

## *What is Alcoholics Anonymous?*

There are two practical ways to describe A.A. The first is the familiar description of purposes and objectives that appears earlier: "Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees for A.A. membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions. A.A. is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any causes. Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety." The "common problem" is alcoholism. The men and women who consider themselves members of A.A. are, and always will be, alcoholics, even though they may have other addictions. They have finally recognized that they are no longer able to handle alcohol in any form; they now stay away from it completely. The important thing is that they do not try to deal with the problem single-handedly. They bring the problem out into the open with other alcoholics. This sharing of "experience, strength and hope" seems to be the key element that makes it possible for them to live without alcohol and, in most cases, without even wanting to drink. The second way to describe Alcoholics Anonymous is to outline the structure of the Society. Numerically, A.A. consists of more than 2,000,000 men and women, in approximately 180 countries. These people meet in local groups that range in size from a handful of ex-drinkers in some localities to many hundreds in larger communities. In the populous metropolitan areas, there may be scores of neighborhood groups, each holding its own regular meetings. Many A.A. meetings are open to the public; some groups also hold "closed meetings," where members are encouraged to discuss problems that

might not be fully appreciated by nonalcoholics. The local group is the core of the A.A. Fellowship. Its open meetings welcome alcoholics and their families in an atmosphere of friendliness and helpfulness. There are now more than 117,000 groups throughout the world, including hundreds in hospitals, prisons, and other institutions.