

September 1986

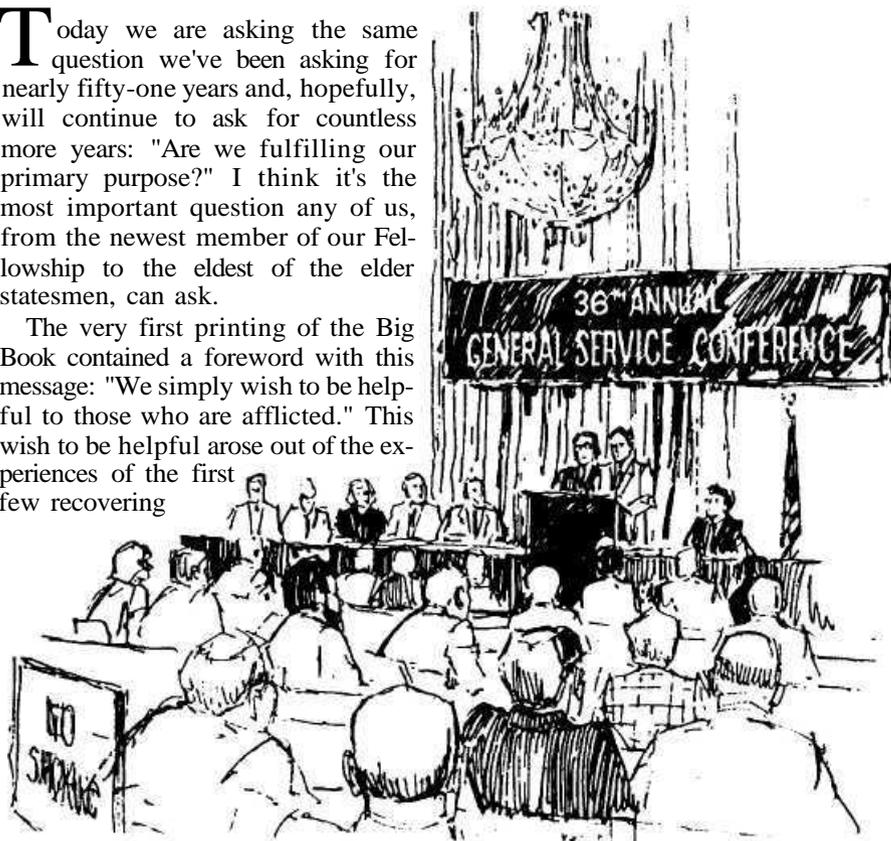
AA's FUTURE - OUR RESPONSIBILITY

The following three articles were originally presentations at the 1986 General Service Conference

Fulfilling Our Primary Purpose?

Today we are asking the same question we've been asking for nearly fifty-one years and, hopefully, will continue to ask for countless more years: "Are we fulfilling our primary purpose?" I think it's the most important question any of us, from the newest member of our Fellowship to the eldest of the elder statesmen, can ask.

The very first printing of the Big Book contained a foreword with this message: "We simply wish to be helpful to those who are afflicted." This wish to be helpful arose out of the experiences of the first few recovering



alcoholics because they had been transformed from useless, leaden creatures and because they deeply felt what Bill W. said to be true: "We must carry the message, else we ourselves can wither and those who haven't been given the truth may die."

One of my earliest feelings in sobriety was relief in the discovery that at last I had a primary purpose, that there could be more to my life than not drinking. I was given opportunities to share my experience, and I did so willingly, perhaps more willingly than I do today. Today I get involved in serving the Fellowship in different ways — committee meetings, conferences, workshops — but are these ways "primary"? They assuredly benefit me, but do they benefit the suffering alcoholic? Have I let these ways replace direct encounter with the one who needs me most?

When I discovered that those helping me declared themselves members of a group, then I wanted to be a member of the group. I found the group to be interested in other alcoholics besides me, so I became interested in other alcoholics. I tapped into the power of the group to help me carry the message. I began to welcome newcomers, to give them my name and telephone number, and to try to give them some hope rather than my latest resentment or war story. I learned that sobriety was the sole purpose of the group. Is sobriety still the sole purpose of my group?

When my group held an election to fill service jobs, I discovered what my

sponsor calls "icing on the cake." I found my group was interested in being part of AA as a whole, so I wanted to be part of AA as a whole. And they let me. It has been through service that I've gotten even a small idea of the message that is being carried worldwide. It is through service that my group communicates with other groups, my area with other areas, and the General Service Conference with our Fellowship around the world. Through this communication, we all strengthen each other in fulfilling our primary purpose.

In a letter written in 1966, Bill W. said: "The chief purpose of AA is sobriety. We all realize that without sobriety, we have nothing." Then he went on, "We are not living just to be sober; we are living to learn, to serve, and to love." There is no question in my mind that we have learned and continue to learn, have served and continue to serve, have loved and continue to love. There is also no question in my mind that I do this imperfectly, that my group does this imperfectly, and that AA as a whole does this imperfectly.

Fulfillment of our primary purpose is an individual and a collective responsibility: "Unified we live; disunited we shall perish." Although we become impatient with our progress, there is progress. More than once I've been distracted with counting — counting members, groups, and contributions. I've been distracted with judging — judging commitment of GSRs and committee members, judg-

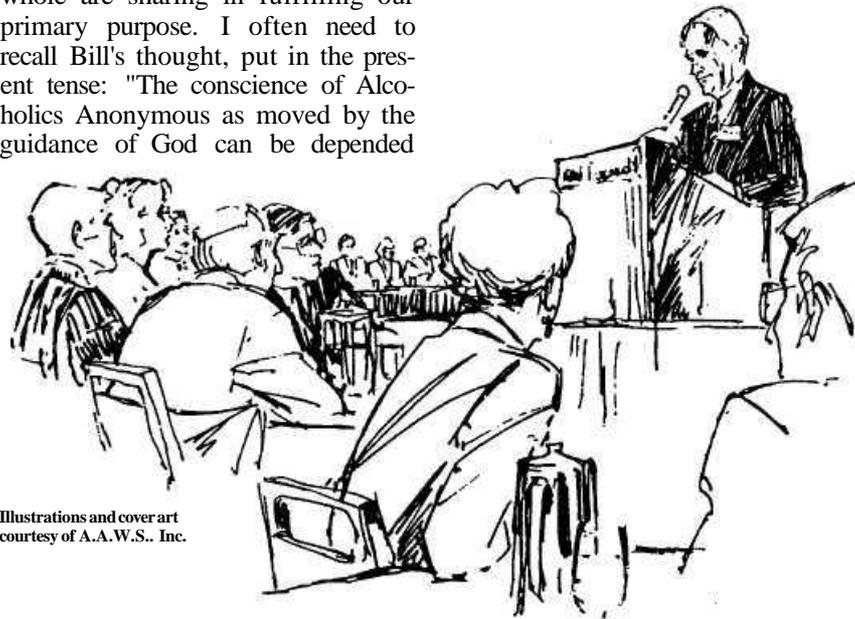
ing what I perceive to be a general lack of interest in some groups in being part of AA as a whole. These distractions are relieved only by the arrival of the newcomer who gives me and gives you the opportunity to fulfill our primary purpose.

The newcomer is from an inexhaustible supply, yet each one is of monumental importance to us. The newcomer isn't distracted by what distracts me. He knows with a deep certainty that he is fulfilling his primary purpose — to stay sober and then, later, to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety. As long as the newcomer fulfills his primary purpose, I am sharing in that fulfillment. As long as I am sharing, my group, my area, and AA as a whole are sharing in fulfilling our primary purpose. I often need to recall Bill's thought, put in the present tense: "The conscience of Alcoholics Anonymous as moved by the guidance of God can be depended

upon to insure AA's future. Clearly, my job henceforth is to let go and let God. Alcoholics Anonymous is at last safe — even from me."

We have daily reminders of what we are about — in newspapers, magazines, radio, and television, but mainly in our association with recovering alcoholics. The symbol of our Fellowship is a complete triangle enclosed in a complete circle. So long as we are responsible when anyone, anywhere reaches out for help, we are fulfilling our primary purpose. So long as I do and you do what we have been taught to do, then AA as a whole is fulfilling its primary purpose. We will continue, so long as it is God's will, to pass it on.

H. M. Bellaire, Tex.



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Why Have a Home Group?

In a recent letter to a member of the Fellowship, a member of the General Service Office staff referred to the home group as the heartbeat of AA. That made a big impression on me, and I believe that just as surely as we are aware of, sensitive to, and in need of our own heartbeat, each of us needs a home group.

It all began in the home group, didn't it? Not all of us readily identified that mysterious group of people who were trying to help us get sober as our home group. In fact, I am painfully aware that the commitment to become a part of anything escapes many in the early stages of recovery.

Most members of the Fellowship will never have the rewarding experience of attending a General Service Conference. Only a few are even touched by our area assemblies, state and national conventions, and other functions which bring members together from many home groups. Even the district functions might be attended by only a small portion of the membership of the groups involved. To many, their AA is only the home group. If this is so, what should the home group be to the member, and why should a member have a home group?

When we took those first faltering

steps to recovery, many of us would have stumbled and fallen once again if we had to make what was to be a miraculous change by ourselves. In my case, the first rays of hope came from those sometimes loving, sometimes cantankerous old geezers who sat around the table in my hometown. A long time before I believed, or even heard, what they told me, I began thinking there might be a chance simply because I thought if they could do it, so could I.

The first slogans I heard came from them. Later, when I heard the same things from speakers at a convention, I thought it was so wise; but it was months before I realized that I first heard those thoughts from the fat little guy who I thought was so windy and who eventually became my sponsor. In fact, after I got into service work, I thought I needed to go to conventions, assemblies, and

Forums to get my batteries recharged because things were so dull and routine in my home group.

Now I know that it's not the wonderful people I've met from throughout these great lands who have helped keep me sober most of the time, but those wonderful people sitting around the table in my hometown who loved me when I could not love, who waited for me to quit lying, who tolerated me when I would be part of nothing, and who never asked me to leave when I was obnoxious. Because of their love and patience, I was able finally to get outside of myself and make some sort of commitment to the group.

It seems to me that, in the beginning, a home group is all most of us can possibly handle. It's where we first find a sponsor, where someone first sees that we get a Big Book, where we first see the Steps on the



wall, where we learn again to pray, and where we first begin to recover. (Remember the heartbeat?) But most of all, because of the trust that develops through the meetings of a home group, it is where we might first begin to care about someone else so that we might eventually begin to love again, both in AA and among our friends and family.

It is where we first learn to take responsibility so that we might eventually take responsibility for our lives. In my case, that began with the simple chore of cleaning out ashtrays. (How wise that they knew I could do no more!) It was there we learned to do Twelfth Step work so that we could eventually pass on to others what was so freely given to us, thereby assuring the very future and survival of the Fellowship. It was there we first learned about the rest of the Fellowship, and someone began answering the questions about all the mysteries of what makes the whole

thing work.

Oh yes, the home group is the heartbeat of the Fellowship. There are many reasons why the Fellowship needs these wonderful groups, and there are many reasons why the groups need each and every member running through their life veins. But most important, we need our home groups. That's where it all began, and it's where it will all end for us. Yes, all of us have also had the job of burying some of those people who passed the recovery program on to each of us.

With this week at the Conference, this phase of my service to the Fellowship, of paying back a small measure of my gratitude, begins to wind down. What will I do now? If I am very, very lucky, those who are doing such a marvelous job of serving the Fellowship in my home group might, just might, allow me to make coffee next week and maybe even talk to a drunk.

R. B., Neosho, Mo.

