

Unity in a Changing World – Gabriel K, 2021 PNC

Good morning PNC! My name is Gabriel and I am an alcoholic. My sobriety date is 4/24/2012 and my home group is the Wood Village Men's Group which meets every Tuesday night in Gresham, Oregon - located in the amazing Oregon Area 58. I am humbled and honored to speak to you this morning about a topic which hits so close to home in my own sobriety and in our world as AA members today; Unity in a Changing World.

Two and a half weeks ago, I held my newborn baby boy in my arms. Words cannot describe the emotions and light which filled my heart. While he is not my first, Sebastian Gabriel represents so much about what the program of Alcoholics Anonymous has done in my life. From a broken and homeless alcoholic who hated my own reflection to a man brimming with confidence, only through the grace of a strong and loving Higher Power. When I looked into the eyes of my son, I think of what he will become and what obstacles he could encounter in his life as a Hispanic Native American. No matter what decisions he makes or who he chooses to become, I will always love him. One of the fears I've struggled with is the amount of change in the world around him *and* the fact that he is predisposed to alcoholism. I would be naïve to think that this insidious disease could not affect any of my four children. No matter who he becomes, I want the program of Alcoholics Anonymous to still stay openminded and willing to foster our legacy of Unity within the fellowship so we can continue to keep the doors of AA open to those who are looking for a solution. The change which is knocking on the doors of Alcoholics Anonymous is one which recognizes all people of color and considers those alcoholics who identify as non-binary or trans.

If you think that change stops outside the doors of AA, then you're wrong because change permeates all things including the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous. It is how we maintain our Unity within a Changing World that helps keep Alcoholics Anonymous growing and ready for the next generation of Alcoholics. Sobriety and reaching out to suffering alcoholics has made me passionate about challenging our societies pre-conceived notions so that we can embrace equity and inclusion. This affects both suffering and recovering alcoholics. I feel a strong personal sense of passion for how we can carry the message to diverse populations. When individual AA members or even people in service argue about changing things in AA from our Preamble, or words and phrases in the Big Book – they are showing contempt prior to investigation based on personal bias of things they do not understand or even willing to learn about. In these changing times, we must support, respect, and value all members of Alcoholics Anonymous. We survive together or die separately.

Alcoholics Anonymous has struggled with inclusivity and equity in our fellowship from its infancy and the it continues when new issues present themselves. Unity within the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous was fractured in the past with racial integration of Black AA members. When the United States was struggling with racial integration of Blacks, there was much resistance within Alcoholics Anonymous. AA meetings went from banning Blacks, limiting their attendance to open meetings, allowing attendance as “observers,” designating certain meetings as “interracial,” to further lowering and then losing such barriers. Can you imagine what our Unity was like back then? If you want to investigate further, research our history, and understand how the struggles of ethnic minorities in Alcoholics Anonymous is no different than the fellowships struggle with gender pronouns in the Preamble. The same evidence is present in the past when we have had to make decisions on creating literature for Native Americans, gays, and women. This fear comes from ego about what we do not understand what does not affect us. Fear and hostility have no place in Alcoholics Anonymous. While there have been profound changes in our constantly changing world, there remains more links outside of our chain of progress when it comes to Alcoholics Anonymous. Countless times throughout our fellowship's history, women, gay, bisexual, transgender, atheists, and mentally ill alcoholics have been shunned by Alcoholics Anonymous and for some of these communities, this still continues today. As a young man of color in recovery, I have personally experienced and seen others not openly welcomed in Alcoholics Anonymous. We all want to believe that our personal thoughts and opinions do not affect Alcoholics Anonymous, but it does, and it can have deadly consequences.

What we strive for in Alcoholics Anonymous is to demonstrate to newcomers that they are welcome, wanted, needed and I'll add in accepted, if they have a desire to stop drinking. Everyone belongs. It's incumbent upon the fellowship to make sure that everyone, regardless of age, sex, race, sexual orientation are welcome. It is my experience that people often let those in minority communities know when they do not belong and usually have no answers for where they

should belong. When minority communities are told they do not belong, they feel excluded. Of extreme importance – our common welfare and remembering to value our inclusivity, diversity and how change outside the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous does affect us and can affect our Unity. The Responsibility statement is something I take to heart in the fact that “When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the Hand of AA always to be there.” But it’s not up to me or any other member of Alcoholics Anonymous to judge what the hand reaching out to me looks like. There are some who believe if AA doesn’t work it’s because the person isn’t doing the necessary work and that objections to old-fashioned language and sexist stereotypes are something people have to get over. AA members sometimes say, “The language is archaic, but it works as is. If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” Just because something doesn’t harm you, doesn’t mean it doesn’t harm others.

No matter our personal differences of opinion over personalities, personal likes and dislikes, politics, and blind cultural taboos, we need to meet Unity at a fundamental spiritual level. It takes every member of Alcoholics Anonymous to look within ourselves, to have courage, to speak lovingly – boldly – and honestly, when basic spiritual principals are at stake. Alcoholics Anonymous is no stranger to Unity or how we can maintain this Unity in a Changing World. However, we struggle with stagnant growth based on maintaining a tight grip on our past and by doing so, we use our Founders words and the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous as our weapon against change. Today our world outside of Alcoholics Anonymous is divisive, but that is not how Alcoholics Anonymous should be. When we look fundamentality at dealing with issues of change with a spiritual context, we remind ourselves of what Unity is all about. Tradition One states that “Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends on AA Unity. Without unity, AA dies. Individual liberty, yet great unity. Key to paradox: each AA’s life depends on obedience to spiritual principals. The group must survive or the individual will not. Common welfare comes first.”

Just because Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues, does not mean that we can hide behind Alcoholics Anonymous when individual thoughts and opinions around gender neutrality or bias around our minority communities trickle down to the newcomer who craves sobriety and a program of recovery and may be affected by our thoughts and opinions. We can maintain Unity, by being open minded and willing to accept new opinions and things we may not understand so that others can find the Unity and fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous. On Page 129 of the 12x12, it states “Without Unity, the heart of AA would cease to beat; our world arteries would no longer carry the life-giving grace of God; His gift to us would be spent aimlessly.” I hope that this presentation of my experience, strength and hope can open our eyes and hearts to those alcoholics who have yet entered our doors. All of us can take action by not judging the hand that reaches back to us and by being open minded about those things we do not understand the next time we speak to a newcomer, a sponsee, or even a long-time member. When we share our own personal opinions in the rooms of Alcoholics about things, we may not understand like gender neutral pronouns or transgenders in recovery – may this quote by Bill Wilson about diversity seek to ground us in Unity in a Changing World, “We have atheists and agnostics. We have people of nearly every race, culture and religion. In A.A. we are supposed to be bound together in the kinship of a common suffering. Consequently, the full individual liberty to practice any creed or principle or therapy whatever should be a first consideration for us all ... Let us always try to be inclusive rather than exclusive; let us remember that each alcoholic among us is a member of A.A. so long as he or she (or they) declare.”

There is much work to be done and the membership of Alcoholics Anonymous is responsible for making everyone feel welcome, wanted, needed, and accepted. Alcoholics Anonymous was there for me when I needed it the most and I am forever grateful. Hopefully our consistent Unity in a Changing World will keep Alcoholics Anonymous around for my children and the generations to come if we remain vigilant.