

SERVICE: THE THIRD LEGACY

We are gathered here for the final hours of A.A.'s twentieth anniversary celebration.

Above us floats a banner on which is inscribed the new symbol for A.A., a circle enclosing a triangle. The circle stands for the whole world of A.A., and the triangle stands for A.A.'s Three Legacies of Recovery, Unity, and Service. Within our wonderful new world, we have found freedom from our fatal obsession. That we have chosen this particular symbol is perhaps no accident. The priests and seers of antiquity regarded the circle enclosing the triangle as a means of warding off spirits of evil, and A.A.'s circle and triangle of Recovery, Unity, and Service has certainly meant all of that to us and much more.

On our first evening together here in St. Louis, we looked at the base of our triangle, A.A.'s First Legacy of Recovery, on which everything rests and depends. During our second evening we contemplated Unity, A.A.'s Second Legacy, and all its vast meaning for our future. Now we want to think about the third side of our triangle, A.A.'s Third Legacy of Service, which in this afternoon's closing hour will be delivered into your hands for all time to come. Then our symbol will be complete, and may Recovery, Unity, and Service, the means by which, under God, our fellowship has been created, be ever at His command for so long as He may use this society.

A.A.'s Twelfth Step, carrying the message, is the basic service that our fellowship gives; it is our principal aim and the main reason for our existence. A.A. is more than a set of principles; it is a society of recovered alcoholics in action. We *must* carry A.A.'s message; otherwise we ourselves may fall into decay and those who have not yet been given the truth may die. This is why we so often say that *action* is the

magic word. Action to carry A.A.'s message is therefore the heart of our Third Legacy of Service.

Yet some of us are still a bit confused about A.A.'s Third Legacy. We still ask, "Just what is this Third Legacy business anyhow? And just how much territory does 'service action' take in?"

The answer is simple. 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. But the publicity that caused the prospect to get in touch with us, the car we rode in, the gasoline we paid for, and the cups of coffee we bought him—all of these aids were necessary to make our call possible and effective. And this is only the start. Our services involve meeting places, hospital co-operation, Intergroup offices, and pamphlets and books. Services can require committees, delegates, trustees, and conferences. They include small voluntary money contributions so that the group, the area, and A.A. as a whole can function. They range all the way from the cup of coffee up to A.A.'s General Service Headquarters for national and international action. The sum of *all* these services is A.A.'s Third Legacy. Such services are utterly necessary to A.A.'s existence and growth. Yearning for simplicity, we often wonder if we could not do away with many of A.A.'s present services. Wouldn't it be wonderful to have no bother, no politics, no expense, and no responsibility! But this is only a dream about simplicity; it would not be simplicity in fact. Without its essential services, A.A. would soon become a formless, confused, and irresponsible anarchy.

Regarding any particular service, we need to ask only one question: "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 to those who want and seek A.A. For twenty years now we A.A.'s have been trying to determine what are needed services and what are not. As I tell the story of the growth of A.A.'s services, I hope that the vision of our Third Legacy will come clear. ✕

Let's begin with my own sponsor, Ebby. When Ebby heard how serious my drinking was, he resolved to visit me. He was in New York; I