

1. Greetings

2. I will go quickly through the slide presentation for the Tradition starting with a summary of Bill's essay (from the 12 & 12.) Don't worry... if I go too fast, it will be available on my website at www.onwhatslenderthreads.com. My objective will be to hit the highpoints, so that we have plenty of time for discussion.

3. Discussions and questions. Everyone is invited to share anything that they have learned about that Tradition. I get so much knowledge from participants!

Disclaimers about this workshop

On What Slender Threads: A.A.'s Twelve Traditions from a Historical Perspective.

No need to purchase the book.

Audios and slides are posted on www.onwhatslenderthreads.com under “Workshop Resources”

Made possible by General Service Office literature, published research of historians, and wonderful friends in A.A. world-wide.

Any inferences in this study are strictly my own and in no way reflect the opinion of Alcoholics Anonymous

In keeping with the Eleventh and Twelfth Traditions, I try to avoid using the last names of any alcoholics including Bill W. and Dr. Bob.

What have we accomplished so far?

After examining Bill's essays from a historical perspective on Traditions 1 through 8, I am convinced that the *Twelve Points to Assure Our Future* were pedaled to the groups as the guidelines that his proposed Conference of delegates from A.A. groups would follow.

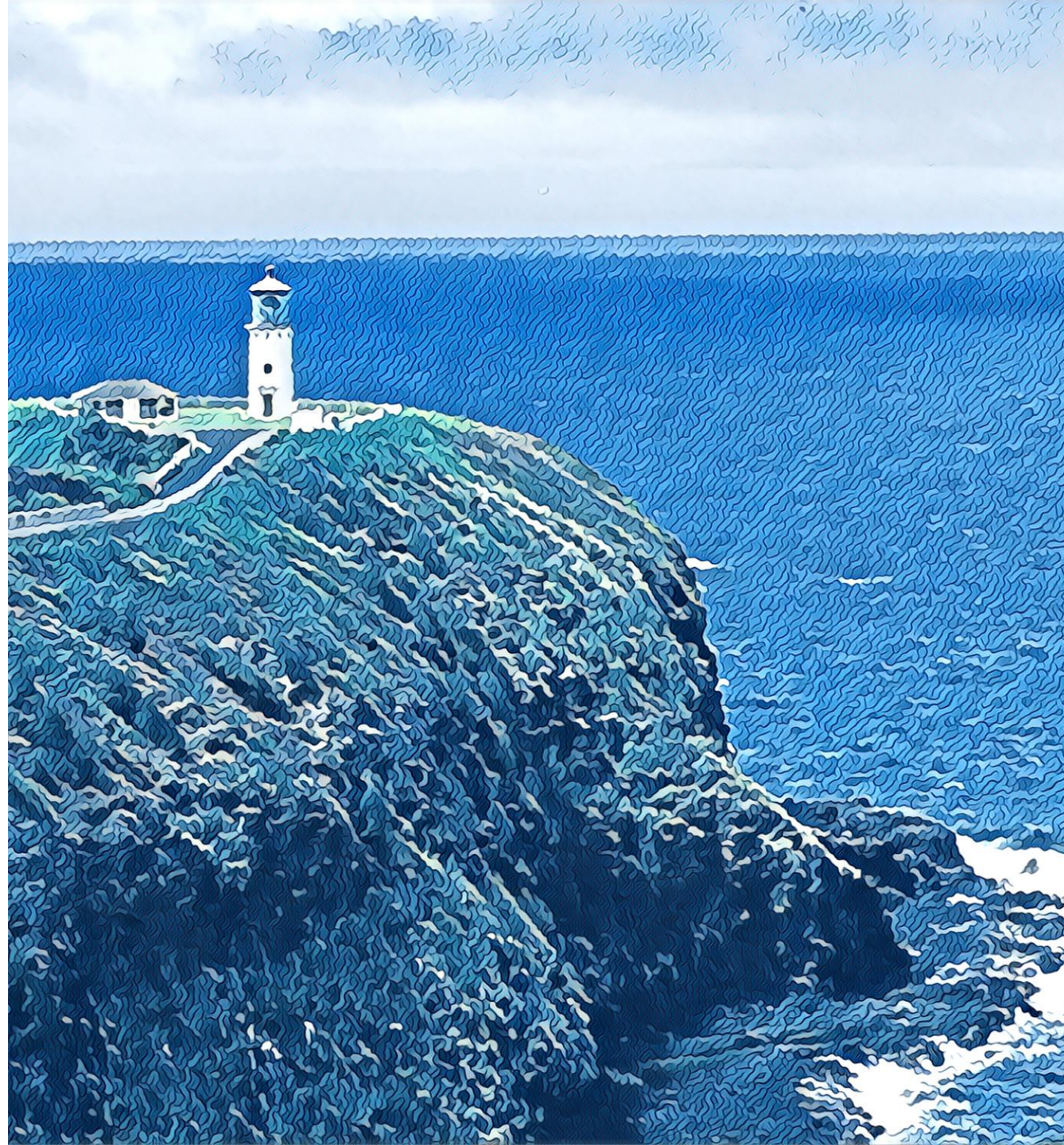
Unity rested on the “structure of our Society.” The structure relied on the representative voice of A.A. groups making informed decisions by the group conscience steered by the ultimate authority of a loving higher power.

The Conference would have to adhere to the guidelines spelled out for membership, groups' autonomy, A.A.'s primary purpose, it's non-affiliation with any outside or related entity, its commitment to self-support only by alcoholics who benefit from the program, and finally the need for service workers to make Twelfth Step work possible.

But who is going to be responsible for Children of Chaos?
That is laid out by Tradition Nine.

...if [Bill and Dr. Bob] did nothing, their silence would in later years be interpreted as approval of the status quo [Trustees running A.A.]... They should try the conference. If it was a failure, they could always cancel... The movement's delegates could come down to New York and see what A.A.'s world affairs were really like. They could then decide whether they would take responsibility or whether they would not.

[Dr. Bob] said, 'Bill, it *has* to be A.A.'s decision, not ours. Let's call that conference. It's fine with me.'



Tradition 9

A.A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.

The Original Point (Long Form): *Our A.A. experience has taught us that:*

Each A.A. 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. (*Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, 172, 191 – 192)

The Original Point (Long Form) Continued: The trustees of the General Service Board are, in effect, our A.A. General Service Committee. They are the custodians of our A.A. Tradition and the receivers of voluntary A.A. contributions by which we maintain our A.A. General Service Office in New York. They are authorized by the groups to handle our overall public relations and they guarantee the integrity of our principal newspaper, the A.A. Grapevine. All such representatives are to be guided in the spirit of service, for true leaders in A.A. 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.

(Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, 191 – 192)

Tradition 9 – Bill’s Essay pp. 174 - 178

Today, we are able to say with assurance that Alcoholics Anonymous—**A.A. as a whole**—should never be organized at all.

Then, in seeming contradiction, we proceed to create **special service boards and committees** which in themselves are organized.

“What do they mean, no organization?”

Power to direct or govern is the essence of organization everywhere.

Yet **Alcoholics Anonymous is an exception**. It does not conform to this pattern.

Neither its General Service Conference, its Foundation Board,* nor the humblest group committee **can issue a single directive** to an A.A. member and make it stick, let alone mete out any punishment.

Tradition 9 – Bill’s Essay pp. 174 - 178

Who is more unpopular than the oldtime A.A., full of wisdom, who moves to another area and tries to tell the group there how to run its business?

But long ago, trustees and staff members alike found they could do no more than **make suggestions**, and very mild ones at that.... “Of course, you are at perfect liberty to handle this matter any way you please. But the majority experience in A.A. does seem to suggest . . .”

Churchman ... **“They are making disobedience a virtue!”**

Psychiatrist ... **“Defiant brats! They won’t grow up and conform to social usage!”**

Man on the street ... **“I don’t understand it. They must be nuts!”**

Tradition 9 – Bill’s Essay pp. 174 - 178

Unless each A.A. member follows to the best of his ability our suggested **Twelve Steps** to recovery, he almost certainly signs his own death warrant.

His drunkenness and dissolution are not penalties inflicted by people in authority; they result from his **personal disobedience to spiritual principles**.

The same stern threat **applies to the group** itself. Unless there is approximate **conformity to A.A.’s Twelve Traditions**, the group, too, can deteriorate and die.

Great suffering and great love are A.A.’s disciplinarians; we need no others.

... never to name boards to govern us, ... equally clear that we shall always need to authorize workers to serve us.

It is the difference between the **spirit of vested authority and the spirit of service**, two concepts which are sometimes poles apart.

Tradition 9 – Bill’s Essay pp. 174 – 178

It is in this spirit of service that we elect the A.A. **group’s informal rotating committee**, the **intergroup association** for the area, and the **General Service Conferences of Alcoholics Anonymous for A.A. as a whole.**

Even our Foundation, once an independent board, is today directly accountable to our Fellowship. **Its trustees are the caretakers and expeditors of our world services.**

...the aim of our services is to bring sobriety within reach of all who want it.

[Tradition Nine] discloses a society without organization, **animated only by the spirit of service – a true fellowship.**

Children of
chaos choose
orderly chaos

How is Service Defined?

An A.A. service is anything whatever that legitimately helps us to reach fellow sufferers. As we have seen, the Twelfth Step call is the greatest of A.A.'s services. (*Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, 140)

The litmus test for any service:

“Is this or that service *really needed?*” If it is not, then let it be eliminated. But if it *is* needed, then maintain it we must or fail in *our mission* (emphasis added) to those who want and seek A.A. (*Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, 140)

Tradition Eight provides an overview of the tasks A.A. paid service workers carry out to make Twelfth Step work possible.

However, there would be no work for paid staff without A.A. groups whose members serve as volunteers to help decide *how to make Twelfth Step work possible*.

If A.A. members' volunteer services are the heartbeat of Tradition Nine, A.A.'s service committees are its circulatory system. Both are needed to succeed in what Bill referred to as *our mission*.

The criteria for service positions needed to run an A.A. meeting and for carrying the message beyond the A.A. group.

Service “committees” that help make Twelfth Step work possible followed by the conduits for decision-making and policy-shaping in A.A.

The final battle Bill fought on behalf of the Fellowship.

“He [a churchman] is joined by a psychiatrist who says, “Defiant brats! They won’t grow up and conform to social usage!” (*Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* , 174)

“We are not organized.”

Long Form Part 1: The essentials for individual groups

1. Each A.A. Group needs the least possible organization.
2. Rotating leadership is the best.
3. The small group may elect its secretary, the large group its rotating committee.

The G.S.O. pamphlet, *The A.A. Group*, provides guidelines for open and closed meetings along with suggested meeting formats and possible topics if appropriate.

Usually a Chair, Treasurer, and Secretary are helpful for facilitating A.A. groups' meetings. (*The A.A. Group*, 13 – 24)

For a group “to exist outside” the meeting requires a vision of Twelfth Step work that employs a variety of means to reach unseen alcoholics from multi-faceted cultures and diverse perspectives, who may be in the neighborhood or on the opposite side of the globe.

Such an effort usually does not provide the direct satisfaction of a Twelve Step call;

Combined groups’ potential to reach more suffering alcoholics is without comparison.

Recall in Bill's essay on the First Tradition – “when Twelfth Step work forms a group. . . “ he also spoke to unity and common welfare when he said,

“So at the outset, how best to live and work together as groups became the prime question.” (*Twelve and Twelve*, 130)

A.A.'s tradition of unity and common welfare is demonstrated when combined groups live and work together through Tradition Nine.

A.A.'s volunteer service committees, enable groups to carry out the primary purpose of A.A. as the Fellowship's extended hand.

A representative steering committee

The trusted servants of such a committee are “directly responsible to those they serve.”

As a subset of the group, the committee can streamline the amount of work involved in addressing issues and then bring their recommendations to the group for a decision.

(The A.A. Group, 23 -24)

Public Information committee members carry the message locally using a range of methods that are suitable for letting struggling alcoholics know where meetings and groups are located.

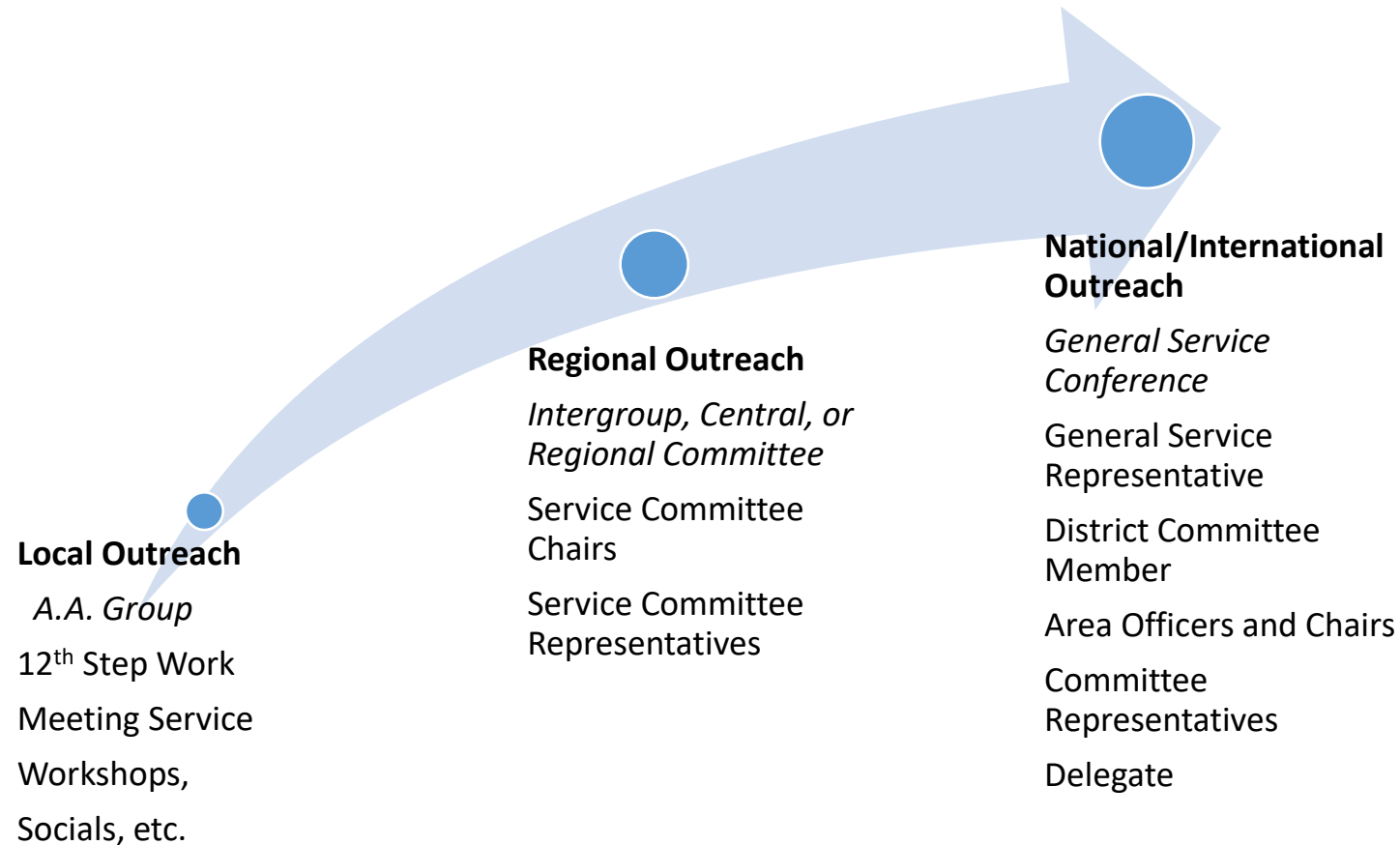
Archives committee members generate an historical timeline of A.A. in their area and catalogue local groups' histories.

Treatment Facilities/Corrections committee members serve as liaisons to area treatment and corrections facilities organizing on-site meetings and transition assistance (Bridging the Gap).

Literature and Grapevine/La Viña are usually two separate committees whose members are resources for procuring and distributing their publications to the groups and individual members.

Cooperation with the Professional Community committee members focus on cooperation, not affiliation, by sending A.A. members' to provide information about the Fellowship at professional organizations' conventions and at other professional venues. (*The A.A. Group*, 24-27)

When a group examines how it would like to expand its service beyond the confines of the meeting, it will help to think about the impact of the service on carrying the message.



The Loners-Internationalists Meeting (LIM) is a confidential bimonthly bulletin sent to Loners, Homers, Internationalists, Port Contacts, and Loner Sponsors. See GSO's SM F-123 for more information on how to participate.

Corrections Correspondence – See GSO's F-26 pamphlet on how to participate in this service.

For more Corrections Services see GSO's website <https://www.aa.org/corrections-committees>

Long Form Part 2: The essentials for groups' combined efforts: service in Central or Intergroup

And the groups of a large metropolitan area [may have a] central or intergroup committee, which often employs a full-time secretary. (191)

In general, a **representative steering committee** of volunteers from participating groups provide oversight of their Intergroup or Central Office.

The Intergroup/Central Committee generally have service committees like Public Information, Cooperation with the Professional Community, Hospitals and Institutions, etc.

Not all A.A. groups are in regions that can sustain an intergroup or central office.

All A.A. groups in the U.S./Canada are geographically situated in one of ninety-three Area Committees that are associated with the A.A. General Service Conference.

There are 62 other General Service Conferences around the world. Each one is similarly composed of areas/regions.

Such groups can elect to have a General Service Representative (G.S.R.), who serves as the group's liaison to the Area Committee.

The General Service Conference is a representative steering committee!

“The final responsibility and the ultimate authority for A.A. world services should reside in the collective conscience of our whole Fellowship.”

How can one A.A. member or one A.A. group be part of such an all-encompassing, *voluntary* effort to help alcoholics anywhere?

More importantly, how can alcoholics – children of chaos – be responsible for and authorities of A.A.’s world services?



The Second Tradition

A part of the answer, and only a part of the answer, lies in the General Service Conference.

Thus, the worldwide Fellowship's accountability begins with individual A.A. members' and A.A. groups' collective conscience as expressed for the General Service Conference committee in their locale.

That collective conscience is at its best when it invokes the ultimate authority of a combined loving higher power!

The General Service Conference

The U.S. and Canada General Service Conference is a *representative* steering committee of approximately 135 members;

- 2/3 of the voting body are Delegates (A.A. volunteers); one Delegate from each of 93 Areas in the U.S. and Canada,
- 1/3 of the voting body is made up of
 - 21 Trustees (nonalcoholic and A.A. volunteers), and
 - 21 people who are either A.A. staff, non-Trustee Directors of A.A.W.S. and the A.A. Grapevine, or non-alcoholic staff.

Over 90% of the voting body are members of Alcoholics Anonymous. It is the collective conscience of this Conference that represents the responsibility and ultimate authority of all A.A. groups in the U.S./Canada.

A.A. groups who participate by having an active General Service Representative can exercise that responsibility and authority.

The G.S.R. connects the A.A. group to the General Service Conference

1. **The group's G.S.R.** shares the recommendations of the group conscience with the District committee or other service committee as defined by each Area's service structure.
2. **The District committee** (or similar structure) is a service committee of G.S.R.s from the groups in an assigned District. The District's G.S.R.s select a representative, **District Committee Member (D.C.M.)**, who shares with the Area committee the sense of the groups in the District.
3. **The Area committee** holds a special meeting to discuss the agenda for the upcoming General Service Conference. The **Delegate**, elected by the Area committee, listens to the discussion at the Area's pre-General Service Conference meeting.
4. The Delegate attends the **General Service Conference** and fully discusses issues with the other voting members, putting forward to the Trustees on the General Service Board final decisions (Advisory Actions) or recommendations (Additional Considerations).
5. **The Trustees**, as custodians of A.A.'s corporate entities, implement the decisions and recommendations of the Conference.

Traditions Eight and Nine at Work

| G.S.O. A.A. Staff Offices | General Service Conference | Corresponding Trustees Committees |
|--|---|--|
| Accessibilities & Remote Communities | Treatment and Accessibilities | |
| Conference | Agenda | General Service Conference |
| Cooperation with the Professional Community (C.P.C.)/Treatment | Cooperation with the Professional Community | Cooperation with the Professional Community (C.P.C.)/Treatment and Accessibilities |
| Corrections | Corrections | Corrections |
| Literature | Literature | Literature |
| Public Information | Public Information | Public Information |
| Archives | Archives | Archives |

The Seventh Tradition - A.A.'s independence from outside influence is protected by its philosophy of self-support.

Only A.A. members and groups are allowed to contribute to the finances and provide the voluntary work of its service committees.

In particular, groups elect how to partition their excess contributions should they choose to support their intergroup or central office, district (or other entity), their Area, or the Conference through its General Service Board. Guidelines are in the pamphlet *Self-support: Where Money and Spirituality Mix* provided by the General Service Office.

A.A. online has grown exponentially <https://aa-intergroup.org/>

International Conventions hosted by different countries.

Therefore, the potential for A.A. service worldwide is a new and exciting arena for sharing and demonstrating A.A.'s primary purpose.

Through active and engaged volunteers in the service structure channel, A.A. groups that choose to “exist outside” the meeting can contribute new and exciting ideas for carrying the message, and more importantly, decide through the General Service Conference *how to make Twelfth Step work possible.*



English



Español



Português



Français



Italiano



Português



Русский



فارسی



中文



日本語



ONLINE INTERGROUP
ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

HOME

MEETING DIRECTORY

CAN'T STOP DRINKING?

INSIDE OIAA

7TH TRADITION

CONTACT US

OIAA Assembly 21-March 2026



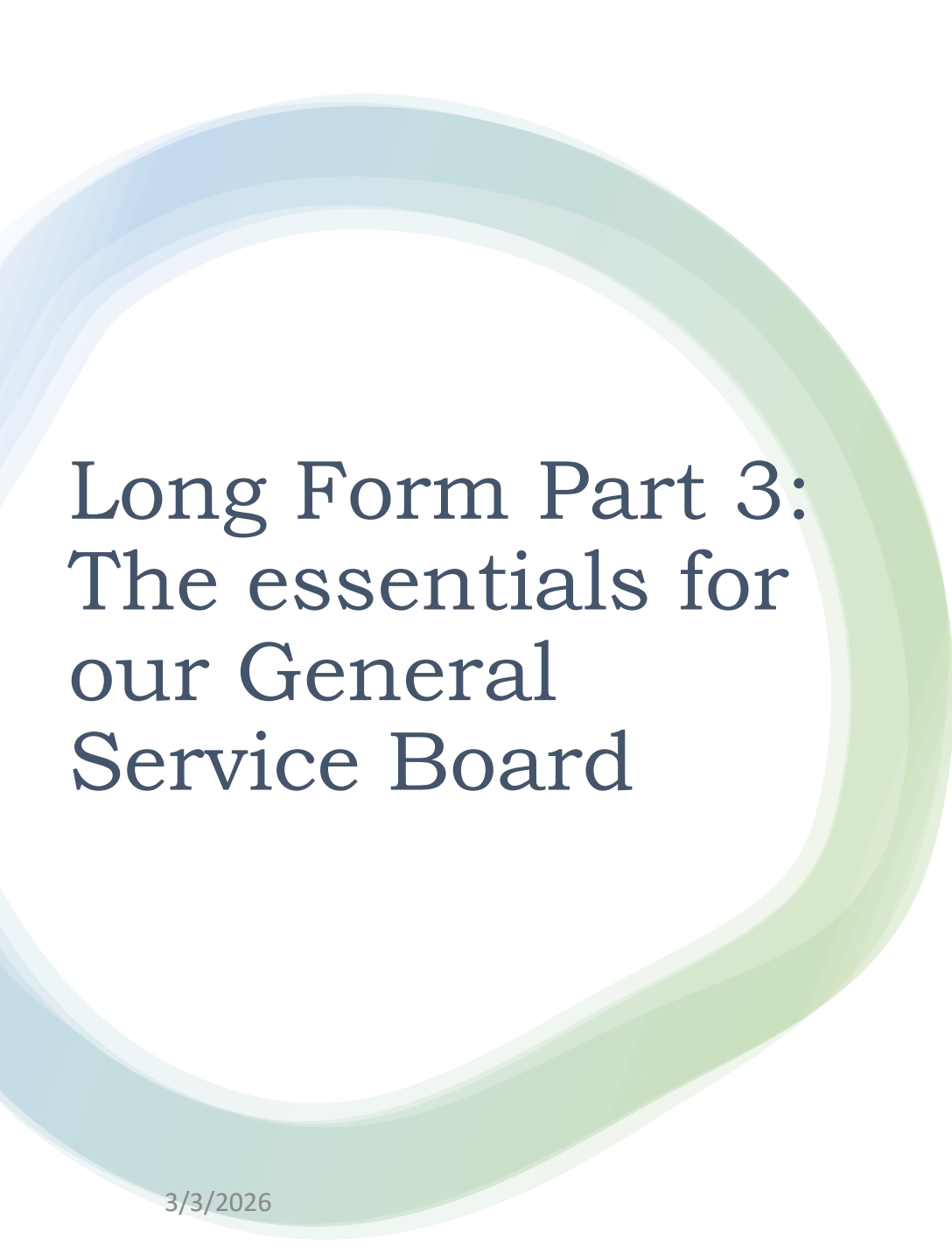
Online Meetings



Have a Drinking Problem



Inside OIAA

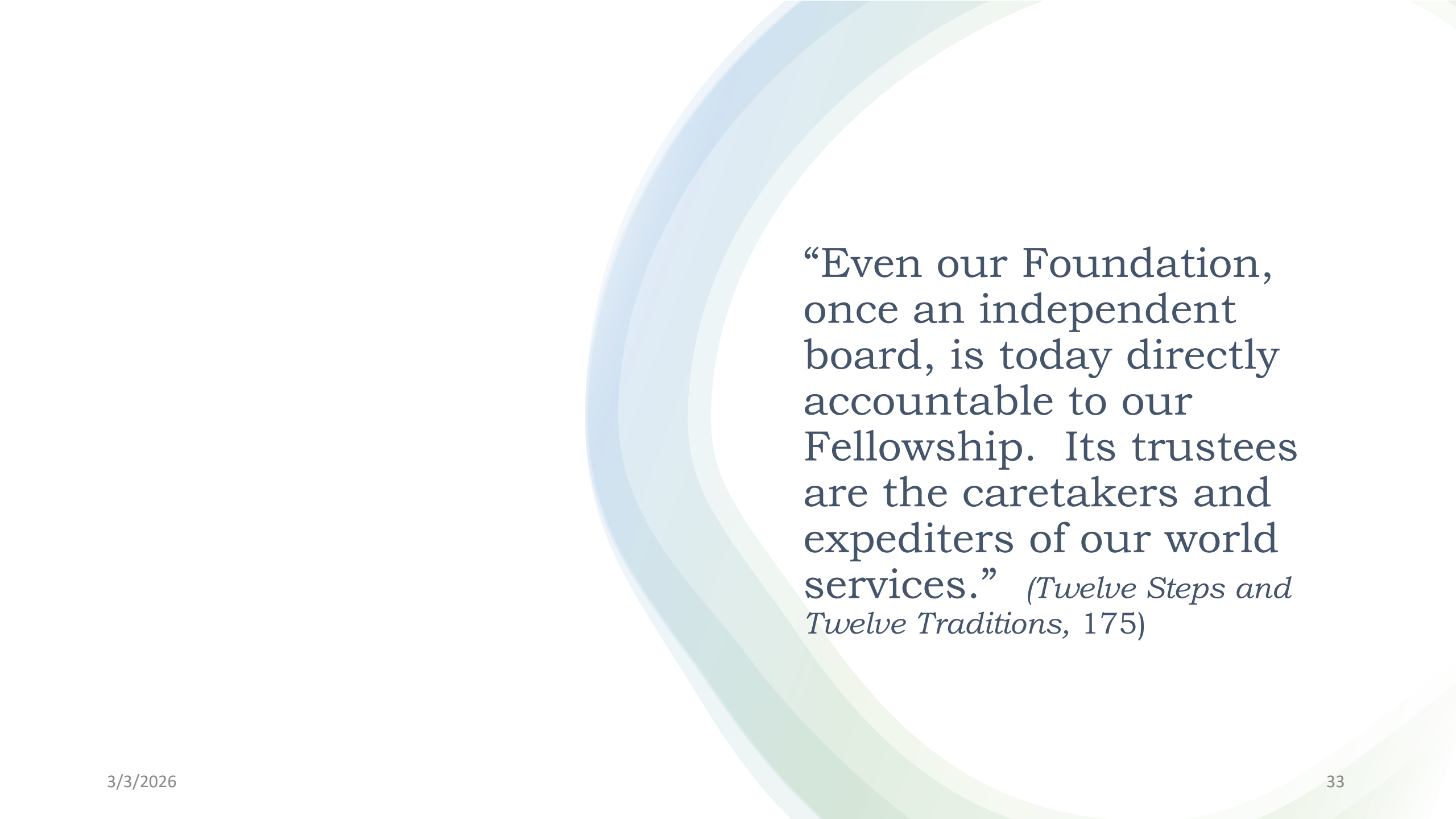


Long Form Part 3: The essentials for our General Service Board

The trustees of the General Service Board are, in effect, our A.A. General Service Committee.

They are the custodians of our A.A. Tradition and the receivers of voluntary A.A. contributions by which we maintain our A.A. General Service Office [in] New York.

They are authorized by the groups to handle our overall public relations and they guarantee the integrity of our principal newspaper, the A.A. Grapevine. A.A. General Service Office. (*Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, 191)



“Even our Foundation, once an independent board, is today directly accountable to our Fellowship. Its trustees are the caretakers and expeditors of our world services.” *(Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, 175)*

Whew! And yet, Bill claimed A.A. was not organized? How and why was that?

It helps to go back to the years before the Conference when all decisions for A.A.'s future were made by Headquarters (Bill and Dr. Bob) and the Alcoholic Foundation's Trustees, the majority of whom were non-alcoholic.

We will then conclude with the remaining portion of the Long Form of the Ninth Tradition.

In its early beginnings, A.A. was organized

In 1938, it was clear that it was essential for non-alcoholics to oversee A.A.'s fiscal affairs:

- 1) to ensure the trust of donors and
- 2) to protect alcoholics from themselves.

But in less than ten years:

...The main link between our world services and A.A. itself had been Dr. Bob, our secretarial staff, and me. To our world-wide fellowship its devoted Board of Trustees was scarcely known at all. Not one A.A. in a thousand could name even half of them. (Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age, 210)

When death or disability finally took us few old-timers out of the picture, where would that leave the Trustees and the Headquarters?

The Trustees could make a devastating mistake that would result in A.A. groups' "failure of confidence."

It was evident that here was a world-wide movement that had no direct access to its own principal service affairs. The Trustees had authority over our services; A.A. itself had no authority. The simple trusteeship had been the ideal guardian for our infancy and adolescence, but how in future years could it possibly go on functioning as it had? *(Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age, 210)*

The annual Conference of Delegates from the groups began a five-year trial in 1951. (Actually four years)

However, Dr. Harry Tiebout was not at all convinced that alcoholics would ever be mature enough to handle the responsibilities of A.A.'s global outreach, especially with those crazy Traditions that encouraged anarchy and discouraged leadership.

When raising the issue of the chronic immaturity of alcoholics, Tiebout's first case in point was usually Bill.

After reading Bill's report of the first 1951 experimental Conference, Tiebout, in a fury, pointed out the dangers of historical distortion, egotism, and damaging ingratitude.

Bill agreed that his telling of A.A.'s early history lacked clarity but went on to deny vigorously any intentional "historical distortion" that resulted in the early Fellowship appearing "self-sufficient" or mature.

Bill then continued resentfully that he had been giving credit to many of the Fellowship's non-alcoholic friends including Tiebout.

The experimental Conference had met only once, and Bill was already on the defensive with Tiebout, who would become a Class A Trustee in 1957! (Kurtz, 130)

Alcoholics claim that they have an obsessively compulsive inclination to addictive dependency, and they declare that self-reliance is dangerous to their recovery!

How can such impaired individuals ever say, at the same time, that they are mature? Was that contradiction not the best proof of “*immaturity* -- the denial of the reality of dependence?”

Bill took Tiebout’s points to heart and spent the next four years searching for answers to this conundrum. *(Kurtz, 130)*

1952 - *Progress:*

“We here must dedicate ourselves to insure that there is never any government in the hearts of Alcoholics Anonymous.”

1953 - *We Are Standing on the Threshold of Maturity:*

“No one can say in truth that we are really mature yet. The process of maturing will go on as long as we last.” (Kurtz, 130-131)

1954 - *Confidence and Responsibility:*

“. . . some examples of “plain irresponsibility” that had arisen from the members’ sense of separation from the Trustees of the Alcoholic Foundation.”

Driven by his own lack of confidence in the Trustees, Bill pushed the name change of the Alcoholic Foundation to the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous –

Selection continued to be essentially from within, although the elective process was slightly opened and formalized.” (Kurtz, 131)

1955 - *Coming of Age*

“. . . a formal handing over to the membership, as represented by the General Service Conference, of the “Three Legacies of Alcoholics Anonymous . . . Recovery, Unity, and Service.”
(Kurtz, 131)

In that five-year period, alcoholic Delegates demonstrated that A.A. members could not only suit up and show up; but also provide valuable perspectives to solving some of A.A.’s problems.

For Bill, that was not enough.

Bill believed that many people who suffered from the disease would **not** be attracted to a program that perpetuated the idea that

alcoholics could never recover enough to be responsible for their own program.

His problem in achieving that outcome was two-fold:

The Trustees,
The Delegates.

Both were skeptical. (Kurtz, 138 – 142)

From 1956 through 1962, the Delegates advised retaining the non-alcoholic majority on the Board.

During that time, Bill continued to hold back on advocating for ratio change.

Nevertheless, he was smoldering when he said,

“At the forthcoming Conference I am having nothing to say whatever about the Trustee ratio. . . . I really did quit at St. Louis and meant to.” (Kurtz, 139 – 140)

Nobody wishes to quit the “papa” business any more eagerly than I do. A.A. needs to stand on its own feet, that’s the primary thing. . . .

What am I supposed to do? Am I supposed to transfer the remainder of my leadership to a Board in which I cannot have full confidence?

I am fully fed up with it. . . . [But at St. Louis] I . . . agreed to turn over full responsibility to the groups. . . .

So, when they still refuse to name a majority of their own membership to run their own affairs, I wonder if they are really doing this. It looks to me rather that they were consulting their fears rather than their trust. *(Kurtz, 140)*

Tiebout wrote to Bill:

**Most [A.A.'s] are not impressed
by the need to grow up. . . .**

I am not very much moved by
the emphasis on growing up.
Most adolescents are very
conscious of having grown up.
The trouble is that they do not
know that they still have a lot to
learn.” (*Kurtz*, 140)

Bill could not win!

The *Twelve Concepts for World Service*. His essays outlined the “why” of A.A.’s service structure, with substantive components that meticulously described “how” A.A.’s service structure works.

“No group or individual should be set in unqualified authority over another.” (*A.A. Service Manual*, C2)

The Delegates accepted *The Concepts*, but continued to support the nonalcoholic majority representation on the Board in 1962.

While alcoholics may be chronically immature, that did not mean they could not be responsible.

The Traditions spoke to how groups avoid irresponsibility

The Concepts spoke to how groups assume responsibility.

Dr. Tiebout agreed to vote for the ratio change in late 1964. (Kurtz, 140)

1965 A.A.'s 30th Anniversary at the International Convention's keynote was "The Declaration"

Bill and Lois closed the convention with 10,000 A.A. attendees holding hands and reciting:

I am responsible. When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A. always to be there. And for that: I am responsible. *Our Great Responsibility*, 46.

At the time the majority was set up, nobody had more than three years' sobriety in A.A., and they didn't trust themselves in the money department. I said, 'Give it a try. If it doesn't work, we can change it.' And it was that easy.
(Pass It On, 396)

The Conference recommended and the Board approved the two-thirds alcoholic Trustees' majority representation in 1966.

From that point on, A.A.'s future belonged to alcoholics.

And for that, A.A. members are responsible.

From Advisory Actions: Trustees, 1966, p. 164

The re-structure plan of the General Service Board be approved, changing the board into a body of

14 A.A. (Class B) and

7 non-alcoholic (Class A) trustees. (Floor Action)

The General Service Board consist of eight regional A.A. trustees, six from the U.S., two from Canada. Also, six “General Service” Class B trustees (chosen for business skill)—four from the New York City area, one from Canada, one from anywhere in the U.S. (Floor Action)

Currently, there are seven Class A Trustees and fourteen alcoholic Class B Trustees.

The Class B Trustees are in three categories:

Eight regional Trustees (six from the U.S. and two from Canada),

Four General Service Trustees (two from Alcoholics Anonymous World Services and two from Grapevine), and

Two Trustees-at-Large (one from the U.S. and one from Canada).
(The A.A. Service Manual, 52)


Long Form Part 4: We are not organized

All such representatives are to be guided in the spirit of service, for true leaders in A.A. 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. (191)

A.A.'s Trustees are trusted servants to the A.A. groups.

A.A. groups are responsible for A.A.

In terms of hierarchy, A.A. is not organized



Caution against
confusing service with
leadership/ownership

While A.A. has to function, it must at the same time avoid wealth, prestige, and power, three great dangers which necessarily tempt nearly all human societies.

Though Tradition Nine at first sight seems to deal with purely practical matters, it embodies a deep spirituality in its actual operation.

A.A. is a society without organization, animated only by the spirit of service—a true fellowship (emphasis added). (Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age, 120)

Bill emphasized the role of *trusted servants* – no matter what the service position is.

Indeed, general service requires a substantial amount of heavy lifting.

However, Bill makes it clear that service for inside the meeting and for outreach are equally important.

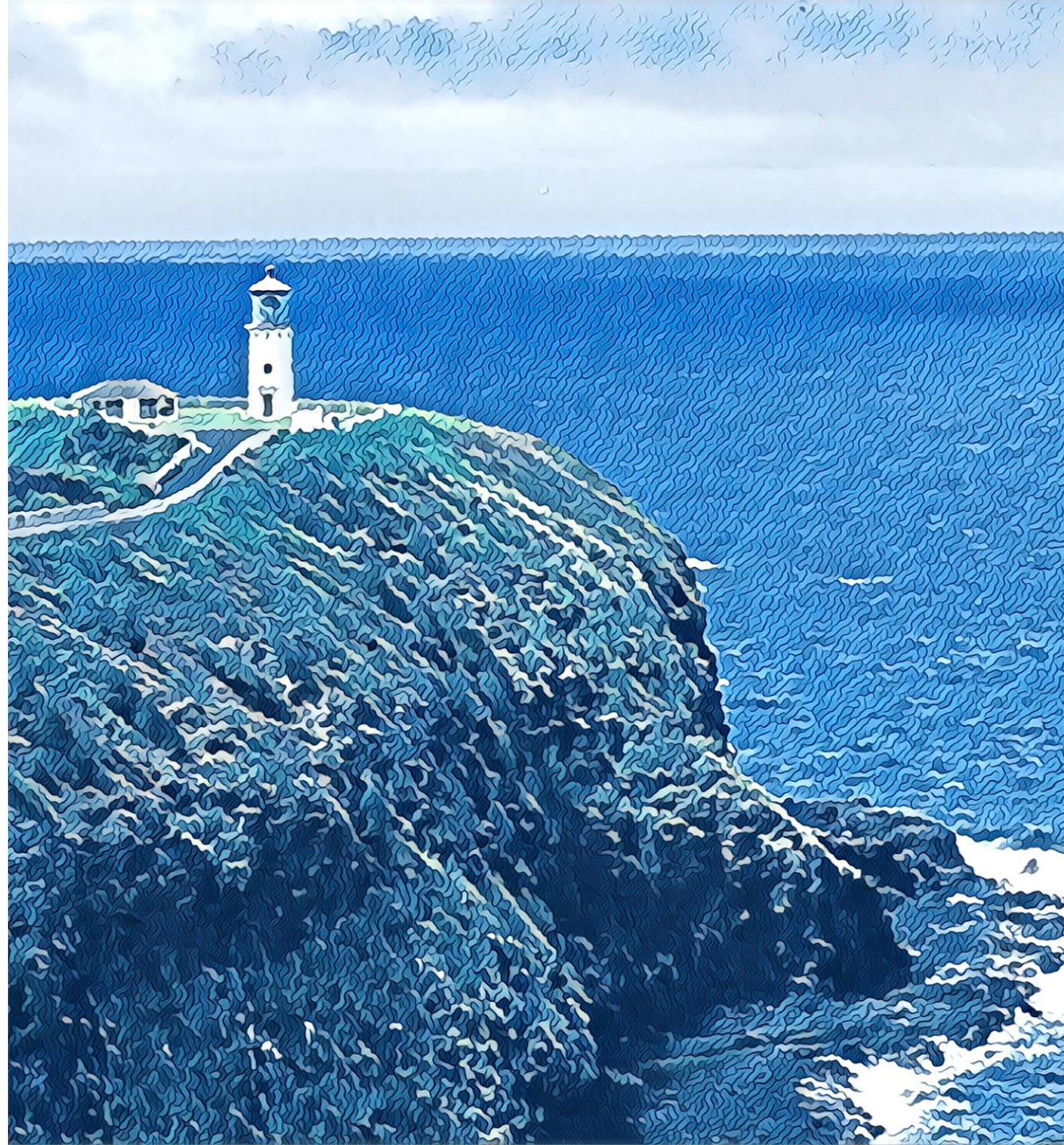
There is no higher echelon of service.

As a result of this discussion, hopefully groups will contact their Area Committee for facilitating an exploration of, or even a brief overview of *The A.A. Service Manual Combined with the Twelve Concepts for World Service*.

And, if not done already, groups will elect a volunteer for the critical “A.A. communications channel” position of G.S.R.!

...if [Bill and Dr. Bob] did nothing, their silence would in later years be interpreted as approval of the status quo [Trustees running A.A.]... They should try the conference.

If we do nothing, our silence will be interpreted as approval of the status quo.



Coming up: the Tenth Tradition

One would think that with all of Bill's trials in establishing the service structure for A.A., he would be the staunchest defender of the *Traditions*.

When we explore Tradition Ten, we'll learn how the Trustees, Headquarters, and Bill occasionally faltered under the pressures of outside issues.

Would you like a weekly reminder?
Put your email in the chat and I'll
add you to the list.

Comments and questions?

contact

Lyn S.

whatslenderthreads@gmail.com

+1-240-462-4641

www.onwhatslenderthreads.com