

## First Strategic Planning Report to Area 50: A Vision for Service in Area 50

### Preface

I recently offered to serve as scrivener for an Ad Hoc Committee of Area 50, charged with drafting a strategic plan to “Turn the Lights On in Area 50.”

As I began to think about drafting a strategic plan, I realized that I did not know enough about AA’s Third Legacy of Service or the AA service structure, their purpose, or why they were important, to draft such a document.

Accordingly, I began to study the AA Service Manual, supplemented by my knowledge of the Big Book and the 12 & 12 and my own limited personal experience with the service structure. This Report is the result of that effort.

The AA Service Manual was drafted to a large extent by Bill W. himself, and most of the quotations in this Report appear to be from his personal writings.

Bill viewed the AA service structure through the lens of the Third Legacy of Service, which he saw as a way to bring life to the first two Legacies of Recovery and Unity. I have tried to follow this same approach in this Report.

Bill called the AA service structure “vital” to our own recovery and the survival of the Fellowship. Manual at S2.

He said that the AA groups had “ultimate responsibility” for making the service structure work, by participating in their District and Area. *Id.* At S15. He described the Area itself as the “mainspring” of the entire service structure. *Id.* at S36.

I hope this Report will provide some insight into why Bill used such powerful language to describe what he saw as the critical nature of this task – critical to our own recovery, and to the survival and flourishing of the Fellowship.

Having presented this vision, my intention is to turn to a further Report on my understanding of the problems that have arisen in Area 50 over the past several years, and the ideas that have arisen for dealing with them – some of which are already being implemented. I hope these Reports will help to further the strategic planning effort.

As it says in the Big Book, “we realize that we know only a little,” and accordingly, this Report “is meant to be suggestive only.” Big Book at 164. It is offered in what I hope is a spirit of humility as a vision of what the Third Legacy of Service is supposed to mean in this context. I hope it will be of some service to the GSA, and to the Fellowship in our Area.

I will be deeply grateful for input on this Report and on the planned Report to follow.

Yours in service,

Hank K.

September 6, 2016

## **A Vision For Service in Area 50**

**AA's Three Legacies of Recovery, Unity and Service Are the Foundation of the AA Program.**

**Experience Teaches That All Three Legacies Must Be Vibrant If AA is to Survive and Thrive.**

**Experience Also Teaches That To Be "Happy, Joyous and Free," AA Members Must Incorporate All Three Legacies In Our Daily Lives.**

**Therefore, The Three Legacies Are Critical to the Survival of the Fellowship, and to the Recovery of Each AA Member.**

**A Healthy AA Service Structure, and a Healthy GSA, Are Critical to Fulfilling All Three Legacies.**

### **Discussion**

#### **Introduction**

In 1951, Bill W. wrote an essay entitled "AA's Legacy of Service." This essay was designed to explain the evolution and purpose of the AA service structure, which was being developed at that time. The essay now appears at pages S1-S12 of the AA Service Manual.

Bill notes that "The most vital, yet least understood, group of services that AA has are those that allow us to function as a whole[.]" Manual at S2. This "group of services" constitutes the service structure of which Area 50 and its GSA are a part.

In this Report, I hope to provide an overview of this "least understood" aspect of AA service, along with some insight into why Bill described this service structure as the Third Legacy's "most vital" aspect.

I wrote this Report with the hope that it will encourage the groups and individual members in Area 50 to embrace this vital service.

Specifically, I hope that "being convinced," the AA groups and members in Area 50 will join in and support GSA's effort to "Turn the Lights On in Area 50," and thereby help insure and enhance our own recovery, and ensure that the Fellowship survives and flourishes in Western New York.

#### **I. Service Is Essential to Living the First Legacy of Recovery.**

##### **A. Overview**

AA's Third Legacy of Service insures the unity of the Fellowship in implementing the Legacy of Recovery through the practice of the 12 Steps. In particular, AA Service brings to life Step 12 - Carrying the Message to Other Alcoholics - throughout the Fellowship.

Bill's essay on the legacy of service begins by stating that "Our Twelfth Step – carrying the message – *is the basic service that the AA Fellowship gives* – this is our principal aim and the main reason for our existence. . . . We must carry the message, else we ourselves can wither and those who haven't been given the truth may die." Manual at S1 (emphasis added.)

##### **B. AA Service Is Critical to Each Member's Recovery and Survival**

Six months into his own sobriety, at the Mayflower Hotel in Akron, Bill recognized that he needed to work with another alcoholic to insure his *own* sobriety. As Bill told Dr. Bob at their very first meeting, “I’m not here for you – I’m here for me!”

The critical nature of 12<sup>th</sup> Step work to our own survival is well explained in the 12 & 12. “The AA member has to conform to the principles of recovery. His life actually depends upon spiritual principles. . . . Moreover, he finds he cannot keep this priceless gift unless he gives it away. *Neither he nor anyone else can survive unless he carries the AA message.*” 12&12, p. 130 (emphasis added.)

### **C. AA’s Service Structure Supports 12<sup>th</sup> Step Work Both Inside and Outside the Home Group**

Bill’s essay on service explains that “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 [ ] phone call and a cup of coffee, and to AA’s General Service Office [in New York] for national and international action. The sum total of all these services is our Third Legacy of Service.” *Id.*

As Bill states, much 12<sup>th</sup> Step work takes place beyond the actions of an individual member or group. Examples include coordinating 12<sup>th</sup> Step work with treatment centers and prisons, cooperating with the professional community in a particular locale, or dealing with the general public.

AA’s service structure exists to support, coordinate and foster *all* these 12<sup>th</sup> Step efforts.

This mission is perhaps why Bill described the AA service structure as “the most vital” aspect of our Third Legacy.

### **D. AA’s Service Structure Supports the Unity of the AA Message Throughout the Fellowship**

We need to insure that the message we carry in 12<sup>th</sup> Step work of any kind is unified and consistent. This is one focus of the AA Traditions, discussed in the next section of this Statement. The AA service structure, discussed in Section III, is designed to support and foster that unity.

### **E. Summary**

In summary, service through 12<sup>th</sup> Step work is an essential component of the First Legacy of Recovery. As Bill explains, supporting that effort in all its aspects is a fundamental purpose of AA’s Third Legacy and the AA service structure.

## **II. Service Is Essential to Living Our Second Legacy of Unity. The AA Service Structure Supports and Fosters the Legacy of Unity Throughout the Fellowship.**

### **A. Brief History of the Traditions and the Legacy of Unity**

In its earliest days, the focus of what was to become the AA Fellowship was on developing the program of personal recovery that became the 12 Steps as described in the Big Book.

The Program generated such demand that “by the close of 1941, . . . [t]he mushrooming process was in full swing. AA had become a national institution.” Big Book, Foreword to the Second Edition, p. xviii.

At that point, AA entered into what this Foreword describes as a “fearsome and exciting adolescent period.” *Id.* There were “quarrels over membership, leadership and money”; “strivings for power and prestige”; and “schisms which [threatened to] split AA apart.” *Id.* at xviii-xix.

This period was the crucible in which AA’s Second Legacy of Unity was formed. As the Foreword explains, “But out of this frightening and at first disruptive experience the conviction grew that AA’s had to hang together or die separately. We had to unify our Fellowship or pass off the scene.” *Id.* At xix.

AA’s leaders embodied the conclusions which emerged from the experience of this period in the Twelve Traditions. As the Foreword states, the Traditions “had become so widely accepted by 1950 that they were confirmed by our first International Conference held at Cleveland.” *Id.* The Foreword continues, “Today the remarkable unity of AA is one of the greatest assets that our Society has.” *Id.*

Our very first tradition - “Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon AA unity” – is an express recognition that the very survival of AA’s membership and our Fellowship as a whole depends upon our 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.*” 12 and 12, p.129 (emphasis added.)

**B. A Loving God, Expressed Through An Informed Group Conscience, Is the Source of All Authority in AA. This Tradition is a Further Assurance of Unity.**

The Second Tradition states that “For our group purpose there is but one authority – a loving God as He may express himself in our group conscience.”

The primacy of the group conscience is reinforced by the second sentence of Tradition 2, which states that “Our leaders are but trusted servants – they do not govern.” This provision makes it explicit that the responsibility of our leaders is to serve the groups they lead by carrying out the group conscience.

Thus, an informed group conscience is the ultimate authority in an individual group. As the next section of this Vision Statement will show, the AA service structure is designed to insure that an informed group conscience governs not only the individual groups, but also the Fellowship as a whole.

**C. AA’s Unity Is Also Fostered By the Fourth Tradition, which Addresses Relations Between the Groups and With AA As a Whole.**

The Fourth Tradition states that “Each group should remain autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or AA as a whole.”

12<sup>th</sup> Step work beyond the Home Group (see Sec. I B on page 2 above) depends upon cooperation among the groups in the Area, as Tradition 4 clearly contemplates.

More fundamentally, since unity is “the most cherished quality our society has,” 12 & 12 at 129, preservation and enhancement of this unity is obviously a matter which affects AA as a whole. Under the 4<sup>th</sup> Tradition, therefore, preserving and enhancing our unity is a matter on which all groups must cooperate.

That cooperation, so vital to the survival and growth of our Fellowship, is the basic purpose of the AA service structure.

#### **D. Summary**

In summary, the AA Traditions protect AA unity; ensure that AA is governed by an informed group conscience; and provide that, while preserving each group's autonomy, the groups work together in matters affecting other groups or AA as a whole.

All of this work requires a structure through which AA groups can work together, both regionally and throughout the Fellowship. That is the purpose of the AA service structure.

### **III. AA's Service Structure Exists to Support All Three Legacies, In the Program of Each AA Member and Throughout the Fellowship.**

**For This Reason, According to Bill W., AA's Service Structure Is the "Most Vital" But "Least Understood" Aspect of AA's Third Legacy of Service.**

#### **A. Brief History of AA's Service Structure**

As Bill's essay explains, a series of structures evolved in AA's early days to manage AA's overall affairs. These structures included "the General Service Office; AA World Services, Inc.; The AA Grapevine, Inc.; and our Board of Trustees, known legally as the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous. *Our worldwide unity and much of our growth since early times are directly traceable to this cluster of life-giving activities.*" Manual at S2 (emphasis added.)

Bill continues,

Until 1950, these overall services were the sole function of a few oldtime AA's, several nonalcoholic friends, Dr. Bob, and me. For all the years of AA's infancy, we oldtimers were the selfappointed trustees for Alcoholics Anonymous. *Id.*

Bill explains that by 1950, "we realized that . . . we oldtimers couldn't live on forever." *Id.* Moreover, "we realized that AA had grown up, that our Fellowship was ready and able to take these responsibilities from us" and "assume direct responsibility for the guardianship of AA tradition and the direction of our principal service affairs." *Id.*

Thus, "in 1950, spurred on by the relentless logic of the situation, the trustees authorized Dr. Bob and me to devise . . . a plan by which our Society could assume full and permanent responsibility for the conduct of its most vital affairs." Manual at S11.

Thus began five years of effort, which led to the creation of the General Service Conference and the Third Legacy Manual of World Service, now known as the AA Service Manual.

In a Resolution adopted at the AA 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Convention on July 3, 1955, the Fellowship as a whole agreed that "*the General Service Conference . . . should become . . . the guardians of the Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous, the perpetuators of the world services of our Society, the voice of the group conscience of our entire Fellowship, and the sole successors of its co-founders, Doctor Bob and Bill.*" S101 (emphasis added.)

Bill's efforts to create a structure for the future continued, and on April 26, 1962, the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual General Service Conference adopted Bill's "Twelve Concepts for World Service." These Concepts are now published as part of the AA Service Manual.

Taken together, these efforts produced the service structure through which our Fellowship operates today.

The AA service structure is explained in the AA Service Manual and the Twelve Concepts for World Service, which are published together in one volume by AA World Services (AAWS). What follows is a brief overview of this structure.

## **B. How the Service Structure Works**

### **1. Overview**

In one sense, the core principle of the AA service structure is derived from Tradition Two: that AA is governed by an "informed group conscience" and that "our leaders are but trusted servants – they do not govern."

Equally fundamental to the AA service structure is the notion of what the AA Service Manual calls the "upside-down organization" or the "inverted pyramid." Manual at S 15-16. Under this vision, the AA "informed group conscience" arises in the first instance in each individual group; as Concept I states, "The AA groups hold *ultimate responsibility* and *final authority* for our world services." *Id.* (emphasis added.)

Putting these two fundamental ideas together, the AA service structure is designed to aggregate the informed group consciences of the individual groups into increasingly broad regions, culminating with the annual General Service Conference. At the same time, this structure allows the groups to work together consistent with the Traditions at all levels, from the District and the Area to the Fellowship as a whole.

The basic point bears repeating: "ultimate responsibility" and "final authority" for AA as a whole rests squarely with the AA groups, operating through the service structure explained in the AA Service Manual.

### **2. The Practicalities Summarized**

As a practical matter, the service structure is implemented in the first instance through the election by each AA group of a General Service Representative (GSR), who carries the informed group conscience of his group to the broader fellowship and makes sure that his group's conscience is informed of the issues facing and the actions being taken by that broader fellowship. For this reason, it has been said that the GSR holds the most important service position in AA.

The GSR participates in his Group's District, with GSRs of other nearby AA groups. The District elects a District Committee Member (DCM), who chairs the District and serves as the District's trusted servant by carrying the District's group conscience to the Area General Service Assembly.

The District also serves the Fellowship by coordinating 12<sup>th</sup> Step service activities throughout the District, in such areas as carrying the message to treatment facilities, correctional facilities, the professional community, etc. GSRs carry the message of this service activity back to their home groups to facilitate the participation of their groups and individual members in this essential 12<sup>th</sup> Step activity.

The activities of the Districts, and the group conscience that emerges there, are coordinated with nearby Districts at the Area and its General Service Assembly (GSA). The GSA is made up of DCMs and GSRs from the active groups, who are welcome to participate in the GSA directly, and who have a vote there.

Each Area and its GSA are served by Area officers, and by Committees and Committee Chairs, who coordinate service activities throughout the Area. The GSA also coordinates with any intergroups or central committees active in the area, to facilitate and coordinate their activities and ensure unity in carrying the AA message throughout the Area.

Each Area also elects a Delegate. The primary role of the Delegate is to carry the informed group conscience of the Area to the Fellowship as a whole, most notably through the annual General Service Conference, in which the Delegates from all of the Areas in North America meet with the leadership of AA from AA World Services (AAWS), the Grapevine (AAGV), and the AA Board of Trustees to develop and oversee the implementation of the group conscience of AA as a whole on issues effecting the entire Fellowship. The Area Delegate has the further responsibility of informing the Area, its GSA, and through the GSA all the participating groups in the Area on the activities of the Fellowship as a whole.

### **C. More About the District and the Area**

The vision for the District and the Area set forth in the AA Service Manual emphasizes their critical role in inspiring language:

*“The area assembly is the mainspring of the Conference structure – the democratic voice of the movement expressing itself.”* Manual at S36 (emphasis added.)

Assemblies are the responsibility of the area committee. *Id.*

*“Perhaps more than any other group of people in AA, the area committee is responsible for the health of the Conference structure and thus for growth and harmony in the AA Fellowship.”* *Id.* At S44 (emphasis added.)

The Service Manual envisions that the work of the area committee and assembly will be interesting, enriching and inspirational to all, enhancing their recovery and the health of the Fellowship.

*“[A]ssembly meetings consider a variety of issues, from General Service Conference business to area problems and solutions and financial affairs, while sharing sessions, public information programs, workshops, and video programs keep AA strong and participation in service growing.”* S36.

...

*“Any AA member may attend, and in many areas members are encouraged to attend assemblies as a way of encouraging them to become active in general service.”* S37.

...

“Some areas hold their assemblies at a convenient central spot, while others rotate the meeting from one district to another. Assemblies may run from half a day to a full weekend.” *Id.*

...

“[A]ssembly meetings deal with a variety of area concerns. To keep agendas lively and meaningful, . . . [s]ome areas choose to keep business to a minimum and use most of the time for sharing sessions or workshops. Special speakers who have experience with AA worldwide can shed light on worldwide services.” S39.

...

“Every AA member has something to say about the Fellowship’s present and future[.] . . . Thus, one of the most important program items for an assembly (or a district meeting) is a good look at what might help AA on a broad basis. . . . Assemblies and district meetings provide an ideal time to find out what problems and solutions are shared by AA groups everywhere.” S39.

...

“In a sharing session, everyone has a chance to use their experience, strength and hope to contribute ideas and opinions about the welfare of AA.” S40.

Archives, Working with Local Intergroups and Central Offices, Area Newsletters or Bulletins, and Area, State, Provincial and Regional Conventions are other avenues for fruitful district and area activity. S40-42.

#### **D. Summary**

Since the “ultimate responsibility” for and “final authority” over the entire Fellowship lies with the groups, the participation of the groups in the AA service structure is critical to the Third Legacy of Service.

Individual groups discharge their responsibility and authority by their active participation in their District and their Area, which integrate the groups and bring to life the communication throughout the Fellowship for which the service structure was designed.

Bill called the District and the Area the “mainspring” of the entire service structure. Once again, if the District and the Area do not function as the Service Manual contemplates with the support of the groups, then what Bill described as the “most vital” aspect of our Third Legacy of Service will fail.

#### **Conclusion**

The AA service structure is designed to embody and foster AA’s Three Legacies of Recovery, Unity and Service.

The spirit which inspires the AA service structure is a substitute for the loneliness and isolation of our former lives. As the Big Book says in the chapter, “A Vision for You”:



Yes, there is a substitute and it is vastly more than that. It is a fellowship in Alcoholics Anonymous. There you will find relief from care, boredom and worry. Your imagination will be fired. *Life will mean something at last.* Big Book at 152 (emphasis added.)

The Third Legacy of Service affords not only fellowship, but the satisfaction of helping and supporting the Fellowship and our fellows, especially the alcoholic who still suffers.

You will be bound to them with new and wonderful ties, for you will escape disaster together and you will commence shoulder to shoulder your common journey. *Then you will know what it means to give of yourself so that others may survive and rediscover life. You will learn the full meaning of "Love thy neighbor as thyself."* *Id.* At 152-53 (emphasis added.)

"Being wrecked in the same vessel, being restored and united under one God, with hearts and minds attuned to the welfare of others . . ." (Big Book at 161) – This is the essence of the AA service structure. As the Book concludes, "Give freely of what you find and join us." *Id.* At 164.

There is no better description of AA's Third Legacy of Service.

The success of this service structure depends upon the active and informed participation of each Home Group and its membership. Without this active participation in the District and Area, the vision of our Third Legacy is lost.