – “Inclusion and Diversity” – suggesting that we have a speaker or panel from various areas to discuss the theme as a general concept and how it relates to Secular AA. Perhaps have three people from different countries and backgrounds.

10 – 12 – Ballroom and 5 Breakout Rooms (Note, the Ballroom can be divided into up to 5 smaller rooms but as the lunch is taking place there on Saturday it would not be feasible to divide the room until Saturday afternoon.

Workshops (see below for suggestions so far)

12 – 2 – Ballroom – Lunch – Keynote Speaker or Panel (see below for suggestions so far)

2 – 5 – Ballroom and Breakout Rooms – Workshops and Panels

6 – 10 – Ballroom is available – Toronto committee members are working on a proposal. Perhaps a musical evening. We can put it out to the membership of what would be good here. A variety of dinner and activities suggestions will also be available.

### Sunday, August 26

9 – 12 (11?)– Ballroom – Breakfast and Business Meeting

Perhaps have a speaker or panel or maybe just eat. The business of the conference consists of:

1. Electing the new Board
2. Voting on the next Conference location
3. Passing the By-laws
4. ?

10 – 12 – Breakout Rooms – Workshops – could be repeats of Saturdays or new ones for people who don't want to attend the business meeting.

12 – 2 – Lunch on your own

2 - 5 – Ballroom and Breakout Rooms – workshops and panels

5 pm – Conference ends

WORKSHOP SUGGESTIONS RECEIVED BY THE PROGRAM COMMITTEE ( Note items that are in quotes are as received by the person suggesting the topic)

1. Pets in Recovery – This was a suggestion from one of our members who found that having his dog to walk every day gave him a purpose in early sobriety. There are lots of ways newcomers need to know about how to stay sober.
2. “Secular AA for Dummies” – This was a suggestion from someone who is brand new to the Secular AA World and needed a primer.
3. Concurrent Disorders
4. Women’s Panel
5. Family Panel ( Al-anon, ACA representatives)
6. Traditions Workshop
7. The Medical View – We have contacted Dr. Vera Tarman
8. “It all Comes down to Biology – How and Why AA Really Works”
9. “This Is Just to Say, Looking at Poems of Recovery and Writing Our Own”
10. Sobriety Courts – Michigan experience – see below as well on suggested speakers. Eric Carlson is unable to attend ICSAA but can assist with this topic I hope
11. Regional Conferences
12. “The Relevance of the 12 Steps: An Atheist View”
13. A Critique of Chapter 4 “We Agnostics”
14. History of Secular AA
15. How to Start a Secular AA meeting
16. Alt-Recovery Movement
17. Young People Meeting
18. LGBTQ Meeting
19. Small Town AA
20. Secular AA and the Courts/the Law
21. How to Start a Secular/Agnostic Meeting – maybe multiple sessions
22. Histories of Startups – what has worked
23. How to interact with Intergroup/District – past experiences
24. Buddhist Panel/perspective
25. What does the Toronto Intergroup experience mean for Secular AA
26. Spirituality without Religion
27. Secular Steps vs. BB steps
28. Primary Purpose of Secular AA
29. Quotes from Founders vs. AA Mythology
30. Meditation as a tool for Recovery
31. Using “Living Sober”
32. Decline of AA in US vs the World
33. The Future of Secular AA – Panel?
34. Working with the Justice System

35. History of Agnostic Groups – LA, Austin, Chicago, NYC, Toronto
36. History of Secular AA in Toronto
37. “Are ‘Atheist Thumpers’ Dividing Secular AA?” – **suggested by Vic Losick**
38. What works in a Secular Meeting – Doris A. and Geri have agreed to lead this
39. Service in AA

#### SPEAKER/PANEL PARTICIPANT SUGGESTIONS RECEIVED BY THE PROGRAM COMMITTEE

1. Madeleine Parmley, former GSO Delegate and Trustee
2. Greg Muth, former GSO Manager and Trustee
3. Michele Grinberg, Chair of the AA Board of Directors  
(Note – these three have been proposed by Thomas as the opening panel on Saturday to discuss “Inclusion and Diversity”. They could also be included in other ways.)
4. Ann Dowsett-Johnson – author of “Drink: the Intimate Relationship between Women and Alcohol”
5. Dr. Nicola Labor – The Science of Addiction – **I have written to Dr. Labor who is only available on the Friday evening and has requested compensation.**
6. Jowita B – author of “Drunk Mom”
7. "Class A" General Service Board trustees Christine Carpenter, a Missouri judge with significant experience running Drug Court programs in her state; and Nancy McCarthy, a senior official of the Missouri Department of Corrections – **This is a suggestion from Eric Carlson. I am tracking down contact information. Again no idea about travel expenses.**
8. Archer Voxx – **He will pay his own expenses.**
9. Bill White – **Suggested by Roger C. and Thomas B.– need contact information and don't know about travel expenses he would require.**
10. Ami B., Executive Editor of the Grapevine

Bill S. - is currently writing a well-researched book on the writing of the Big Book.