

July 1955



"Recovery, Unity and Service—these are the Three Legacies of our AA experience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern. God, as He may speak in our group conscience, is our sole authority. And World Service is the heart of our Third Legacy."

OUR Twelfth Step—carrying the message—is the basic service that AA's Fellowship gives; this is our principal aim and the main reason for our existence. Therefore, AA is more than a set of principles; it is a society of alcoholics *in action*. We must carry the message, else we ourselves can wither and those who haven't been given the truth will die.

Hence, an AA service is *anything whatever* that helps us to reach a fellow sufferer—ranging all the way from the Twelfth Step itself to a ten-cent phone call and a cup of coffee, and to AA's General Service Headquarters for national and international action. The sum total of *all* these services is our Third Legacy.

Services include meeting places, clubs, hospitals and Intergroup offices; they mean pamphlets, books and good

publicity of almost every description. They require committees, delegates, trustees and conferences. And, not to be forgotten, they need voluntary money contributions.

These services, whether performed by individuals, groups, areas or AA as a whole, are utterly vital to our existence and growth. Nor can we make AA simple by abolishing such services. We would only be asking for complication and confusion.

Concerning any given service, we therefore pose but one question: "Is this service really needed?" If it is, then maintain it we must, or fail in our mission to those who seek AA.

The most vital, yet the least understood group of services that AA has, are those which enable us to function as a whole; namely, the AA General Service Office, the AA Publishing,

Inc., the AA Grapevine, Inc., and AA's Board of Trustees, recently renamed as the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous. Our worldwide unity and much of our growth since early times is directly traceable to this cluster of life-giving activities located, since 1938, at New York.

Until 1950, these over-all services were the sole function of a few old time AAs, several non-alcoholic friends, Doctor Bob and myself. For all the years of AA's infancy, we old timers had been the self-appointed trustees for Alcoholics Anonymous.

At last we realized that AA had grown up; that our Fellowship was ready and able to take these responsibilities from us. There was also another urgent reason for change. Since we old timers couldn't live forever, newer trustees would be virtually unknown to the AA Groups, now spread over the whole earth. Without direct linkage to AA, future trustees couldn't possibly function alone.



This meant that we had to form a Conference representing our membership which could meet yearly with our trustees at New York and thus assume direct responsibility for the guardianship of AA tradition and the direction of our principal service affairs. Otherwise, a virtually unknown Board of Trustees and our too little understood Service Headquarters operations would someday be bound to face collapse.

Suppose, acting quite on their own, that future trustees were to make a serious blunder. Suppose, with no linkage to AA, that they tried to act for us in time of great trouble or crisis. With no direct guidance from AA as a whole, how could they do this? Collapse of our top services would then be inevitable. And if, under such conditions, our world services did fall apart, how could they ever be reconstructed?

The trustees, Doctor Bob and I finally saw in 1950 that this appalling risk must no longer be taken. A direct linkage between ourselves and AA had to be built.

These were the conclusions that led to the formation of the General Service Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous, a body of about seventy-five elected Delegates from the States and Provinces of the United States and Canada. On a trial experimental basis, these Delegates commenced in 1951 to sit yearly at New York with our Trustees and General Service Staff members.

The General Service Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous has proved it-

self an immense success. Its record of achievement during its four-year trial period has been completely convincing.

Therefore, we who are the old timers of AA, are now entirely ready to deliver the principal affairs of Alcoholics Anonymous into the permanent keeping of this well-tryed and

tested body of AA members.

Beginning, therefore, with our Twentieth Anniversary in 1955, the Third Legacy of World Service will henceforth be for all members of Alcoholics Anonymous to have and to hold for so long as God may wish our society to endure.

THE CONFERENCE IS BORN

IT was one thing to say that we ought to have a General Service Conference, but it was quite another to devise a plan which would bring it into successful existence. The cost of holding such a Conference was easily dismissed. Even though the outlay might be \$20,000 for each yearly session, this would be only fifteen cents apiece extra for each AA member, and mighty well worth it. What member wouldn't give that much to be sure that AA didn't collapse at its center in some future day of great need or crisis?

But how on earth were we going to cut down destructive politics with all its usual struggles for prestige and vainglory? How many delegates would be required and from where should they come? Arrived at New York, how could they be related to the Board of Trustees? What would be their actual powers and duties? Whatever the plan, it had to be sound enough to work well on the first trial. No blunders big enough to create a fiasco could be allowed.

With these several weighty consid-



erations in mind, and with some misgivings, I commenced work on a draft of a plan, much assisted by Helen B. of the office Staff.

Though the Conference might be later enlarged to include the whole world, we felt that the first Delegates should come from the U.S. and Canada only. Each State and Province might be allowed one Delegate. Those containing heavy AA populations could have additional representatives. To give the Conference continuity, the

delegates could be divided into panels. Panel One, elected for two years, would be invited for 1951, the first year. Panel two, elected for two years, would be seated in 1952. Thereafter, one panel would be elected and one would be retired yearly. This would cause the Conference to rotate. The election of State and Provincial Committeemen and Delegates could take place at large centers of population within each State and Province. Or, to save expense, such Assemblies of Group Representatives could be held at annual State or Provincial Conventions.

But how could Assemblies of Group Representatives choose their Committeemen and Delegates without terrific political friction? As veterans of many a group hassle and inter-group brawl, we shivered. Then came a happy thought. We remembered that the usual election troubles were often caused by personal nominations, whether from the floor or from some committee issuing from a back room. Another main cause of trouble was to be seen in close elections, hotly contested. These nearly always left a large and discontented minority.

So we devised the scheme of choosing Committeemen out of Group Assemblies by written ballot, with no personal nominations at all. The Committee would then be placed in front of the Assembly, which could then elect from it the Delegate to the Conference in New York. But, sure enough, this was going to be the hottest spot of all! How could we

pull the inevitable election pressure down? To accomplish this, it was provided that a Delegate must receive a two-thirds vote for election. If a Delegate got a majority of this size, nobody could kick much. But if he or she didn't, and the election was close, what then? Well, perhaps the names of the two highest in the running, or the three officers of the Committee, or even the whole Committee could be put in a hat. One name would be drawn. The winner of this painless lottery would become the Delegate. Since the high candidates in the running would all be good ones, we couldn't miss getting fine Delegates by this method.

But when these Delegates got to New York, what would they do there? We thought they would want to have real authority. So, in the Charter drawn for the Conference itself, it was provided that the Delegates could issue flat directions to the Trustees on a two-thirds vote. And even a simple majority vote would constitute a mighty strong suggestion. It would become traditional too for the Trustees, thereafter, to submit the names of all proposed Board members to the Conference for confirmation. This would give the Conference an effective voice in the selection of Trustees.

Along with a temporary plan for financing the Conference, we put these ideas and their detailed applications into a pamphlet called "The Third Legacy." We shipped about 50,000 of these documents to the groups and asked them to form Assemblies for the

election of Committeemen and Delegates.

With Dr. Bob's approval, I stumped the country for the Third Legacy Plan, talking to large AA audiences and watching Assemblies select their Delegates in more than two dozen States and Provinces.

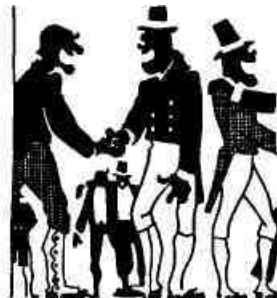


How well I remember that first try-out in Boston! The Irish turned out in force. To our amazement, the proceedings were as unruffled as a mill pond, even though ballot after ballot failed to get anybody a two-thirds majority for election as a Delegate. The Assembly finally drew lots among the whole Committee, and out of the hat popped a mighty good Delegate! Everybody was pleased and happy; the heat was off. If the Irish could do it without a fight, anybody could. Right there we got the first glimmer that AA had begun to move from partisan politics into true statesmanship.

Much the same thing happened at all the other stops. About a third of the Delegates chosen were real old-timers. The rest were active AAs, sober four to eight years. The large majority named were chosen by a two-thirds vote, only a few of the

elections being decided by lot, as Boston had. And when these few were so chosen, there was never any hard feeling. It was tremendously encouraging.

The first Conference was set for April, 1951. In came the Delegates. They looked over Headquarters, cellar



to garret, got acquainted with the Service Staff, shook hands with the Trustees. That evening, we gave them a briefing session, under the name of "What's on your mind?" We answered scores of questions of all kinds. The Delegates began to feel at home and reassured. Seeing so much quick understanding and increased confidence, our spirits rose. To a man, we sensed that something very big was happening. One strenuous Conference session followed after another. The Delegates overhauled our finances with a microscope. After listening to reports from the Board of Trustees and from all the Services, there was warm but cordial debate on many a question of AA policy. The Trustees submitted several of their own serious problems for the opinion of the Conference.

Feeling that everybody was too

polite, we set up something called the "Gripe Box." Nothing but excellent questions were dropped into it; nobody was mad about anything, believe it or not!

So went session after session, morning, afternoon and evening. The Delegates handled several tough puzzlers about which we at Headquarters were in doubt, sometimes giving advice contrary to our own conclusions. In nearly every instance, we saw that they were right. Then and there they proved, as never before, that AA's Tradition Two was correct. The group Conscience could safely act as the sole authority and sure guide for Alcoholics Anonymous.

Nobody present will ever forget that final session of the first Conference. We knew that the impossible had happened, that AA could never break down in the middle, that Alcoholics

Anonymous was at last safe from any storm the future might bring.

And, as the Delegates returned home, they carried this same conviction with them.

Realizing our need for funds and better literature circulation, some did place a little too much emphasis on this necessity; others were a little discouraged, wondering why fellow members did not take fire as they had. They forgot that they themselves had been eye witnesses to the Conference and that their brother alcoholics hadn't. But, both here and at home, they made an impression much greater than they knew. The interest of great numbers of AA groups commenced to deepen, something which has continued in all the four Conference years since.

In the midst of this exciting turn of affairs, the Conference agreed that the

WHO ARE AA'S TRUSTEES?

In response to many inquiries indicating widespread interest in AA's national affairs, the Grapevine is glad to publish a list of the non-alcoholic friends of Alcoholics Anonymous who serve without compensation as Trustees of the General Service Board of AA:

Mr. Jack Alexander, The Saturday Evening Post
Mr. Frank B. Amos, Retired
Mr. Frank Gulden, Charles Gulden, Inc.
Mr. Leonard Harrison, Community Service Society
Dr. John Norris, Eastman Kodak Company
Mr. Archibald B. Roosevelt, Investments
Mr. Bernard B. Smith, Attorney and Author

Seven alcoholics, serving also without compensation, complete the 15-man Board. A recent vacancy among the non-alcoholic members has not as yet been filled.

Alcoholic Foundation ought to be re-named as the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous, and this was done. The word "Foundation" stood for charity, paternalism and maybe big money. AA would have none of these; from here out we would assume full responsibility and pay our expenses ourselves.

As I watched all this grow, I became entirely sure that Alcoholics Anonymous was at last safe—even from me.

Nearly all of the last dozen years of my life have been invested in the construction of our General Headquarters. My heart is there, and al-

ways will be. AA's Headquarters seems that important to me. When, therefore, the hour comes at St. Louis for me to turn over to you this last great asset of the AA inheritance, I shall feel not a little sad that I must no longer be your Headquarters handyman. But I shall rejoice that Alcoholics Anonymous has now grown up and, through its great Conference, can confidently take its destiny by the hand.

So, my dear friends, you now have read my final accounting to you for the World Services of Alcoholics Anonymous.

This is the third and final installment from Bill's "Third Legacy Manual of World Service," which he will present in final form at the Twentieth Anniversary Convention in St. Louis this month. The second half of the Manual, which will not be reprinted in the Grapevine, gives detailed guidance for those actively engaged in the conduct of AA's worldwide services.—Ed.

