

December 1945

ST. PAUL'S FOUR DISCUSSION GROUPS

A Method of Outlining AA. to New Members

(Continuing the series outlining the various plans and methods followed by different groups throughout the country.)

The present plan of discussion for new members in the St. Paul group, with modifications during use, has been in operation for seven months. At its inception, about a dozen persons interested in the work met and formulated a tentative plan based on the experience of one of the squads and the material presented in the Washington, D.C., pamphlet and obtained from other sources.

Four discussions covering the A.A. program were outlined. Two members for each of these prepared and presented their discussions before the remainder of the group. Critical attention to these "previews" enabled each individual to reorganize or rewrite his discussion so that it would contain what the group as a whole considered an adequate presentation of the subject on the basis of their collective experience and what they knew of experiences elsewhere.

In general, the plan is to cover the A.A. program as clearly, concisely and completely as possible in four 45 minute discussions, with time for questions at the end of each. The arrangement of the club rooms permits all four discussions to be presented at one time, each in a separate room, every Wednesday

evening. New members are urged to attend all of the sessions in the proper order. It is emphasized each time that the discussions are not to replace any other A.A. activity, but to supplement them and to serve as an outline into which the new member can fit his past experiences, his present objectives and his progress toward these objectives.

AT every meeting the three objectives of A.A. are kept before the group: 1. To attain and maintain the FACT OF SOBRIETY.

2. To RECOVER from those things which caused us to drink.

3. To HELP OTHERS who want what we have.

By adherence to simplicity in concept and in presentation in all discussions, we try to give aid to the new member in understanding how to progress toward these objectives.

Attendance at discussions indicates the fact of sobriety, so that the emphasis is placed on a Program of Recovery. Each of the 12 Steps is considered in respect to its place in the whole program rather than for its value *per se*. The four discussions are integrated each time by brief review of what was covered before and preview of what is to be the content of discussion to follow.

Questions are encouraged at the end of the discussions and frequently require as much time as the discussion. Some attempt is made to consider

questions of general interest here, while other questions seem best referred to discussion with the sponsors or others who may be better able to give help on them.

Older members also are urged to attend discussions and many do attend. Their contributions in the question period are very valuable. The plan in the present stage of evolution seems to show sufficient improvement over earlier methods to justify its approval for another six-months period. It is our hope that we can continue to progress in this as one of the ways of helping others.

Discussion No. 1: The Admissions:

1. The admission of alcoholism, as a result of our experiences with it - what we are and how did we get that way.

2. The admission that we want to do something about it - the qualifications for A.A. membership.

3. The belief that we can obtain help - which is not debatable.

A brief outline of the purpose and scope of the discussions is stated. A brief history of A.A. and a statement of the motives, methods and scope is made. A short consideration of what constitutes an alcoholic and a statement of alcoholism as a disease, along with the progress in public thinking about alcoholics and alcoholism, are included. The objectives in A.A. membership are pointed out and certain mechanisms for

getting over the tough spots are mentioned.

This material is covered by each of the persons giving this discussion according to his own methods and is varied to meet the needs of the group present so far as possible. At the end, each new member is given a small card. On one side of this card is a list of the activities at the club rooms for each night of the week, with the address of the club rooms. At the top is a reminder - "I made a 24-Hour Deal Today," at the bottom - "Easy Does It."

On the reverse side of the card is an outline of the Program of Recovery, which is also the outline of the discussions. Space is provided for the name and telephone number of the sponsor and co-sponsor. The new member is also given a single sheet of information about the St. Paul group and other brief information which may be of value to him.

Discussion No.II: Inventory and Restitution:

The steps concerned with inventory are read and discussed with regard to what constitutes an inventory, how to go about it and when to do it. Emphasis is on honesty, thoroughness, clear thinking and "follow through" in practicing the 10th Step. Restitution is approached in the same fashion and the steps concerned are discussed as means to an end. The 5th Step is mentioned as a further aid in self-understanding and as a way to do something about our character analysis.

Discussion No.III: Spiritual Aspects of the Program:

Steps 2,3,5,7 and 11 are read and discussed in their relation to our objectives to the remainder of the program. Open mindedness, tolerance and personal understanding of A Higher Power are stressed as essential to progress in this part of the program. "Easy Does It" is the watchword in this discussion.

The 12th Step is used as the basis of a summary of the Program of Recovery, as our "insurance" in A.A. and as a way of living in keeping with normal human behavior and experience. The three parts of the 12th Step are discussed separately.

1. Spiritual experience is discussed as sudden conversion to a new way of life or the more common result of the cumulative effects of all experiences in working at the program which result in a personality change. Continuance of spiritual experience is emphasized.

2. Making calls on prospective members is cited as only one of the things considered in working with others. Personal aggrandizement, zeal to reform and increased membership are discussed as unsuitable reasons for making calls. Sincerity of purpose in helping others, humility in the knowledge of our own power to help, and confidence in our understanding of our capacities in A.A. are indicated as states of mind likely to help in working with others.

3. The last part of the 12th Step is discussed as a way of life that encompasses our motives, our methods and our accomplishments in A.A. It insures continuance of sobriety, happiness in what we do and peace of mind in the knowledge that we are progressing in our Program of Recovery with the help of a "Power greater than ourselves." - *L.S.L., St. Paul, Minn.*