

AA AUSTRALIA CARRIES THE MESSAGE TO THE SOLOMON ISLANDS !!!

This is a report that should be read by all members to remind us of how fortunate we are in this country. Please read and pass on. A copy can be emailed to you, or downloaded from our website.

PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE shows that nothing will so much insure immunity from drinking as intensive work with other alcoholics. It works when other activities fail. This is our **twelfth suggestion**: Carry this message to other alcoholics! You can help where no one else can. You can secure their confidence when others fail. Remember they are very ill. Life will take on new meaning. To watch people recover, to see them help others, to watch loneliness vanish, to see a fellowship grow up about you, to have a host of friends ---- this is an experience you must not miss. We know you will not want to miss it. Frequent contact with newcomers and with each other is the bright spot of our lives.

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To know that each newcomer with whom I share has the opportunity to experience the relief that I have found in this fellowship fills me with joy and gratitude. I feel all the things described in AA will come to pass for them, as they have for me, if they seize the opportunity and embrace the program fully.

DAILY REFLECTIONS p.37

Initial contact

Our initial contact was when a lady called Mia, whose husband is an alcoholic, made a request to National Office that since **the need for help in the Solomon Islands was great** and potential AA members had no understanding or direction, that perhaps some literature and advice could be sent to help start AA. In consultation with Valerie and Trevor, (chairman of the Trustees International Committee) it was concluded that this would be the ideal opportunity to make use of some of the money held as our 75% of International Sponsorship Fund. My first contact with Mia was in late November 2006 and I told her of the decision to send someone out. This was greeted with enthusiasm and she gave me several other E-mail contacts, including the Catholic Archbishop of Honiara who immediately began plans to facilitate the visit.

It was decided that I should be the person to go and I thought it best to go as soon as possible. The Archbishop intimated that if I could come around mid January there was a meeting of the Council of Churches, (SICA) where I could talk and carry the message of AA. He also made plans for an interview on radio and with the local newspaper. (Solomon Star) With much help from our national office staff, literature was sent ahead and I left Perth on 22nd January with much trepidation and even less knowledge of how to carry AA to a **new frontier**.

Introduction to the Solomon Islands

The Solomon Islands comprises 992 islands, of which 347 are inhabited. The population is estimated to be around 600,000 with 122,000 being on Malaita and around 70,000 on Guadalcanal, the capital of which is Honiara, where I was based. The Solomon Islands gained independence from Britain in 1978, but since that time has experienced periods of what are commonly known as “tensions”, which amount to civil war. The latest being in April 2006 which resulted in rioting and burning of large parts of Honiara and the evacuation of Chinese, New Zealand and Australian citizens. A succession of governments from the date of independence has failed to stabilise and rebuild the country. The main industries are agriculture and fishing and 75% of its labour force are engaged in these.

As in most countries where the economy has suffered and unemployment is rife, alcohol has been something that the people have turned to. In particular, the young people have discovered alcohol. Young men, who at one point were defending their country, now find there is nothing for them and are producing a local alcoholic drink called “Quaso” and making home brew from a variety of products.

On my arrival in Honiara, Archbishop Adrian Smith, who was at great pains to make AA and myself welcome, met me. He had gone to great lengths to arrange for me to speak to local groups of people and was also adamant that AA should not be seen as affiliated with the Catholic Church, as to do so would exclude many since Catholicism only accounts for 19% of the population, 34% being Anglican and 33% belonging to the Church of Melanesia. I found that churches are an integral part of Solomon Island life and many social occasions are fostered through the various churches. In fact, it was a great surprise to me to see churches of all persuasions bursting at the seams with people. It had been decided that I would stay on church premises rather than in a fancy hotel, since I felt that, when trying to attract drunks to AA it was better to be at the “grass roots”

On my first day I spoke to four different groups of Solomon Islanders, including a group of leaders who were in counselling for trauma caused by the ethnic tensions and a group of priests at a seminary. At this point I would acknowledge the depth contained in our National Office Website, the contents of which were the basis of my talks to outside groups. These talks on AA were met with great enthusiasm and lots of questions were asked. The literature I had carried with me was snapped up and was promised to be passed on to other islands.

In the following days I continued to carry the message by having a full-page article in the Solomon Star and an interview with the Solomon Island Broadcasting Agency, which was broadcast after the 6pm, 7pm and 9pm news for a period of three days. Radio is the most effective form of advertising in Honiara as, although they have a local TV station, not many people have TV and in fact, I did not see a television set for the entire time I was there!!

The first AA meeting was held at Holy Cross Church on the Thursday night at 7.30pm. Our literature which had been sent from the National Office three weeks before, arrived just two hours before the meeting started which was a real blessing since all the literature I had carried with me was by this time gone. There were 24 people at the first meeting, although I would suggest that not all of them were potential AA members. I had made it plain that it would be an open meeting and anyone could come along. So we had a mixture of potential AA, Alanon members, mothers and wives and some educators.

Unusually, I did not find too much trouble with my accent. I tried to speak slowly and clearly and also did not attempt to swamp them with information. So I would run it as an AA meeting, with the preamble, fifth chapter etc: but stop frequently to ask if there were any questions. I found that I had to adapt as I went along. For instance: At a normal AA meeting, there would be a range of lengths of sobriety and when asked to share, many would be willing. But in this case, **there were 24 people who had never been to an AA meeting** and were reluctant to share. I found it best to have a short meeting (one hour) and then try to talk to people on an individual basis for about another hour.

Over the following couple of days, I spoke to several other groups, including The Solomon Island Churches Association (SICA), which comprises representatives from all churches in the islands. I passed on The Preamble and 12 Steps and 12 Traditions for possible translation into "Solomon Pidgin" which is basically spoken by everyone, although there are seventy languages spoken, of which English is the official one. No steps will be taken to put this translation (when it comes) into circulation without full consultation with National Office.

Our next meeting was held in Tanagi, which is a village outside Honiara. This time there were 35 people present. Advance publicity had helped. On the previous Sunday I had attended the church in Tanagi and had been allowed to announce the meeting to a packed house. This was also a celebration of "Pioneers" which is an organization run by the church where people "pledge" not to drink for periods of time. Whilst not wanting to associate AA with this organization, in consultation with the church leaders, I recognised that some of its members needed other help such as AA. The celebration was one of the most moving events I have attended and was followed by lunch and entertainment in the form of warrior dances and singing. I was also able to carry the message to Mr Romano Tikotikoca, a Fijian, who was leaving the following day to take up the post of Commissioner of Police in Fiji.

The meeting itself was, to my mind, a great success, in that I had even more people sharing and asking questions and I continued to adapt to the unique situation by talking to members on an individual basis. I would also think that **the majority were there with the requirement for AA membership "A desire to stop drinking"**.

I was then invited to conduct a meeting in Mateneko, which is in the jungle and is a village without electricity or running water. I was accompanied by the parish priest (Appollinara) and after **a bus ride followed by a walk of about three miles**, we then **crossed a river in a boat that had seen better days and leaked profusely**. On arrival to a little church surrounded by palm trees and forest I was very surprised to be greeted by men, women and children some of whom had come long distances to hear AA's message. **This was one of the most inspiring AA meetings I have ever been involved with** and I left not only with several addresses but with the certain knowledge that no matter what new ideas we have and how business-orientated we become **this is the essence of Alcoholics Anonymous**, one alcoholic sharing with another anywhere, at any time, in an attempt to stay sober.

Our final meeting, which I attended, was back at Holy Cross in Honiara where, although there was a lesser amount of people (twelve) I felt we were now down to potential AA members who would run a group. This was proven when after the meeting we had a group conscience meeting and three members agreed to run the meeting every Thursday. One also intimated that he would attempt to open a meeting in his village. I gave them my promise that **AA Australia would not desert them** and we would be available to answer questions and provide literature until they became self-supporting in every way.

My last act was to place an advertisement in the Solomon Star, which said:

**If you have a drinking problem and need help
Alcoholics Anonymous meets every Thursday at 7pm at
Holy Cross Church.**

The telephone number of a Family Health Centre was included and we tutored them in how to direct people to AA.

Conclusions and Observations.

My thanks go to Archbishop Adrian Smith, who was a rock during my visit and a driving force in organising venues, interviews and groups to address. I was very wary of working with an archbishop but found him to be very committed to the cause and a very down to earth jovial companion.

The National Office staff were very supportive and nothing was too much trouble for them. Valerie and I kept in contact via a very slow E-mail café and she kept members in Australia informed of progress. This had the effect of heightening interest throughout Australia and I was able to tell Solomon Island members of this enthusiasm.

As previously said, Honiara has been torn apart by internal strife and **many people are experiencing poverty and unemployment**. Nevertheless, I found them to be amongst the most friendly and enthusiastic people I have ever met and they were **entirely ready to receive the message of Alcoholics Anonymous**. AA may not take off in a big way immediately in the Solomon Islands, but as I kept telling people: **Once the seed has been planted, AA will grow** whether it is now or in five years time. Within my lifetime, I remain sure that the message will infiltrate the majority of islands that are populated.

On a personal note, I would say that this was **the experience of a lifetime**, although the heat affected me badly and the mosquitoes had a field day! I even woke to an earthquake in the middle of the night: something I had never experienced before. **To have the opportunity to carry AA's message renewed my faith and enhanced the gift I have been given**. I would very much like the opportunity to continue this work and will try to return towards the end of the year and possibly visit other parts of the Solomon Islands, using the list of contacts that I have been given. I now have three countries to which I pay allegiance: Scotland, where I was born, Australia, where I am a citizen and **the Solomon Islands, where my heart is now**.

Ian C
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