

FEBRUARY 2021 DISTRICT 5 LITERATURE COMMITTEE REPORT

Presented 2021 GSC Literature Agenda Items. D5 Literature Committee presentation is located below. Literature Committee is meeting via Zoom on February 25 at 6:45pm to further discuss the agenda items – please email us at literaturecommittee@aadistrict5.org if you would like to attend or for any other literature information.

(Agenda Items & Background Information: Area 15 Delegate's Corner: <https://area15aa.org/delegate/delegates-corner/>)

Referenced the 70 GSC Big Book Presentation at <https://vimeopro.com/user112910871/big-book-riptab/video/500617913> and quote from Bill W. as follows: *“Since the audience for the book is likely to be newcomers, anything from the point of view of content or style that might offend or alienate those who are not familiar with the program should be carefully eliminated.”*

Discussed

- How to disseminate information about Agenda Items
- How to present information
 - Objectively (your vote represents your opinion)
 - Present background
 - Identify traditions that are involved
- How to mediate discussion
 - Read “Informed Group Conscience” from The A.A. Group pamphlet before beginning the discussion.
 - Instead of allowing the loudest voices to dominate, go around the room, providing an opportunity for each person to express his or her opinion in two minutes.
 - Use a timer.
 - Instead of arguing the question or item, list pros and cons for each side of the question.

Literature Committee Agenda Items

Agenda items are like motions. Each group is expected to discuss and vote on each item that affects their local area or A.A. as a whole. Concept One states, “The final responsibility and the ultimate authority for A.A. world services should always reside in the collective conscience of our whole Fellowship.” Therefore it is our responsibility to consider and vote on changes to our literature.

AGENDA ITEMS

Agenda Item U. Consider if proposed agenda items for plain language, simplified language, accessible translations, and large print versions of the book [Alcoholics Anonymous](#), as well as workbooks to help study the program of Alcoholics Anonymous, can be addressed with a common solution. (background information pp. 364-378)

What the Delegate needs to know: Can all of these suggestions be addressed with a common solution?

Literature Committee opinion: No. They are too diverse to be addressed with a common solution. Some of these entail changes to the existing Big Book and will require lengthy discussion by the fellowship while at least one of these is long overdue for an up or down vote. We do not understand why we are encouraged to agree to a “common solution” to very different publications. Trying to find a “one size fits all” approach doesn’t work. The suggestions for each publication should be weighed separately.

(Plain Language Big Book is a translation of the Big Book, not a change to the Big Book we use. See pamphlet “This Is A.A.”)

Agenda Item B. Part 1. Consider requests to revise the book [Alcoholics Anonymous](#):

Should we add pages 3 through 41 of the pamphlet “The A.A. Group” [The AA Group ... Where it all begins](#) as an appendix in the next printing of the book [Alcoholics Anonymous](#)? (background information p. 439)

- This added information would encourage best practices and participation in general service.
- It would be easily available for clarification at business meetings and group inventories.

Agenda Item B. Part 2. Should we revise the first 164 pages?

District 55 proposal to revise the first 164 pages of the Big Book (Doc. 2.i Version 4, April 26th, 2019):

From District 55:

We recommend that the Conference form a study committee to audit the first 164 pages of the Big Book with the purpose of identifying changes that can be made to make the Big Book more reflective of the A.A. membership composition. The focus should be on identifying the following for possible change:

- Pronoun usage – where possible the gender-neutral form should be incorporated.
- Passages or sections that are no longer consistent with or relevant when taken in context of society in general or the A.A. membership composition.
- The chapters To Wives and The Family Afterward should specifically be evaluated for revisions to be more consistent with today's membership.

Once items have been identified these should be prioritized both by the ease of editing and the possible impact to the context of the message. Changes to the overall message should be minimized or avoided entirely. Simplification of the vocabulary should not be considered and references to historical figures and events should remain unchanged.

Where possible, suitable changes should be suggested for incorporation into the text subject to Conference approval.

Examples of changes consistent with the proposal:

Pronoun usage: The gender-neutral form is not the same as no gender; rather it is the generally accepted form of writing that does not assign specific gender to an action or uses a he or she format.

From the Big Book page 17, the sentence, “But the ex-problem drinker who has found this solution, who is properly armed with facts about himself,” could readily be changed to “But the ex-problem drinker who has found this solution, who is properly armed with facts about themselves,” without altering the meaning. This would be considered an appropriate change.

Passages or sections that are no longer consistent with or relevant when taken in context of society in general or the A.A. membership composition.

The following is a passage from the Big Book followed by the section rewritten in a fashion aligned with the proposal. This was done in a single pass, with little thought concerning the precise words that could be used. Even so, the message seems consistent.

Original text: Into Action, page 80:

The chances are that we have domestic troubles. Perhaps we are mixed up with women in a fashion we wouldn't care to have advertised. We doubt if, in this respect, alcoholics are fundamentally much worse than other people. But drinking does complicate sex relations in the home. After a few years with an alcoholic, a wife gets worn out, resentful and uncommunicative. How could she be anything else? The husband begins to feel lonely, sorry for himself. He commences to look around in the night clubs, or their equivalent, for something besides liquor. Perhaps he is having a secret and exciting affair with "the girl who understands." In fairness we must say that she may understand, but what are we going to do about a thing like that? A man so involved often feels very remorseful at times, especially if he is married to a loyal and courageous girl who has literally gone through hell for him.

Revised text:

The chances are that we have domestic troubles. Perhaps we are mixed up with someone in a fashion we wouldn't care to have advertised. We doubt if, in this respect, alcoholics are fundamentally much worse than other people. But drinking does complicate sex relations in the home. After a few years with an alcoholic, a spouse gets worn out, resentful and uncommunicative. How could they be anything else? The alcoholic begins to feel lonely, sorry for themselves. They commence to look around in the night clubs, or their equivalent, for something besides liquor. Perhaps they are having a secret and exciting affair with "someone who understands." In fairness we must say that they may understand, but what are we going to do about a thing like that? A person so involved often feels very remorseful at times, especially if they are married to a loyal and courageous partner who has literally gone through hell for them.

Chapters: The chapters To Wives, and The Family Afterward and perhaps even To Employers are, for a variety of reasons particularly challenging. Perhaps applications of the first two revision criteria, which are essentially simple word substitutions, may result in improvement.

However, the apparent revision level required for these chapters may result in rewrites on a paragraph-by-paragraph basis. The text would be recognizable, but may differ significantly from the original text. Thus, it is outside the scope of this document to address what may be done in these cases.

Examples of changes not consistent with the proposal:

Historical references to people or events should remain the same. For example, Bill's Story is a period piece. The vocabulary and descriptions should not change. Being able to connect to a period of 80-90 years ago when alcoholics experienced the same feelings we have today is of immense value to the continuity of the fellowship.

Similarly, when discussing a Higher Power in We Agnostics the proposal of travel to the moon is presented as a mechanism of faith in an idea we cannot know with certainty. Would changing that historical prediction to something new be more relevant? Or does it provide connection to the thinking of those that came before us? We think the latter, and such references should remain unchanged.

Additional Notes: The proposal has been made specific to clarify the objective. It should not be construed as an attempt to make a simple-language big book. The exact mechanism the committee uses to identify items, develop changes, and the subsequent approval process is left to the Conference. However, we think much of that is obvious. One important detail to note is the 1995 conference advisory action preventing changes to the first 164 pages remains in effect.

Literature Committee opinion: No. This agenda item was too poorly written to consider. For example, The proposal asks, "Should the first 164 pages be revised?," while the explanatory text proposes something different: "We recommend that the Conference form a study committee to audit the first 164 pages of the Big Book with the purpose of identifying changes that can be made to make the Big Book more reflective of the A.A. membership composition. (District 55 in Area 59). The suggested text changes were all grammatically incorrect.

The Literature Committee agrees that an audit committee should be formed to analyze pronoun usage and societal context. We are open to the idea of a gender-neutral version of the Big Book, but this agenda item did not present a coherent proposal.

(Plain Language Big Book is a translation of the Big Book, not a change to the Big Book we use. See pamphlet "This Is A.A.")

in our presentation we referenced one slide with the following quote from Bill W.: "Since the audience for the book is likely to be newcomers, anything from the point of view of content or style that might offend or alienate those who are not familiar with the program should be carefully eliminated."

Agenda Item C. Consider proposals related to possible Fifth Edition of the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*:

What the Delegate needs to know:

C1. Develop a Fifth Edition or not?

C2. Develop a Fifth Edition of the book *Alcoholics Anonymous* with updated stories

Background

This background is from Item D.

In a June 14, 1954 letter to Bernard S., Bill wrote:

"The story section of the Big Book is far more important than most of us think. It is our principle means of identifying with the reader outside of A.A.; it is the written equivalent of hearing speakers at an A.A. meeting; it is our show window of results. To increase the power and variety of this display to the utmost should be, therefore, no routine or hurried job. The best will be none too good. The difference between 'good' and 'excellent' can be the difference between prolonged misery and recovery, between life and death for the reader outside A.A."

And in a letter to a potential author of a Big Book story, Bill wrote:

"As you are probably aware the stories we need will be of the straight A.A. variety; the kind which would be most effective with the beginner on our program. We are looking for straight personal narratives which describes the drinking history, how the newcomer arrived in Alcoholics Anonymous, how A.A. affected him, and what A.A. has since accomplished for him."

and with the following revisions to Appendices III and V?

C3 • Update Appendix III (The Medical View on A.A.) to include more information on mental illness. The language could be similar to (or directly lifted from) "The A.A. Member - Medications and Other Drugs." Specifically, page 6 of the pamphlet where it talks about some alcoholics needing medication.

C4 • Appendix III references a pamphlet that is now out of print. It says, "This address is now available in pamphlet form...under the title 'Three Talks to Medical Societies by Bill W'."

C5 • Update Appendix V and include perspectives from different faiths. Currently, the only perspectives offered are from Father Ed Dowling, who was Catholic, and an Episcopalian magazine. There are many other faiths that can be included, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, etc.

C6. Add an addition to the Forward that explains dated language such as why the original audience was male, etc.

Literature Committee opinion: Yes to develop a fifth edition. Bring us more detail and specific wording on the other suggestions.

Agenda Item W. Consider the development of a draft Fifth Edition of the Big Book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, noting past Advisory Actions.

Consider the development of a draft Fifth Edition of the Big Book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, bringing a progress report to the 2022 Conference; keeping in mind the 1995 Advisory Action that: "The first 164 pages of the Big Book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, the Preface, the Forewords, 'The Doctor's Opinion', 'Dr. Bob's Nightmare' and the Appendices remain as is" (background information p. 339)

Agenda Item E. (Part 1)

Should we remove the phrase "opposite sex" from paragraph two on page 117 in the chapter "Step Twelve." [Twelve Steps - Step Twelve](#) (background information pp. 106-125)

Remove Original Paragraph: "Nearly every sound human being experiences, at some time in life, a compelling desire to find a mate of the opposite sex with whom the fullest possible union can be made - spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical. This mighty urge is the root of great human accomplishments, a creative energy that deeply influences our lives. God fashioned us that way. ..."

Replace with Proposed Paragraph: "Nearly every sound human being experiences, at some time in life, a compelling desire to find a mate with whom the fullest possible union can be made - spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical. This mighty urge is the root of great human accomplishments, a creative energy that deeply influences our lives. God fashioned us that way. ..." {The rest of the paragraph would remain unchanged}

Background

The paragraph is in conflict with Tradition 10. It states that "'every sound human' desires to find a mate 'of the opposite sex' with whom the fullest union can be made, and it says that God fashioned us that way." This reflects religious ideals. AA has no opinion on outside affiliations, let alone stating God's will towards sexual preferences.

Tradition 3 tells us that the only requirement for membership is the desire to stop drinking. Telling any alcoholic that their lifestyle preference is not 'sound' or that it goes against God's Will says to them that they are different, and could have them question if they are accepted in the fellowship.

Tradition 2 tells us, for our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority - a loving God as He may express himself in our group conscience.

Agenda Item E. (Part 2)

To reconsider use of the phrase “lustful enough to rape” in paragraph one on page 66 in the chapter “Step Six.” Twelve Steps - Step Six (pp. 63-69)” [Twelve Steps - Step Six](#) (background information pp. 63-69)

Background

• Lust is not the cause of rape. The cause of rape is complex and multifaceted. In a 2015 literary review on the causes of rape, Beverly A. McPhail concludes that “rape occurs due to multiple motives rather than [a] single motivation ... The multiple motivations include, but are not limited to, sexual gratification, revenge, recreation, power/control, and attempts to achieve or perform masculinity and a desire for power, among other causes” (8). In stating so plainly that lust leads to rape, these words are hugely misleading. This inaccuracy at best misinforms AA members and at worst triggers AA members - many of whom are sexual assault survivors.

What the Delegate needs to know: Groups only need to vote on whether delegates “reconsider.” There is no specific change to language.

Literature Committee opinion: We find this vague. It would have been helpful if the suggested language change was included.

Changes to Pamphlets

Agenda Item G. Consider requests to revise text related to open meetings in the pamphlet “The A.A. Group.” [P-16 - The AA Group ... Where it all begins](#)

Background:

This agenda item was written in a way that obscures the real intention. The intention is not to make the literature consistent, but is to change our group conscience on primary purpose. They wrote:

Last year, the suggestion to add “Nonalcoholics may attend open meetings as observers” to the Primary Purpose (blue) card is because the card does not match the language found in the pamphlet The A.A. Group. This motion was defeated. Therefore, to make the literature consistent, the sentence: “Nonalcoholics may attend open meetings as observers” should be removed.

The two groups who put this forward encourage non-alcoholics to participate in meetings. Their points include:

- “My home group has a long custom of permitting AI-Alons – often the Significant Others of our members – to speak at our open meeting (they generally introduce themselves as such)”
- “If someone does not want nonalcoholics sharing in their meeting, I strongly suggest they not hold an open meeting, and instead consult their group conscience on whether or not their meeting should be closed.”
- In Alcoholics Anonymous (p. 159-60), it says this: “In addition to these casual get-togethers, it became customary to set apart one night a week for a meeting to be attended by anyone or everyone interested in a spiritual way of life. Aside from fellowship and sociability, the prime object was to provide a time and place where new people might bring their problems.” “New people” and “anyone and everyone interested in a spiritual way of life” sounds like whoever showed up could share.

What the Delegate needs to know: Should “Nonalcoholics may attend open meetings as observers” be removed from the pamphlet description of open meetings.

Literature Committee opinion:

No. “Nonalcoholics may attend open meetings as observers” should not be removed.

The intention in deleting this sentence is not to make the literature consistent, but is to change our group conscience on primary purpose. The person requesting this change quoted the definition of open and closed meetings without quoting the paragraph above those definitions:

“The purpose of all A.A. group meetings, as the Preamble states, is for A.A. members to “share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism.” Toward this end, A.A. groups have both open and closed meetings.”

In “Problems Other than Alcohol,” it states, “there are certain things that A.A. cannot do for anybody, regardless of what our desires or sympathies may be. Our first duty, as a fellowship, is to insure our own survival. Therefore, we have to avoid distractions and multipurpose activity.

“Sobriety — freedom from alcohol — through the teaching and practice of the Twelve Steps, is the sole purpose of an A.A. group. Groups have repeatedly tried other activities, and they have always failed. It has also been learned that there is no possible way to make nonalcoholics into A.A. members. We have to confine our membership to alcoholics, and we have to confine our A.A. groups to a single purpose. If we don’t stick to these principles, we shall almost surely collapse. And if we collapse, we cannot help anyone.”

As an autonomous group, they can decide to have Al-Anon members speak at their meetings. This is not a request to “revise text related to open meetings”, but a request to change our current group conscience on our primary purpose.

Finally, we are going to request that future agenda items be more carefully reviewed. This agenda item was framed as a request only “to revise text,” which obscured a very different intention.

Agenda Item I. Consider revising the pamphlet [“Questions & Answers on Sponsorship”](#):

Agenda Item I. Part 1. Change the following paragraph, found on page 12 under the heading “Can any member be a sponsor?”:

Remove the original paragraph: “In most instances, A.A. custom does suggest one limitation, already noted on page 10: If the group is large enough to allow a choice, sponsor and newcomer be of the same sex. The reasons are the same from both viewpoints; we A.A. members, no matter how long we have been sober, remain thoroughly human, subject to emotions that might divert us from “our primary purpose.””

Replace it with the following paragraph: “A.A. custom does suggest one limitation: sponsorship should be avoided wherever a romantic entanglement might arise between sponsor and newcomer. We A.A. members, no matter how long we have been sober, remain thoroughly human, subject to emotions that might divert us from “our primary purpose.””

Background: (1) Transgender people are disproportionately likely to abuse alcohol and drugs, but they are far less likely to seek and find sobriety in A.A. than non-transgender people. This is not because of any inherent difference or deficit of transgender people. The experience of a growing number of transgender and nonbinary alcoholics demonstrates that this program can work for us, if we are given the same opportunities as any other alcoholic to connect with the wisdom and support of the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Systemic barriers within A.A. make it an unwelcoming place for transgender people to find recovery. Throughout our pamphlets, our literature, and our meeting formats, Alcoholics Anonymous maintains a strict segregation of men and women. This segregation leaves transgender alcoholics at risk of misunderstanding, ostracism, rejection, and even violence.

When a nonbinary newcomer hears in our Preamble that Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women, they hear that this is a fellowship with no place for them.

When it comes to sponsorship, there is often no good option. They have three options:

1. they can out themselves by looking for a sponsor who shares their gender identity;
2. they can hide their identity and seek a sponsor who shares their assigned sex;
3. they can try to go it alone, without a sponsor to help them navigate sobriety.

Remove the suggestion that sponsor and newcomer be of the same sex.

Those against the changes seemed to voice comments around:

- If we start changing anything, where would we stop?
- That as written, the 12x12 was good enough to get them sober, so it's good enough for everyone

Those in favor of the changes seemed to voice comments around:

- The removal of the few words would be more inclusive
- It was religious in nature
- Some members were personally offended by the text as written

[as Submitted by District 1 Area 15] (background information p. 65)

in our presentation we referenced one slide with the following quote from Bill W.: "Since the audience for the book is likely to be newcomers, anything from the point of view of content or style that might offend or alienate those who are not familiar with the program should be carefully eliminated."

{end}