

# THE AA GROUP

- Where it all begins
- How a group functions
- How to get started





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*Alcoholics Anonymous*® is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism.

The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees for AA membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions.

AA is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any causes.

Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.

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For free help with any group problem, you are invited to use your clearinghouse of AA experience:

### **AA General Service Office in Great Britain**

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Mail address:  
AA General Service Office  
P.O. Box 1,  
10 Toft Green, York YO1 7NJ

Telephone: (01904) 644026 or [www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk](http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk)

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## The Purpose and Content of this Booklet

This booklet is intended to convey to the newcomer to AA and to those assuming office within a group the way in which a group is constituted and operates inside the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous. It will also assist alcoholics established within a group to understand and appreciate some of the finer points of group protocol and procedure. In that sense, it is recommended that it should be read also in conjunction with the *AA Service Handbook for Great Britain* which should be available in each group.

To the extent that AA is not an organised society, with do's and don't's and will's and wont's, there is no central authority for AA. The Fellowship works primarily through the local groups and each group is independent. There is, of course a structure to AA in that it is a registered charitable company and has to meet certain legal requirements. However, knowledge of this is not necessary to be able to understand or appreciate this booklet.

The booklet examines how things get done in a group and is based not on rules but on *proven-by-experience* ways which other members have used "to stay sober and help others to achieve sobriety". It relies therefore on suggestions drawn from AA experience the world over and it tries to *help* rather than to *tell* people what to do. Experience has shown that the better informed group members are the more they participate in group activities and the fewer the criticisms and problems that arise.

This is why the booklet does not start with how an AA group is formed but rather with how things get done, talking mostly about the various offices and responsibilities taken voluntarily by members within a group.

Following the natural processes of growth and development within the Fellowship which new members go through, the booklet takes a look at what it means to be a grown-up member of the AA family, able to recognise that the process of recovery from alcoholism isn't just a gift to be clutched selfishly for oneself but carries with it the responsibility for service to others.

**Our membership ought to include all who suffer from alcoholism. Hence we may refuse none who wish to recover. Nor ought AA membership ever depend upon money or conformity. Any two or three alcoholics gathered together for sobriety may call themselves an AA group, provided that, as a group, they have no other affiliation.**

**Tradition Three (long form)**

## How things get done in your AA group

### 1 Why do groups have ‘officers’?

All sorts of jobs have to be done to keep an AA group going - or to start one. And most of us agree, ‘AA, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.’ (Tradition Nine short form).

It is through the work of group members in AA that:

- Alcoholics in the community learn that AA is available and how to find it.
- Calls for help are answered.
- A meeting place is provided, made ready, and cleaned up after meetings.
- Programmes are arranged for meetings.
- Literature is on hand, and refreshments are served.
- The necessary money is collected and properly spent.
- Group problems get solved.
- Necessary contact is made with the rest of AA – locally through intergroup, region or otherwise through the General Service Office (GSO) in York.

It takes people to get these jobs done, of course. In AA groups they are called ‘officers’, but our Second Tradition (short form) reminds us, ‘For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority – a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.’

They are usually chosen by the group for limited terms of service.

The jobs they do may have titles. But titles in AA do not bring authority or honour; they describe services and responsibilities. They are ways of carrying the message. They are forms of Twelfth Step work an AA member willingly undertakes, primarily to help personal recovery. Many AA members have also found group duties an excellent way to strengthen their sobriety.

### 2 What officers do we need?

Individual groups have many ways of making sure the necessary services are performed with a minimum of organisation. For example, a group might have the following workers:

Steering committee

Group Chair

Secretary

Treasurer

Group service representative (GSR)

Speaker secretary  
Refreshment helpers  
*SHARE or Roundabout* representative

....or some combination of those, varying from time to time and place to place. The important thing is: The jobs get done.

### **3 Why have a steering committee?**

Questions about what a group should do, and how, sometimes arise. The steering committee (some groups call it the group service committee) is one way of getting those questions handled for the group.

As an experienced cross section of the group membership, it can handle day-to-day operations for the group. Anywhere from three to five members may be the right-sized steering committee for a small group. For larger ones, 12 or so members provide a better cross-section and share the workload in a fairer way.

In many groups, the officers are automatically the steering committee. Sometimes, former officers make good members because of their experience.

In some groups, a rotating committee (members serve six months, a year, two years, with one member added, one dropped, each month or each quarter) serves the same purpose as a steering committee.

### **4 What does the Chair do?**

In most groups, the chair is the chief officer for a stated period of time.

Like other group servants, they should have been sober awhile – probably a year. They should have had other group service experience before tackling this job. At least, that's what most groups have found works best.

They co-ordinate group activities, trying to prevent confusions and misunderstandings in group affairs. They may substitute for other group officers occasionally. They probably call steering committee meetings and preside at them. They may open all regular group meetings, then turn them over to other members who are the 'leaders' for that one session only.

The chairman has final responsibility for the smooth functioning of groups. Actually, it doesn't seem to matter *which* group officer does which job, as long as all jobs get done without confusion and conflict. It is very important for everybody to understand who is to do what.

The chairman is generally the group member responsible for maintaining good relations between the groups and their neighbouring communities, starting with the landlords.

For example: If the group meets on church property, what the clergy, the caretaker, and the church members think of AA depends mostly on the behaviour of the group members. If AA members seem to be nice people, our work is respected and sick alcoholics are encouraged to contact us. If we are found to be troublesome, the word that gets passed around does not attract alcoholics to us.

The same goes, of course, for local doctors, police, probation and social workers, and others who encounter sick alcoholics.

Usually, the better informed the chairman (and any other group officers) are about all of AA, the better they function in their offices. If they keep Tradition One in mind and help their groups to become more aware of all the Traditions, they will probably find their own welfare flourishing with that of the groups they serve.

## 5 What do secretaries do?

Some groups have no chairman, because the secretary serves as the group's chief officer. In any case, like the chair, secretaries need to be good all-around group servants. These may be typical responsibilities of a secretary:

- Opening the meetings, when the chairman is not available.
- Seeing that AA literature (especially Conference approved pamphlets for newcomers and the books *Alcoholics Anonymous*, *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, *AA Comes of Age* and *As Bill Sees It* is on hand at all times.
- Making or distributing special announcements about important AA activities.
- Keeping an up-to-date, *strictly confidential* list of names, addresses and telephone numbers of group members (subject to each member's approval, of course) and knowing which ones are available for Twelfth Step calls.
- Accepting and assigning calls for Twelfth Step help (unless there is a Twelfth Step chairman for this particular duty).
- Making sure that with the treasurer's help the rent is paid.
- Keeping a file on anniversaries if the group wishes.
- Helping the treasurer count and keep a record of each meeting's collection and co-signing the group's cheques.
- Maintaining a notice board for posting AA announcements.
- Sending to GSO, usually via intergroup, up-to-date names and telephone numbers of members willing to be included in the 'Where to Find' as contacts for the group.
- Sharing with the group members mail from other groups and the intergroup unless the intergroup representative does this.
- Providing safekeeping for group records.
- Making sure the intergroup and the GSO know of any changes of address, meeting places, new officers, etc. (The GSR may do this, but the secretary can make sure it is being done.)

Some groups use an alternate or assistant secretary to share the workload (and prepare to replace the outgoing secretary).

## 6 What do treasurers do?

AA groups are self-supporting (Tradition Seven), accepting money only from members and, in most cases, only enough to keep carrying the message and to maintain the communications and other services necessary to keep AA available for those who want it.

Usually, passing the pot at meetings takes care of the group's money needs, plus something left over so the group can do its fair share of supporting the Intergroup and the GSO. But it helps if treasurers report to their groups regularly, showing what the money is needed for.

There is no formal obligation for any member to contribute, but most do. Those who can are generally willing to put in a bit extra to make up for those unable to give at present.

Group funds pay for services such as:

- Rent, light, heat, and maybe caretaker services for the meeting place.
- Refreshments.
- Equipment and miscellaneous expense, such as AA signs, cups, spoons, ashtrays, postage, telephone, etc.
- AA literature: for books and pamphlets see separate literature order form. Cheques should be made payable to GSO.
- For subscriptions to our monthly magazine, write to GSO York for *SHARE and Roundabout*. Local meeting lists are usually obtained from the intergroup.
- Running the local telephone service office, where one exists, and the GSO (the central clearinghouse for all groups). Cheques for GSO are made out to General Service Office or GSO.
- Contributions to the intergroup for local area activities.

Treasurers usually keep simple records and keep their groups informed about how much is taken in and how it is spent. They may make brief monthly reports to the groups, and post financial statements quarterly.

Problems can be avoided by keeping group funds in a separate group bank account that requires two signatures on each cheque. There are other ways of doing this job and any other AA task, of course (no pamphlet can spell them all out). But the methods suggested here have proved to eliminate troubles later.

Most groups now find it makes good sense to budget all expenses in advance, setting aside sums from each collection in order to meet monthly bills.

**AA experience clearly shows that it is not a good idea for a group to accumulate large funds in excess of what is needed, plus a prudent reserve.**

Group troubles also arise when extra large donations, in money or goods or services, are accepted from one member.

Group treasuries are used for all group expenses, but not for members' expenses in Twelfth Step work. GSO accepts contributions from individual members - not more than £10,000 in one year.

The Group Chapter in the AA Structure Handbook for Great Britain sets out very simply the responsibilities of Group Officers. As The Group chapter in the AA Structure Handbook for Great Britain is based on this pamphlet it could be as well to have it readily at hand for a quick referral.

## **7 What do Group Service Representatives (GSRs) do?**

The GSR is the first vital link in communications. As Bill W. said, the strength of our whole structure starts with the group and with the GSR that the group elects. Working via the intergroup the GSR is the group's link with the General Service Conference (GSC), through which groups share experience and voice AAs collective conscience.

GSRs may receive and share with their groups all mail from GSO, the *AA Service News* (which reports on Conference proceedings annually in one issue), and the AA directory in which the group concerned is listed.

They can make sure the groups see all the pamphlets published by AA.

They can help see that up-to-date group information for the AA directory is in the hands of the GSO immediately changes occur. They can help to collect and forward to GSO, via intergroup, the group's monthly contributions for keeping AA work going worldwide.

They keep fellow members informed about local service activities.

Each represents his or her group at intergroup service assemblies, sharing experiences with neighbouring GSRs.

They may be GSO contacts for referral to carry the message.

Good GSRs really act in the spirit of our Twelve Traditions, and more than any other group servants, probably they are familiar with our Third Legacy - our spiritual responsibility to give service freely. They can also help their groups solve problems and avoid foolish mistakes. To do this, they can draw on all the facilities of the GSO at York where the staff are ready to relay helpful AA experience from all over the world.

For more information, see Sections 31-35 and the list of pamphlets at the end of this one, or write to the address given at the front.

One of the ways in which you can be most valuable, others have found, is in sharing experiences with representatives from other groups. Often, you find one of them can tell you how his or her group solved a problem last week facing your group this week. The Group Chapter in the Structure Handbook for Great Britain sets out very simply the duties of the GSR.

## 8 How about AA in institutions?

The most successful groups in institutions usually follow as closely as possible the procedures of 'outside' groups, adapting them as necessary but using the same principles.

Groups outside usually feel a special responsibility to alcoholics in institutions and can be of great help to them. In fact, in some cases, AA may be the only source of hope and help for these people.

Whenever AA members have taken the attitude - both toward institutionalised alcoholics and toward the staffs of institutions - of 'How can we be of service?', the AAs have been able to help many alcoholics in prisons, clinics and hospitals.

But an AA attitude of 'We're the experts' can cause institutional personnel to feel less friendly towards AA and this can deprive some sick alcoholics of their chance at the AA recovery programme.

It has proved important for AA members to show respect for all institutional rules and regulations always. After all, we are usually *guests* in such places and should be on our best behaviour to attract alcoholics to our way of life. Attraction, not promotion, is the best for AA.

Here are some of the ways groups have helped alcoholics who are confined in institutions:

- Choosing an institution's representative, who reminds other members periodically of the need for Twelfth Stepping in institutions. If the intergroup or region has an institutions committee, or separate committees for hospitals and for prisons, each representative can work through this committee structure to co-ordinate the group's activities in institutions with those of other groups.
- Furnishing AA literature for alcoholics in institutions (special packets of AA pamphlets, subscriptions to *SHARE* or *Roundabout*).
- Supplying speakers, leaders, literature, and refreshments for AA meetings in institutions.
- Attending AA meetings in institutions as listeners - just to encourage the members.
- Arranging for AA visitors to call on alcoholics in institutions.
- Making sure that patients or inmates who join AA have AA sponsors when they are released.

- Furnishing AA speakers and literature for the staffs of institutions as well as for the inmates and patients.

For other ideas or free help with AA in institutions problems write to GSO or refer to Chapter Eight in the AA Service Handbook for Great Britain.

## **9 What does a *SHARE* or *Roundabout* representative do?**

Their primary purpose is to make sure that group members are aware of our magazines and the enhancement to sobriety they offer. The representative is to the magazines what the GSR is to the GSO.

The representative makes sure sufficient copies are ordered for the members of the group, sells them when they arrive and displays them at group meetings.

They ask the group treasurer to pay the monthly account. They can also encourage members to submit articles to the magazine.

## **10 How are group officers elected?**

Group workers are generally chosen by the group membership for limited terms of service. (The term may be one month, six months, or a year – it varies. But the GSR should be elected for a *two-year* term.) In some groups, a rotating or steering committee simply names the new group officers periodically. In others, elections are regularly held. A nominating committee (maybe the steering committee) may suggest who might make good officers and a majority decides the election.

## **11 What are some good qualifications for group office?**

Most groups make sure that their officers have some continuous sobriety behind them and are available and willing to give dependable service. Members in the habit of regular attendance at meetings usually make better workers, of course, than absentees. And it has generally been found that giving members jobs solely to help them stay sober does not work; instead, the *group's* welfare is of primary concern in choosing officers. A review of Traditions One and Two helps at election times.

Most group officers realise that giving service to a group, like staying sober, may sometimes involve doing tasks whether they want to, or feel like it, or not.

More and more, group servants have found that knowledge of all Three Legacies (see Section 36) helps them to do a better job. A thorough familiarity with the main AA publications is a good way to start.

## 12 Why are some AA jobs more popular than others?

It takes a certain kind of courage to do the job of intergroup representative, GSR, or institutions representative well. But you can generally count on the group conscience to be quietly on your side.

In planning your reports to the group, it also helps to remember that most of us respond better to calm, factual talk (maybe with a touch of humour) than to demands or preaching.

## 13 Is rotation important?

Traditionally, rotation keeps AA volunteers from becoming fixed in their offices. After one term in any office, most members move on to other kinds of AA service. This way, problems based on personalities are prevented; no power or prestige gets built up; no individual gets taken advantage of and imposed upon; and the blessings of giving service are shared by more and more members.

To step out of an AA office you love can be hard, but it can be a real step forward in growth – a step into the humility that is, for some people, the spiritual essence of anonymity.

Among other things, anonymity in AA means that we forego personal prestige for any AA work we do to help other alcoholics. (see Tradition Twelve).

Rotation helps bring us spiritual rewards far more enduring than any fame. With no AA ‘status’ at stake, we have freedom to serve as we are needed, and we don’t have to compete for titles or praise. There are always opportunities for service.

Many groups have *alternate, assistant, or co-officers* who can step into the officers’ jobs they have been trained for, and new members can take the alternate slots just vacated.

AA jobs aren’t arranged upward like rungs on a ladder; they are all on the same level – the base of service to others.

## 14 What kinds of meeting can a group have?

Our Fourth Tradition (Short Form) says, ‘Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or AA as a whole.’ So a group can hold practically any kind of meeting it chooses. The most common kinds are:

**The Closed meeting** Intended for alcoholics and for those with an alcohol problem who have a desire to stop drinking.

**The Open meeting** Intended for alcoholics and non-alcoholics e.g. family, friends and anyone interested in AA.

**Open speaker meetings** Usually consist of a few members (often from another group), who tell what they were like, what happened, and what they are like now, as the Big Book describes ‘sharing’.

Usually groups prefer members to have a little time of continuous sobriety (say, at least three months) before giving a ‘talk’.

Some groups feel it is important to balance the programme, making sure both men and women are heard, newer members and older. Sometimes an announcement about the importance of anonymity in the public media is read aloud.\* In many places, the presiding member emphasises that ‘anything you hear at this meeting is the opinion of the speaker, and does not reflect the AA opinion, since no one person speaks for AA.’

**Open discussion meetings** are held in many places. At these, non-alcoholics may take part in the discussion with the approval of the group conscience.

**Public** These are speaker-type meetings with emphasis on informing the non-alcoholic public about AA, Doctors, members of the clergy and public officials are invited. Often a guest speaker is heard, in addition to AA members. The *AA Service Handbook for Great Britain* gives excellent suggestions for arranging such a meeting. Such a meeting is an excellent way to celebrate group anniversaries.

**Beginners** These are usually smaller, more intimate question and answer sessions to help newcomers.

**Step meetings** Since the Steps are the basis of our recovery, many groups devote regular meetings to a study of each Step in rotation, perhaps two or three at a time. The leader shares a bit of his or her story and talks on the Step briefly, then throws the meeting open for discussion.

**Business** Some groups arrange special sessions, several times a year, apart from other meetings, for the group officers to report to the group on how their jobs are progressing and to seek group guidance (see the Second Tradition) for the future. New group officers are elected at such meetings, usually.

**Group Conscience meeting** (see also Section 26). These meetings normally take the form of a group inventory. An informed group conscience implies that all pertinent information has been carefully studied; and the views of all members who wish to contribute to the discussion have been heard before the group makes its decision.

\*Wallet cards on the subject and the pamphlet *Understanding Anonymity* are available at the General Service Office

## 15 The following is a list of suggested topics for an AA meeting:

- Passages from the Big Book
- Passages from *As Bill Sees It*
- Passages from *Living Sober*
- Passages from *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*
- Passages from *Daily Reflections*
- Passages from *SHARE* and *Roundabout*
- Resentments
- Honesty
- Openmindedness
- Willingness
- Taking inventory
- What is sobriety?
- Spiritual awakening/spiritual experience
- Loneliness
- Tolerance
- The Serenity Prayer
- Acceptance
- Sponsorship – from both angles
- Prayer
- Meditation
- Personal inventory
- Group inventory
- Gratitude
- Amends
- Faith
- Love
- Into Action
- Twelfth Stepping
- Carrying the message
- First drink concept
- Living a day at a time
- HALT – Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired
- Using the phone
- The Home Group
- Principles
- Freedom
- Serenity
- Humility
- Fear
- Surrender
- Anonymity
- Sobriety
- Depression
- Anger
- Projection

} the essentials of recovery

- Dependence
- Inadequacy
- The Steps
- The Traditions
- The Concepts
- Higher Power
- Spiritual progress
- Altered Attitudes
- My first AA meeting
- Lets be friendly with our friends
- Acceptance not admission
- We plan the action not the results
- Freedom through sobriety
- Surrender
- In all our affairs
- Service

### **16 What's the usual meeting procedure?**

No one type, format, or ritual is best for an AA meeting, but some work better than others. The group chair usually opens the meeting with a few remarks before introducing the speaker for the evening – anonymously, of course, if AA speakers choose to use their full names, that's their privilege, but no-one has the right to reveal any other member's full name or identity, even at an AA meeting.

Some chairs call for a moment of silence and read the Preamble. Some have a reading of part of chapter 3 ('More About Alcoholism') or Chapter 5 ('How It Works') from the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*. In other places, the *Twelve Steps and the Twelve Traditions* are read. Having different members perform these tasks at different times helps people feel they are sharing in group life. Most meetings are closed by the members repeating the Serenity Prayer together. But just a little bit of ceremony seems to go a long, long way in AA. Informed guest speakers – such as doctors, psychiatrists, members of the clergy, alcoholism workers, Al-Anon Family Groups and Alateen members and authors – often give helpful new insights and knowledge. Some groups like to use CDs or DVDs, and tapes of AA talks are sometimes played. And the intergroup representative, institutions representative, or Conference delegates can provide meetings based on AA services. Calls or notes to confirm engagements and thank speakers are only common courtesy.

### **17 What about tea / coffee time?**

Many AA members have reported they get almost as much good out of refreshments and conversation after or before the meeting as they do out of the meeting itself.

Groups consider sharing coffee or tea before or after meetings as a normal part of the AA routine. Most groups depend on members to do these chores as a voluntary service. You often hear AA members say they first felt they belonged when they began helping to set up and clean up the room, pouring tea or coffee, or doing washing up therapy. Many of us are shy and are grateful to be asked. Some newcomers find such activity relieves their timidity and makes it easier to meet and talk to other members. For many of us, this experience is our contribution of AA service.

It seems only fair, of course, that such jobs get passed around. See 'Is rotation important?' (Section 13).

### **18 What is 'public information' for?**

Someone has said that the heart of AA is 'one drunk carrying the message to the other drunk'. This is still a good way of staying away from the first drink.

Sometimes, the 'one drunk' has used a third person to get the message to 'the other drunk'. One member (Bill W.) used a non-alcoholic physician (Dr. Silkworth) and a hospital to find other alcoholics – *to keep himself sober*. In Akron – *to keep himself sober* – he used a minister (the Rev Walter Tunks) and a non-alcoholic lay person (Mrs. Henrietta Seiberling) to find Dr. Bob. Together – *to keep themselves sober* – Bill and Dr. Bob used a non-alcoholic nurse (Sister Ignatia) to locate other alcoholics who needed help. These methods are still used. The Big Book can also carry the message, as pamphlets, *SHARE* and *Roundabout* do.

The message has also been carried to many 'other drunks' by newspaper and magazine articles, radio and TV shows and AA public information committees. Institutions committees have carried the message to alcoholics in both treatment and correctional facilities, and committees on co-operation with the professional community have reached the drunk by way of people and agencies working in the alcoholism field.

Most groups know now that no alcoholics can come to ask for help until they know where AA is. To tell them, many methods are used by groups.

Sometimes, a small sign saying 'AA Meeting tonight' outside a door of a meeting place points the way. From AA's earliest days, small newspaper notices and radio announcements of meetings have been used effectively. They work. And an AA listing in the local telephone directory has proved a lifesaver for many. Public meetings also frequently carry the message – especially when a group is interested in attracting new members, in saying thank-you to old community friends and in helping suffering alcoholics, generally.

As long as these methods of carrying the message demonstrate recovery, give information about the AA programme (not about alcoholism) and do not *boast* about AA, they seem to be well within the spirit of Tradition Eleven.

Many groups regularly invite to their open and public meetings ministers, doctors, hospital and law-enforcement officials, employers, welfare workers and others who deal with alcoholics. Some groups give a subscription to an AA magazine each month to a doctor. Furnishing speakers for non-AA meetings of various organisations in the community also carries the message. (Write to the GSO for a helpful pamphlet, *Speaking at Non-AA Meetings*.)

Local intergroups may now perform some of these services for the group, but there is much that the individual group can do to help. The Public Information Workbook – available from GSO can show you.

Should an AA group advertise? Some groups do, but for the only one reason – to let the community know of the availability of help through the recovery programme. Such advertising, usually in local newspapers, is designed exclusively to let people know how to get in touch with the Fellowship locally, if they so desire. A typical advertisement might look like this:

**HAVE YOU A DRINKING  
PROBLEM?**  
**Alcoholics Anonymous can help.**  
**Telephone: (local contact number)**  
**for details of weekly meetings.**

### **19 How can newcomers be reached and helped?**

Naturally, no alcoholics can be helped by AA unless they know AA exists and where to find us. So it is a good idea for a group to publicise its name, meeting place and time, and a telephone contact. Then notices are given to **1)** police stations, **2)** hospitals or clinics, **3)** doctors, **4)** clergy and churches, **5)** social, health, and welfare agencies and **6)** local employers. In large urban areas, the meeting list of all groups can be used, with the local telephone number.

Along with the notices, it is a good idea also to distribute the flyer *AA at a Glance*.

Some groups keep lists of members available to do Twelfth Step work. Some groups have hospitality committees to make sure no new member, inquiring prospect, or visitor goes unwelcomed, unanswered, or unwanted. Many groups hold special beginners meetings - usually small, short ones just preceding an 'open' meeting. Some members may wish to give

the new person a copy of the Big Book, copy of *SHARE* or *Roundabout* or other appropriate AA literature. Or the group may let the newcomer buy the Big Book and literature on easy terms.

Most often, sponsors take the responsibility for helping newcomers find their way in AA their own way, not the sponsors'. Much help can be found in the AA pamphlet *Questions and Answers on Sponsorship*.

## **20 How do group problems get solved?**

Sometimes, it is hard to tell the difference between a group problem and a group blessing. Each has a way of turning into the other as time passes, depending on who is looking at it.

Group problems are usually a sign that the group is meeting the experiences of life and growing. They are often evidence of a healthy, desirable diversity of opinion among the members. They give us a chance to learn how to 'practise these principles in all our affairs'.

Trouble has often been the soil out of which the best AA growth has come. Three factors seem to lead to this growth: **1)** unity within the group (Tradition One),\* **2)** harmony between the group and its neighbours, both other AA groups and the rest of the community (Traditions Four, Five, Six, Seven, Eight, Eleven); and **3)** 'an open door for everybody' - wholehearted practice of Tradition Three.

By 'group problems' are meant such common AA questions as: **1)** What should the group do about 'slippers'? About pill takers? **2)** How can we boost attendance at meetings? **3)** How can we get more people to help with group tasks? **4)** How can we raise money for more literature? **5)** How can we get out from under the old-timers who insist they know what's best for the group? **6)** Why can't we get some long-timers to share their experience to help solve group problems? **7)** Should we pay rent for the room we meet in? **8)** Should we celebrate individuals' anniversaries, or doesn't this get off the 24-hour plan? **9)** What can be done about dirty jokes and profanity at meetings? **10)** Why can't we hold newcomers in our group? **11)** A church and a clinic want to give us free meeting space; should we take it? **12)** Should we buy literature for a hospital group or a new plaque for our own group? **13)** Is group loyalty a good thing or not? **14)** What can be done about an anonymity breaker? An AA profiteer? **15)** What can be done about acts or threats of violence and other unacceptable behaviour at meetings? How can we protect vulnerable members from sexual harassment? And on and on. Even Solomon might have hesitated over some of the tangled knots AA groups have had to untie.

\* See p31 for Traditions

You will not find the answers here. But most AA groups have got out of jams like these and worse. The story of how they did it is to be found in our Twelve Traditions and other records of AA experience - such as pamphlets, the books *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age* and *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, magazine articles, and the group letters in the files of the GSO. All you have to do is read, see your GSR, or write to GSO.

Often, group problems are simply misunderstandings easily thrashed out in discussion. Or they may involve members trying to change other members' behaviour or opinions. Maybe two people mean different things by the same word. Or maybe members agree on a goal but simply have varied opinions on how to reach it.

Sometimes group - or even intergroup - problems concern honest disagreement between two sincere, well-meaning sets of members. They may be of equally good hearts and intentions, but differ over which crowd performs certain AA services better, or which methods to use, or which bunch has the stronger 'right' to perform the jobs. In most cases, AA's Traditions and past experiences have guided the way to harmony in such matters and the result can be even better services.

No problem has to lead to drastic trouble for any group, since AA experience shows that goodwill, honesty, selflessness and a spirit of love and service prevail against group difficulties if we make an honest effort to 'place principles before personalities' (Tradition Twelve).

In recent years, several groups have found that they can apply in their groups some of the ideas in Bill W's *Twelve Concepts for World Service.* (See p.38 for the 'short form.')

## **21 How do new groups get started?**

Practically every AA group started when one or a handful of hardworking members set up a series of meetings, often in somebody's home and did the chores necessary to keep it going. This sometimes involved breaking off from an older, larger group, or taking speakers into an institution where there were alcoholics, or filling some other needs at a certain place and time for a particular kind of sharing of experience, strength, and hope. Continuing to carry the AA message to other alcoholics is the best way to strengthen our own sobriety. The more healthy, message-carrying groups there are in more places, the better we can help others and ourselves.

How can you know whether there is a need for a group? Ask yourself whether there are alcoholics in your neighbourhood who need AA but who may not know of it.

In each community certain people seem to be more familiar with the alcoholic situation than others. They include clergy, doctors, hospital workers, police, employers, welfare workers, probation and parole officers, psychologists, counsellors, even some bartenders and, of course, people in alcoholism clinics, education programmes, and information centres. It is usually helpful to talk to some of these people, to explain what AA is and especially what it is *not*, and why you want to start a group.

Giving them the AA books, some pamphlets, *SHARE* and *Roundabout* sometimes works wonders.

It is particularly helpful to talk to the local newspaper editor and local radio and television stations - not to ask for favours, but to establish right from the start the importance of the AA principle of anonymity in *the public media*, thus helping to avoid embarrassing anonymity breaks later.

Don't fail to let neighbouring groups, your intergroup and GSO know if you start a new group. Much support and help can come from these sources. (Write to GSO or use AA's website for the Group Information Form.)

If you are involved in helping a new group, you will find that these three recommendations of the AA GSC (see 'Who is the boss?' in Section 32) can help the group avoid vexing problems.

- 1 The primary purpose of any AA group is to carry the AA message to *alcoholics*. Experience with alcohol is one thing all AA members have in common. It is misleading to hint or give the impression that AA solves marital problems or knows what to do about addiction to heroin or other such drugs. (Write to GSO for a copy of the leaflet *Problems Other Than Alcohol*.)
- 2 Experience has taught AA groups to avoid affiliation with or endorsement of any enterprise outside AA. Even the *appearance* of being linked to any professional or lay organisation, club, political or religious persuasion, or institution needs to be avoided. Therefore, an AA group that meets in a correctional or treatment facility or a church can take care *not* to use the institution's name, but to call itself something different. This makes it clear that the AA group is *not* affiliated with the hospital, church, prison, rehab centre, or whatever, but simply uses space there for meetings.
- 3 It has also been strongly recommended by the AA Conference that no AA group be named after any actual person. That is one way we can 'place principles before personalities' (in the words of Tradition Twelve).

Be sure not to miss Section 25, which outlines the difference between an AA 'meeting' and an AA 'group'.

## 22 How do you become a group member?

We usually say that anyone is a member of AA if he or she says so. Tradition Three (Short Form) says, 'The only requirement for AA membership is a desire to stop drinking.'

To join a group is usually the simple process of attending its meetings regularly. Most groups have long ago given up such things as any formal procedure or ceremony for 'joining' - although, of course, some groups do try to keep *confidential* lists of the names of members who wish to be notified of special AA meetings or other events, or are available for Twelfth Step work, and to record general membership information for the AA directory.

Most members feel more at home in one particular group than in others and consider it their home group, where they accept responsibilities and try to sustain friendships. They do not take part in the business or policy of groups which they visit but in which they would accept no service assignments.

## 23 Getting started in a small community.

There should be no difficulty in letting key members of the community, such as doctors, the police and social workers, know of the availability of AA and our willingness to help any alcoholic who is willing to accept help.

You could run a box number in a daily or weekly paper; ask for a listing in the local phone book; put notices of availability of AA help in church bulletins; and arrange to have some information placed in the local paper.

## 24 When is 'breaking my anonymity' not an anonymity break?

**A** The word 'anonymous' in our name is a promise of privacy. Most of us do not want to cater to the cruel stigma unjustly attached by ignorant people to the illness of alcoholism. But we have to face the fact that the stigma exists and that people suffer from it.

Therefore, to those who have trouble with their drinking, who feel ashamed and guilty about it, who are afraid people will find out, we say, 'Come on in. We understand, because we have been there. We'll try to help, and we promise you the private refuge of anonymity.'

**B** We demonstrate that promise by keeping strict anonymity for ourselves and everyone else in AA at the media level. For the press, radio, TV and films, we never reveal last names or any other identifying facts about any AA member. We do not put 'AA' on envelopes sent through the post. In material to be pinned on AA bulletin boards and printed AA programmes that the general public might see, we omit last

names and identifying titles of all members. Television shows and news photographs do not show members' faces if they are identified as AAs. In news stories, we are identified by first names and last initials only. And we usually use first names only when speaking as AA members at non-AA meetings.

- C** Within AA itself, where no stigma is attached to our common illness, we freely exchange our full names.
- D** In personal, private, face-to-face relationships with non-alcoholics, we are not ashamed to say we are recovered, or recovering, alcoholics. This often helps carry the message to others.
- E** We do not hide our alcoholism in guilty secrecy out of fear and shame. That would actually strengthen even further the cruel stigma that unfortunately surrounds the victims of our illness.

We remain anonymous at the media level for two reasons: **1)** our promise of privacy to the still suffering alcoholic and his or her family, and **2)** a spiritual reason, summed up in Tradition Twelve or in the word 'humility.'

*With anonymity, we renounce personal prestige for our AA recovery and work and place the emphasis on our principles - the Power that really heals us - not our personal selves.*

## **25 What's the difference between a 'meeting' and a 'group'?**

The group conscience of AA seems to have agreed upon six points that define an AA group:

- All members of a group are alcoholics, and all alcoholics are eligible for membership.
- As a group, they are fully self-supporting.
- A group's primary purpose is to help alcoholics recover through the Twelve Steps.
- As a group, they have no other affiliation.
- As a group, they have no opinion on outside issues.
- As a group, their public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion, and they maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, TV, and films.

Regularly scheduled meetings, of course, are the chief activity of any AA group. The group continues to exist outside meeting hours, ready to offer help when needed.

## **26 How is a group inventory taken?**

Many groups periodically take a 'group inventory,' using times set aside for an honest and fearless discussion of the group's weaknesses and strengths.

Many groups have written to GSO that a group inventory perked up their AA activity and made sobriety more exciting and enjoyable - besides getting the message to more and more alcoholics.

The most popular form for taking a group inventory has been the set of questions, which some groups have used effectively.

For groups that want to Tenth Step themselves, here is a recent version - suggestions for a programme that may bring the group new health and vitality.

- 1 What is the basic purpose of the group?
- 2 What *more* can the group do to carry the message?
- 3 Considering the number of alcoholics in our community, are we reaching enough people?
- 4 What has the group done lately to bring the AA message to the attention of physicians, judges, members of the clergy, and others who can be helpful in reaching those who need AA?
- 5 Is the group attracting only a certain kind of alcoholic, or are we getting a good cross section of our community?
- 6 Do new members stick with us, or does turnover seem excessive?
- 7 How effective is our sponsorship? How can it be improved?
- 8 Has everything practical been done to provide an attractive meeting place?
- 9 Has enough effort been made to explain to all members the need and value of kitchen and housekeeping work and other services to the group?
- 10 Is adequate opportunity given to all members to speak and participate in other group activities?
- 11 Are group officers picked with care and consideration on the basis that officership is a great responsibility and opportunity for Twelfth Step work?
- 12 Does the group carry its fair share of the job of helping intergroup? *SHARE* and *Roundabout*? GSO? groups in institutions?
- 13 Do we give all members their fair chance of keeping informed about the *whole* of AA - Recovery, Unity, and Service?

You'll probably want to add questions of your own. (If your group tries an inventory, please let GSO know of the results)

## How things get done in your intergroup, region or telephone service office

### 27 How do such offices start?

- How can we find out where and when nearby groups meet?
- How can we exchange speakers with other groups, or hold joint meetings or social gathering with them?
- If we had one central place where prospective members could telephone, or come, couldn't we put them in touch with the group right in their own neighbourhood -and thus get help to them quicker?
- If the groups around here pooled resources couldn't we do a better job of carrying the message into hospitals, prisons and informing the public about AA?

When questions like these come up, neighbouring groups usually develop a system for working together. That's why and how an intergroup or telephone service office gets started. Intergroups get going simply as the most efficient way of getting AA jobs done well - providing services for alcoholics with a *minimum* of organisation. (See Traditions Eight and Nine).

Experience shows that together we can perform many services better, (with much more between-groups communication, less between-groups confusion) than individual groups can in different, uncoordinated, separate ways.

### 28 What are they needed for?

These local services, with a number of volunteers, often handle local, regional responsibilities such as:

- Maintaining AA listings in local telephone books, handling telephone and mail enquiries.
- Serving as a communications centre for participating groups.
- Sponsoring and arranging joint social affairs.
- Keeping institutions work going.
- Handling requests for information about AA and furnishing speakers for non-AA organisations.
- Maintaining contact with other organisations in the field of alcoholism.

### 29 How do they function?

In most areas, any group that wants to can belong to the intergroup, which tries to provide services for all groups in its area. Member groups ordinarily elect a GSR to represent them (see Section 7) in service affairs. Financial support to such a service by its member groups is usually voluntary and not a requirement for membership. Most members know, however, that they can't expect good service unless they pay their share for it.

### **30 How can you help?**

AA members serve on committees when asked and volunteer for other services.

A major way of help is giving trust (see Tradition Two) and support to group and intergroup officers.

### **How things get done in your General Service Office**

#### **31 How did it start?**

In North America right after the first AA members published the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*, they turned it over to a non-profit foundation. The Alcoholic Foundation became the focal point for questions about AA from all over the world.

Therefore, it also became a sort of repository for an accumulation of worldwide AA experience and know-how, and was AA's first office, the forerunner of the GSO of today.

The foundation is now called the General Service Board of AA. Its trustees, non-alcoholic and AA alike, have been entrusted with the supervision of the two service agencies (AA World Services, Inc. and AA Grapevine, Inc.) and are the custodians of all funds contributed by the groups.

In Great Britain the General Service Board of AA (Great Britain) Ltd. and the GSO York perform a similar function.

#### **32 Who is the boss?**

The board is responsible to AA groups through the GSC. Each year, delegates are sent from their regions to the GSC - to hear the reports of the Board, the GSO and to advise the Board and the GSO.

Each delegate reports back to the groups in his or her area, through the region and intergroup.

Regions and intergroups are frequently responsible for conventions and mini conventions (see The AA Structure Handbook for Great Britain).

#### **33 What does GSO do for you?**

Entrusted with the responsibility for furnishing many services for all of us, the GSO does these things for your group and others:

- 1** Passes along other groups' experience with group problems when you ask for it.
- 2** Works with alcoholics overseas, Loners, Internationalists (seagoing AAs) and those in the Armed Forces and in hospitals and prisons.
- 3** Answers many letters asking for help for alcoholics (these are referred to local groups when possible).

- 4 Publishes *AA Service News* (newsletter for all groups) and other bulletins.
- 5 Publishes and distributes the AA books and pamphlets (such as this one) that are approved by the GSC (see list on inside back cover).
- 6 Provides, produces and distributes Public Information materials.
- 7 Publishes an AA directory to help us in our Twelfth Step work.
- 8 Handles public information (at the national level) for A.A as a whole - with national newspapers, magazines radio and TV networks, film producers, etc, as well as with other national and global organisations interested in alcoholism.

### 34 How are world services supported?

Like the expenses of other AA activities, those of GSO are met principally by group and individual contributions. These almost - but do not quite - take care of world services. But the publishing operation pays its own way and leaves some over to help with the deficit.

For ways your group can be sure of giving its support, read the suggestions included in 'What do treasurers do?' (See Section 6).

### 35 How can you help GSO?

What gets done by GSO and how it is done depends as much on you as on any other member. You have the final responsibility and, ultimately, the dividends.

If you want AA kept as available, as simple, and as effective for the new member you Twelfth-Step tomorrow as it was for you, your help is needed by GSO. Keep informed, and ask questions; the more AA you know, the more you can use.

You can help your group choose - and use - a good GSR. It is vital to inform GSO about any group changes, such as a new GSR (name, address), new group name or new address on the 'Group Information Form' from GSO or via the AA website.

## Questions and answers about some AA customs

### 36 What are the 'Three Legacies' of AA?

They are the experiences AA's earliest members have passed on and shared with the rest of us:

- 1 suggestions for Recovery - the Twelve Steps;
- 2 suggestions for Unity - the Twelve Traditions; and
- 3 AA Service - described in *The AA Service Manual* and *Twelve Concepts for World Service*. See also the book *AA Comes of Age*.

### **37 Who runs clinics and treatment centres?**

Medical and social services are not part of the AA programme. As a fellowship, we claim no qualifications to render such aid.

However, AA members can make valuable employees in clinics, hospitals and treatment centres. Technically, again, there is no such thing as an 'AA Clinic' or an 'AA hospital', although at some such places, AA fellowship is available.

AA members who help such facilities do so as private citizens, of course - never as AA members - and are expected to make sure that neither the name of the institution nor any of its promotional literature uses the AA name or any other name (such as 'Twelfth Step House') that erroneously *implies* endorsement by AA.

### **38 What is Gratitude Week?**

Some AA groups observe 'Gratitude Week' in June each year by having a separate collection and making a special donation to GSO for Twelfth Step work.

### **39 Is AA affiliated with Al-Anon Family Groups, Alateen, national alcoholism programmes, Alcohol Concern, local councils on alcoholism, or any religious groups interested in alcoholism?**

No. AA is not affiliated with any other organisation. Our policy is 'co-operation, but not affiliation.' Among groups we co-operate with are:

*Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters  
57B Great Suffolk Street  
London SE1 0BB*

*Alateen c/o Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters  
57B Great Suffolk Street  
London SE1 0BB*

*Alcohol Concern,  
Waterbridge House  
32-36 Leman Street  
London SE1 0EE*

*Medical Council on Alcoholism,  
1 St. Andrews Place,  
Camden,  
London NW1 4LB*

#### 40 AA's position in the field of alcoholism

Alcoholics Anonymous is a worldwide fellowship of recovered alcoholics who help each other to maintain sobriety and who offer to share their recovery experience freely with other men and women who may have a drinking problem. AA members are distinctive in their acceptance of all or part of a programme of Twelve Suggested Steps designed for personal recovery from alcoholism

The Fellowship functions through approximately; 98,000 local groups in 150 countries. It is estimated that there are now more than 2,200,000 members, but AA recognises that its programme is not always effective with all alcoholics and that some may require professional counselling or treatment.

AA is concerned solely with the personal recovery and continued sobriety of individual alcoholics who turn to the Fellowship for help. The movement does not engage in the field of alcoholism research, medical or psychiatric treatment, education, or propaganda in any form, although members may participate in such activities as *individuals*. The movement has adopted a policy of 'co-operation but not affiliation' with other organisations concerned with the problem of alcoholism.

Traditionally, Alcoholics Anonymous does not accept or seek financial support from outside sources, and members preserve personal anonymity in print and broadcast media.

#### 41 The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous

- 1 We admitted we were powerless over alcohol – that our lives had become unmanageable.
- 2 Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
- 3 Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.
- 4 Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
- 5 Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
- 6 Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
- 7 Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
- 8 Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

- 9 Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
- 10 Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
- 11 Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
- 12 Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

#### **42 The Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous**

- 1 Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon AA unity.
- 2 For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority - a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
- 3 The only requirement for AA membership is a desire to stop drinking.
- 4 Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or AA as a whole.
- 5 Each group has but one primary purpose - to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.
- 6 An AA group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the AA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
- 7 Every AA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
- 8 Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever non-professional, but our service centres may employ special workers.
- 9 AA, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.

- 10 Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the AA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
- 11 Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films.
- 12 Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

### 43 The Twelve Traditions

#### The Long Form

*Our AA experience has taught us that:*

- 1 Each member of Alcoholics Anonymous is but a small part of a great whole. AA must continue to live or most of us will surely die. Hence our common welfare comes first. But individual welfare follows close afterward.
- 2 For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority - a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience.
- 3 Our membership ought to include all who suffer from alcoholism. Hence we may refuse none who wish to recover. Nor ought AA membership ever depend upon money or conformity. Any two or three alcoholics gathered together for sobriety may call themselves an AA group, provided that, as a group, they have no other affiliation.
- 4 With respect to its own affairs, each AA group should be responsible to no authority other than its own conscience. But when its plans concern the welfare of neighboring groups also, those groups ought to be consulted. And no group, regional committee, or individual should ever take any action that might greatly affect AA as a whole without conferring with the trustees of the General Service Board. On such issues our common welfare is paramount.
- 5 Each Alcoholics Anonymous group ought to be a spiritual entity *having but one primary purpose* - that of carrying its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.
- 6 Problems of money, property, and authority may easily divert us from our primary spiritual aim. We think, therefore, that any considerable property of genuine use to AA should be separately incorporated and managed, thus dividing the

material from the spiritual. An AA group, as such, should never go into business. Secondary aids to AA, such as clubs or hospitals which require much property or administration, ought to be incorporated and so set apart that, if necessary, they can be freely discarded by the groups. Hence such facilities ought not to use the AA name. Their management should be the sole responsibility of those people who financially support them. For clubs, AA managers are usually preferred. But hospitals, as well as other places of recuperation, ought to be well outside AA - and medically supervised. While an AA group may cooperate with anyone, such cooperation ought never to go so far as affiliation or endorsement, actual or implied. An AA group can bind itself to no one.

- 7 The AA groups themselves ought to be fully supported by the voluntary contributions of their own members. We think that each group should soon achieve this ideal; that any public solicitation of funds using the name of Alcoholics Anonymous is highly dangerous, whether by groups, clubs, hospitals, or other outside agencies; that acceptance of large gifts from any source, or of contributions carrying any obligation whatever, is unwise. Then, too, we view with much concern those AA treasuries which continue, beyond prudent reserves, to accumulate funds for no stated AA purpose. Experience has often warned us that nothing can so surely destroy our spiritual heritage as futile disputes over property, money, and authority.
- 8 Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever non-professional. We define professionalism as the occupation of counselling alcoholics for fees or hire. But we may employ alcoholics where they are going to perform those services for which we might otherwise have to engage non-alcoholics. Such special services may be well recompensed. But our usual AA Twelfth Step work is never to be paid for.
- 9 Each AA group needs the least possible organization. Rotating leadership is the best. The small group may elect its secretary, the large group its rotating committee, and the groups of a large metropolitan area their central or intergroup committee, which often employs a full-time secretary. The trustees of the General Service Board are, in effect, our AA General Service Committee. They are the custodians of our AA Tradition and the receivers of voluntary AA contributions by which we maintain our AA General Service Office at New York. They are authorized by the groups to handle our overall public relations and they

guarantee the integrity of our principal newspaper, the AA Grapevine. All such representatives are to be guided in the spirit of service, for true leaders in AA are but trusted and experienced servants of the whole. They derive no real authority from their titles; they do not govern. Universal respect is the key to their usefulness.

- 10 No AA group or member should ever, in such a way as to implicate AA, express any opinion on outside controversial issues - particularly those of politics, alcohol reform, or sectarian religion. The Alcoholics Anonymous groups oppose no one. Concerning such matters they can express no views whatever.
- 11 Our relations with the general public should be characterized by personal anonymity. We think AA ought to avoid sensational advertising. Our names and pictures as AA members ought not be broadcast, filmed, or publicly printed. Our public relations should be guided by the principle of attraction rather than promotion. There is never need to praise ourselves. We feel it better to let our friends recommend us.
- 12 And finally, we of Alcoholics Anonymous believe that the principle of anonymity has an immense spiritual significance. It reminds us that we are to place principles before personalities; that we are actually to practice a genuine humility. This to the end that our great blessings may never spoil us; that we shall forever live in thankful contemplation of Him who presides over us all.

#### **44 The Twelve Concepts for World Service**

- 1 The final responsibility and the ultimate authority for AA world services should always reside in the collective conscience of our whole Fellowship.
- 2 When, in 1955, the AA groups confirmed the permanent charter for their General Service Conference, they thereby delegated to the Conference complete authority for the active maintenance of our world services and thereby made the Conference - excepting for any change in the Twelve Traditions or in Article 12 of the Conference Charter - the actual voice and the effective conscience for our whole Society.
- 3 As a traditional means of creating and maintaining a clearly defined working relation between the groups, the Conference, the AA General Service Board and its several service corporations, staffs, committees, and executives, and

of thus insuring their effective leadership, it is here suggested that we endow each of these elements of world service with a traditional “Right of Decision.”

- 4 Throughout our Conference structure, we ought to maintain at all responsible levels a traditional “Right of Participation,” taking care that each classification or group of our world servants shall be allowed a voting representation in reasonable proportion to the responsibility that each must discharge.
- 5 Throughout our world service structure, a traditional “Right of Appeal” ought to prevail, thus assuring us that minority opinion will be heard and that petitions for the redress of personal grievances will be carefully considered.
- 6 On behalf of AA as a whole, our General Service Conference has the principal responsibility for the maintenance of our world services, and it traditionally has the final decision respecting large matters of general policy and finance. But the Conference also recognizes that the chief initiative and the active responsibility in most of these matters should be exercised primarily by the Trustee members of the Conference when they act among themselves as the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous.
- 7 The Conference recognizes that the Charter and the Bylaws of the General Service Board are legal instruments: that the Trustees are thereby fully empowered to manage and conduct all of the world service affairs of Alcoholics Anonymous. It is further understood that the Conference Charter itself is not a legal document: that it relies instead upon the force of tradition and the power of the AA purse for its final effectiveness.
- 8 The Trustees of the General Service Board act in two primary capacities: (a) With respect to the larger matters - of over-all policy and finance, they are the principal planners and administrators. They and their primary committees directly manage these affairs. (b) But with respect to our separately incorporated and constantly active services, the relation of the Trustees is mainly that of full stock ownership and of custodial oversight which they exercise through their ability to elect all directors of these entities.
- 9 Good service leaders, together with sound and appropriate methods of choosing them, are at all levels indispensable for our future functioning and safety. The primary world service leadership once exercised by the founders of AA must necessarily be assumed by the Trustees of the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous.

- 10 Every service responsibility should be matched by an equal service authority - the scope of such authority to be always well defined whether by tradition, by resolution, by specific job description or by appropriate charters and bylaws.
- 11 While the Trustees hold final responsibility for AA's world service administration, they should always have the assistance of the best possible standing committees, corporate service directors, executives, staffs, and consultants. Therefore the composition of these underlying committees and service boards, the personal qualifications of their members, the manner of their induction into service, the systems of their rotation, the way in which they are related to each other, the special rights and duties of our executives, staffs and consultants, together with a proper basis for the financial compensation of these special workers, will always be matters for serious care and concern.
- 12 General Warranties of the Conference: in all its proceedings the General Service Conference shall observe the spirit of the AA Tradition, taking great care that the conference never becomes the seat of perilous wealth or power; that sufficient operating funds, plus an ample reserve, be its prudent financial principle; that none of the Conference Members shall ever be placed in a position of unqualified authority over any of the others; that all important decisions be reached by discussion, vote and, whenever possible, by substantial unanimity; that no Conference action ever be personally punitive or an incitement to public controversy; that, though the Conference may act for the service of Alcoholics Anonymous, it shall never perform any acts of government; and that, like the Society of Alcoholics Anonymous which it serves, the Conference itself will always remain democratic in thought and action.

**Note:** The Twelve Concepts for Service in Great Britain can be found in the '*AA Service Handbook for Great Britain*'.

**Note:** The AA General Service Conference has recommended that the 'long form' of the Concepts be studied in detail. *Twelve Concepts for World Service* in which AA co-founder Bill W closely examines all these principles of AA service, may be ordered from GSO (see Literature Order Form, Item 3360).



## AA PUBLICATIONS

A full list of available literature can be obtained from:  
AA General Service Office, P.O. Box 1, 10 Toft Green,  
York YO1 7NJ, or via the AA website at:  
[www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk](http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk).

### BOOKS

*Alcoholics Anonymous*  
*Alcoholics Anonymous Comes Of Age*  
*Twelve Steps And Twelve Traditions*  
*As Bill Sees It*  
*Dr Bob And The Good Old Timers*  
*Pass It On*

### BOOKLETS

*Came To Believe*  
*Living Sober*  
*The Home Group - Heartbeat Of AA*

### PAMPHLETS

*44 Questions*  
*AA Tradition — How It Developed*  
*A Clergyman Asks About AA*  
*Three Talks To Medical Societies By Bill W*  
*AA As A Resource For The Medical Profession*  
*Is AA For You?*  
*This Is AA*  
*Do You Think You're Different?*  
*Sponsorship: Your Questions Answered*  
*AA For The Women*  
*AA For The Older Alcoholic*  
*The Jack Alexander Article*  
*Younger People In AA*  
*AA And The Armed Services*  
*Is There An Alcoholic In Your Life?*  
*Inside AA*  
*The AA Group*  
*Memo To An Inmate*  
*The Twelve Traditions Illustrated*  
*Let's Be Friendly With Our Friends*  
*How AA Members Cooperate*  
*Inside Stories*

*Speaking At Non-AA Meetings*  
*A Newcomer Asks...*  
*Too Young? Cartoon Pamphlet For Teenagers*  
*It Sure Beats Sitting In A Cell*  
*Illustrated Pamphlet For Inmates*  
*The Little Book*

**PERIODICALS:**

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**I am responsible...  
When anyone, anywhere,  
reaches out for help,  
I want the hand of AA  
always to be there.**

**And for that: I am  
responsible.**



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**This we owe to AA's future:**

**To place our common welfare first;  
To keep our Fellowship united;  
For on AA unity depend our lives,  
And the lives of those to come.**

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