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# The Next 50 Years- Inside and Out

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A 1985 Conference presentation by W. J. Estelle, Jr.,  
former nonalcoholic trustee

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When I was assigned the title "Fifty Years of Caring and Sharing in Correctional Facilities," the invitation was not specific as to which 50 years. And so I want to address the *next* 50 years in addition to the first 50 years.

This day is not only the first day of the rest of our lives, it is also the first day of our Fellowship's next 50 years. Today, there are 450,000 adults in prison in the United States plus 25,000 in Canadian prisons.\* There are at least that many people in our jails. Now, if we relate those figures to five years ago when we had 300,000 adults

\*This presentation was given in April 1985.

locked up, what does it predict for the next five years? Fifty years?

What it predicts for the Fellowship for the next 50 years is a mission which, if AA accepts the challenge, can reach the most severely suffering alcoholics in North America.

Within the last three years, the U.S. Department of Justice released a research report indicating as much as 80% of our prisoners should be classified either problem drinkers or alcoholics. There is little evidence or reason to believe that situation will change significantly during the next 50 years *unless*:

Unless during the next 50 years we are willing to share without reservation or prejudice the joy of sobriety with the youth who are suffering alcoholics. Most crime is committed by

males between the ages of 17 and 27.

Unless during the next 50 years we are willing to carry the message of sobriety to our neighbors who are suffering alcoholics in the ghettos and barrios of our major cities. A significantly disproportionate number of our prisoners come from black and Hispanic neighborhoods of our metropolitan areas. These inner city dwellers are among the most victimized by alcoholism.

Unless during the next 50 years we are willing to establish a cooperative tox centers with greater numbers of the Fellowship involved in this special twelfth-stepping. Everyone who goes to prison has first been in jail and probably a detox center.

Unless during the next 50 years we are willing to establish a cooperative relationship with our overworked probation officers who need the kind of support for their alcoholic probationers only an effective AA sponsor can provide. Nearly every person in prison today failed the conditions of probation, and most of those failures were related to alcohol.

Unless during the next 50 years we are ready to test our collective maturity as we change our attitudes about referrals from treatment centers and the lower courts. There are too many AA members who came to the Fellowship under duress of family, employer, regulatory agency, or others to permit the bigoted attitude some display toward court and treatment center referrals. The program won't work for them all, we know, but it won't

work for *any* of them if they aren't received with the same loving discipline other AAs were received with.

The last 50 years witnessed the vision of the founders being brought to reality only because drunks like yourselves were able to take a part of that vision and share it and extend it. The next 50 years' growth, impact, and success will also depend on vision — the vision of continuity, acceptance, and sharing.

What we have established in our first 50 years of caring and sharing in correctional facilities is a sound foundation for what *could* be a golden era during the next 50 years toward the goal of stemming the rate of growth of alcoholics in our prison population. It is important to remember during discussions of this type that AAs who work with inmates are not "crime stoppers," probation officers, sociologists, therapists, or professors of ethics. They are sober alcoholics doing what they have to do every day to stay sober — not drinking, going to meetings, and sharing the message of sobriety with others who need the helping hand of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Part of the future of this Fellowship (too much of our future) is right now locked up in jails, prisons, and juvenile detention centers. If that thought bothers you even a little bit, let's change it. We should change it if we love the Fellowship. We *can* change it if we love the still-suffering alcoholic. We *must* change it if we love ourselves in sobriety.