

Appendix III

Our Third Legacy and a Remarkable Consensus

A number of factors apply to the search for a consensus from the groups of Alcoholics Anonymous, and the decisions eventually approved on any particular issue show the outcome of sound AA principles. Any group conscience is hopefully an informed group conscience, where the presentations of background facts combine with current views toward a course of positive action. While not always announced in emphasis, resulting decisions reflect an AA principle stated in the *Twelve Concepts for World Service* (adopted at the 1962 General Service Conference) as Warranty Four of Concept Twelve: “that all important decisions be reached by discussion, vote, and whenever possible, by substantial unanimity.” The idea in our Second Tradition of “a loving God as he may express himself in our group conscience” serves as both a motivation for any proposal a group votes on, and that idea also becomes a vehicle that carries the results of voted motions.

Voting at the Assemblies of Northern Illinois Area 20 always prove the vitality of AA principles. Our voting and search for an Area 20 consensus is not always completed in one vote, however. A thorough discussion continues before and after voting a specific motion, as Concept Five’s “right of appeal” allows for the presentation of the minority opinion. In Alcoholics Anonymous, seen in voting from individual groups to Districts to Assemblies onward to the General Service Conference, the minority opinion is well considered.

Our procedure of voting always provides the opportunity for a reconsideration vote when anyone in the majority chooses to change their vote. The final decision on any proposed motion is an authentic informed group conscience where minority views blend into the outcome.

Full NIA consideration was given to a particular motion presented at the 1990 Spring Assembly held in Joliet, resulting in an extraordinary outcome when the Assembly considered its minority views. NIA Panel 40 Delegate Phyllis W. discussed the effort of another Area for the General Service Conference to approve, develop, and publish an AA pamphlet on "Unity." With the Spring Assembly held about one month before that year's Conference, Phyllis reported that some of the large amounts of her mail discussed the proposal for the new pamphlet. She shared the ideas, the details, and the background of the proposal in the morning session during the Delegate's Report, allowing enough time for a thorough Assembly discussion before voting its consensus in the afternoon session.

The first Assembly vote demonstrated Area 20 as being very much in favor of the 1990 Conference looking into developing a pamphlet on AA Unity, with less than 10% voting a minority view. Then, as NIA Assemblies always proceed, the request was made to hear from the minority "if it wished to address the issue." Four or five NIA trusted servants shared their reservations on developing a "Unity" pamphlet and the ideas are included here to help explain the second vote on the proposal. A past Delegate reported that, of AA pamphlets in 1990 distribution, the subject of AA unity was presented and announced over sixteen times. Whether a "Unity" pamphlet was really needed or would actually be read by the Fellowship appeared as the strong consideration for the Assembly NOT to approve its development. Another spoke on the idea that AA Unity, one of the Three Legacies of our

Fellowship, could be thought of as a living, existing, and flexible entity. A new pamphlet on the subject might either be incomplete or detract from the real forces of unity at work in Alcoholics Anonymous. Another spoke of AA's Tradition One, where both our common welfare and personal recovery depend upon AA unity. The word "unity" in the First Tradition carries its inspiration through the remaining eleven Traditions, literally describing its boundaries and explains the principles of AA unity in our Fellowship.

The motion was called for a second vote, and as reported in the Spring Assembly minutes by the NIA Secretary, "Upon a standing vote it was evidenced that there was a total turnaround of the opinion of the Assembly and the question was denied." The 1990 General Service Conference also declined to proceed with the pamphlet's development. The NIA Spring Assembly, after hearing the views expressed by its minority vote, fully reconsidered the thoughtful ideas presented and delivered its informed group conscience, a substantial unanimity and a truly remarkable consensus.

Northern Illinois Area 20 Historian, December 1995.