

The Informed Group Conscience

The Second Tradition:

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.

Concept XII, Warranty Four:

“That all important decisions should be reached by discussion, vote, and whenever possible, by substantial unanimity.”

“Here on the one hand we erect a safeguard against any hasty or overbearing authority of a simple majority; and, on the other hand, it takes notice of the rights and the frequent wisdom of minorities, however small. This principle further guarantees that all matters of importance, time permitting, will be extensively debated, and that such debates will continue until a really heavy majority can support every critical decision ...”

- The Group Conscience strives for unanimity through enlightenment, spirituality, and the practice of our principles in all our affairs.
- To be fully informed requires a willingness to listen to minority opinions through full discussion.
- On sensitive issues, the group works slowly, discouraging formal motions until the group has a clear sense of its views.
- Placing principles before personalities, the group is reflective about dominant opinions.
- The group conscience is the aggregate of experience a group develops after applying the Traditions and Concepts to a question.

The difference between a group conscience and a majority vote or group opinion is that one or more of the elements described above are missing.

Groups find their way past ignorance, prejudice and self-will on an individual basis by practicing the Twelve Steps that enable us to practice humility, patience, tolerance, kindness and love –emphasizing principles before personalities. Through the Steps, we learn to overcome self-will and open the way to a group conscience. When tempers flare, an informed chairperson postpones discussion until those tempers cool, allowing time for prayer and meditation.

Knowledge of A.A. history and willingness to listen to experience are important factors. We can listen for a quiet minority voice, which may be the true expression of a loving God by allowing time for all to share and especially, the minority to be heard.