

Concept I

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

In concept I, Bill traces how this came to be. The first step in 1938 was “the creation of a trusteeship,” first called the Alcoholic Foundation, renamed in 1954 the General Service Board. Why? To perform the services the groups could not do for themselves: e.g., uniform literature, uniform public information about A.A., helping new groups get started, sharing with them the experience of established groups, handling pleas for help, publishing a national magazine, and carrying the message in other languages and in other countries. A service office was formed to carry on these functions under the board’s direction. **Both the board and the office looked to the co-founders, Bill and Dr. Bob, for policy leadership.** (The Twelve Concepts for World Service illustrated)

The average member, preoccupied with his group life and his own “twelfth stepping,” knew almost nothing of A.A.’s world services. Not one member in a thousand could tell who our trustees were. Not one in a hundred had the least idea what had been done for A.A.’s general welfare. **Tens of thousands already owed their chance at sobriety to the little noticed activity of our Trustees and general services. But few realized that this was true.** (Twelve Concepts for World Service pg.6)

...in 1948, there occurred an event that shook us all. It became known that Dr. Bob was suffering from a fatal illness. As nothing else could, this news drove home the hard fact that he and I were almost the sole links between our virtually unknown Trustees and the movement they served. **The trustees always had relied heavily upon Dr. Bob and me for advice.** They had taken a firm grip on money expenditures, but they necessarily turned to us every time that A.A. policy questions arose. Then, too, the groups of that time did not really rely much on the Trustees for the management of their service affairs; **they were still looking to Dr. Bob and me.** So here was a society whose total functioning was still largely dependent upon the credit and the confidence which, for the time being, its founders happened to enjoy.

The fact had to be faced that A.A.'s founders were perishable. When Dr. Bob and I had gone, who would then advise the Trustees; who could link our little-known Board to our thousands of groups? For the first time it was seen that only a representative conference could take the place of Dr. Bob and me. This gap had to be filled without delay. Such a dangerous open end in our affairs could not be tolerated. **Regardless of trouble or expense, we had to call an A.A. General Service Conference and deliver our world services into its permanent keeping...** (Twelve Concepts for World Service pg.6, 7)

Over great resistance by trustees and members devoted to the status quo, Bill managed to "sell" the idea of calling an A.A. General Service Conference (see concept II), and eleven years later Bill was able to declare, "The results of the Conference have exceeded our highest expectations." **This concept is rooted in Tradition Two**, which states: "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." The principles of Tradition Two are crystal clear, Bill asserts: **"The A.A. groups are to be the final authority; their leaders are to be entrusted with delegated responsibilities only."** The outside world cannot imagine an organization run this way, but Bill calls it **"a spiritualized society characterized by enough enlightenment, enough responsibility, and enough love of man and of God to ensure that our democracy of world service will work...."** (The Twelve Concepts for World Service illustrated)

...Hence it is with a sense of great security that we old-timers have no fully vested in A.A.'s General Service Conference the authority for giving shape – through the labors of its chosen Delegates, Trustees, and service workers – to the destiny that we trust God in His wisdom is holding in store for all of us. (Twelve Concepts for World Servicepg.9)