

## EDITORIAL – UNITY

**“The unity of Alcoholics Anonymous is the most cherished quality our Society has. Our lives, the lives of all to come, depend squarely upon it. We stay whole, or A.A. dies. Without unity, the heart of A.A. would cease to beat; our world arteries would no longer carry the life-giving grace of God; his gift to us would be spent aimlessly. Back again in their caves, alcoholics would reproach us and say, “What a great thing A.A. might have been!”**

Bill W used very strong words of peril to describe the importance of Unity. He believed so firmly in the importance of unity, that he developed many portions of our principles wrapped around unity. Starting out with our First Tradition, all the way to the Warranties of the 12<sup>th</sup> Concept, Bill shapes the way in which we do things in A.A. dedicated to the preservation of unity. Does unity mean that we all have to agree? Absolutely not. Unity means that we endeavor to all proceed in the same direction, rather than split into factions and go two separate directions. There is a key and critical difference between those two outcomes. The Washingtonians chose the latter and dissolved quickly.

So, where do we look to find the A.A. way that we can follow that will preserve our precious unity. We find elements in our First Tradition – encouraging us to each individually place an importance on unity. It needs to be important to each of us. We find it in our First Concept wherein the responsibility for our Fellowship resides with the Groups so that together we can decide our direction forward. We find it in the Second Tradition, encouraging us to allow our Higher Power into our decision-making process. It can be found in our Second and Third Concepts. We delegate authority to those we trust to serve us. In our Third Tradition, and the Right of Participation given on our Fourth Concept, we include anyone and everyone to promote unity. While we allow complete autonomy in our Fourth Tradition, it comes with the caution that it not harm A.A. as a whole. Reminding us to be mindful of others. Our Fourth Concept allows for a “Right of Participation. Our Fifth Tradition asks all of us, in unison, to keep to our Primary Purpose. Our Fifth Concept allows the Right of Appeal, and from this, stems our Minority Opinion process. Hearing from the minority is essential to preservation of unity in our process. It is one of the key elements that makes A.A. different from any other organization, and it is key for A.A. to know that they were given fair opportunity to be heard. Unity in A.A. hinges on this very principle in many situations. Concepts six, seven and eight shape the posture responsibilities and authority between Delegates, the General Service Conference, Trustees and the two service corporations. All dedicated to preserving unity in our interactions with each other. Tradition nine and Concept nine encourage us to look to leaders that we have chosen, that we may be shown a path forward that will unify us rather than divide us. Other Traditions encourage us to practice a genuine humility leading to Love and Tolerance as a code.

When Bill was turning A.A. over to A.A. in 1955, he included the resolution that you find as Appendix B in the Service Manual. At the time of proposing the Conference, Bill faced a number of objections. The resolution that he provided was his written response to preventing the objections that were presented. “Bill, if you centralize this thing, it will become a seat of Power. It will become a wealth center and will have all the money, and

therefore all the control. It will become like government with a bunch of rule-makers.” Bill W put in writing in Article XII that it would not be handled that way.

**WE FURTHER UNDERSTAND:** That, as provided in Article XII of the Conference Charter, the Conference binds itself to the Society of Alcoholics Anonymous by the following means: That in all its proceedings, the General Service Conference shall observe the spirit of the A.A. 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 in the service of Alcoholics Anonymous and may traditionally direct its world services, it shall never enact laws or regulations binding on A.A. as a whole or upon any A.A. group or member thereof, nor shall it perform any other such 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.

Seven years later, when he was writing the Twelve Concepts for World Service, he reiterated the same ideas that he wrote in 1955 with the Twelfth Concept and the Warranties contained therein.

*Warranty Four:* “That all important decisions be reached by discussion, vote, and, whenever possible, by substantial unanimity.”

There are four or five paragraphs written in the Twelve Concepts for World Service that I would invite you to read.

Concluding the discussion on this Warranty, it can be said that without question both the practical and spiritual results of the practice of substantial unanimity already have been proved to be very great indeed.

All of this is to say that the formally written A.A. way has utilized the idea of substantial unanimity to successfully preserve our unity since 1955. We have recently seen the effect of the absence of this here in our Area. We are currently experiencing dis-unity. No matter which side of any issue that you may find yourself in the current era, I am sincerely asking all of us in Area 46 to study, learn and decide for yourself if you are comfortable that the A.A.s way as described in the Twelve Concepts for World Service is successful. I would further encourage you to put some thought and deliberation into whether we here in Area 46 should consider the formally written A.A. way of doing things as our own.

Debate and discussion and disagreement are all very healthy things in A.A. They ensure that we have discussed all aspects of an issue and have achieved an informed group conscience. We might well consider the information in our A.A. pamphlet “The A.A. Group: Where it all Begins.

### **What is an Informed A.A. Group Conscience?**

**The group conscience is the collective conscience  
of the group membership and thus represents  
substantial unanimity on an issue before**

**definitive action is taken. This is achieved by the group members through the sharing of full information, individual points of view, and the practice of A.A. principles. To be fully informed requires a willingness to listen to minority opinions with an open mind.**

**On sensitive issues, the group works slowly—discouraging formal motions until a clear sense of its collective view emerges. Placing principles before personalities, the membership is wary of dominant opinions. Its voice is heard when a well-informed group arrives at a decision. The result rests on more than a “yes” or “no” count—precisely because it is the spiritual expression of the group conscience. The term “informed group conscience” implies that pertinent information has been studied and all views have been heard before the group votes.**

In Love and Service  
Bill Lewis

Panel 70 Delegate  
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