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Dear General Service Conference Members –

Since the 75th General Service Conference, the office has received many questions about the fifth edition Big Book. To help us better respond to those questions internally, a simple "FAQ" document was created.

This was shared with the trustees' Literature Committee at their August meeting, and the committee suggested that it might be a useful resource for other Conference members.

Please feel free to reach out if you have any questions or concerns.

Warmly,
Misha Q., GSO Staff, Literature
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FAQs related to the Fifth Edition of *Alcoholics Anonymous*

Why was a fifth edition of the book *Alcoholics Anonymous* created?

In 2020–2021, groups of A.A. members from different areas each submitted proposed agenda items (PAIs) requesting that an updated Big Book be created. The resulting agenda item was discussed at the 71st General Service Conference (GSC), and that year Conference members (by a two-thirds vote) made an Advisory Action that requested the development of a fifth edition of *Alcoholics Anonymous* (the Big Book).

In 2021, when the General Service Conference passed an Advisory Action asking for a fifth edition, there was an awareness that the world, and our Fellowship, had changed in the 20 years since the fourth edition had been published. With that in mind, the language of the Advisory Action specifically called for "an update of stories to better reflect current membership."

When were previous editions of the Big Book published in English?

- First edition: 1939
- Second edition: 1955
- Third edition: 1976
- Fourth edition: 2001

How many new stories were received for consideration for the fifth edition?

2,393 members of the Fellowship submitted their personal stories for consideration. (More than double the 1,200 submissions received for the fourth edition.)

How did stories get selected?

The Advisory Action stated that the fifth edition should include "an update of stories to better reflect current membership."

To review and evaluate the story submissions, the trustees' Literature Committee created a subcommittee in 2021. They began by reviewing the processes that led to the creation of the first four editions of *Alcoholics Anonymous*. The subcommittee was careful to craft a process grounded in A.A. principles and history. Mindful of A.A. cofounder Bill W.'s observation that "the audience for the book is people who are coming to Alcoholics Anonymous now. Those who are here have already heard our stories."

A "Call for Stories" was opened in April 2022 and closed October 31, 2022. Stories were accepted in English, Spanish and French. Members were able to submit stories electronically, as well as through postal mail.

As the stories came in, the subcommittee fine-tuned the process for evaluating the story submissions that would provide an effective and careful review of every submission.

By early 2025, the subcommittee was able to reduce the number of stories being considered down to 48. These were shared with the full trustees' Literature Committee and the Conference Committee on Literature who were both provided the opportunity to provide input on, or express concerns around, any of the story being considered.

Throughout 2025, the subcommittee continued to meet and discuss the stories, frequently referring to the original Advisory Action. Emphasis was placed on selecting stories with depth and weight that would help a newcomer identify and find hope. In the end, a final set of 26 new stories were selected. These stories reflect A.A.'s geographic

diversity and feature the experiences of those who got sober as young people, as well as those who found sobriety later in life. The stories also reflect different kinds of lived experiences, including being part of a remote community, coming to the U.S. or Canada as an immigrant, being a member of the LGBTQ+ community and serving in the military. These new stories also include members who got sober during periods of incarceration and some who struggled with the notion of a Higher Power. All found sobriety, hope and a new way of life through the program of Alcoholics Anonymous.

I'd like to invite the authors of some of the new Big Book stories to speak at an A.A. event. Can you share their names or contact information with me?

I'm sorry, we cannot share that information. In fact, story submitters are encouraged not to publicly share that their personal story has been selected. In A.A. terms, those stories are considered anonymous spiritual contributions.

I heard that my favorite story from the fourth edition will not be in the fifth edition. Why not?

The subcommittee charged with developing the fifth edition went through a careful process to select which stories would be retained from the fourth edition. This process included asking members of the trustees' Literature Committee and the Conference Committee on Literature to help determine which stories from the fourth edition should be included in the fifth edition.

After reviewing the feedback from both committees, the subcommittee recommended that of the 42 personal stories in the fourth edition, 12 should be included in the fifth edition, including:

• Dr Bob's Nightmare • Alcoholics Anonymous Number Three • Gratitude in Action • Women Suffer Too • The Vicious Cycle • Jim's Story	• The Keys of The Kingdom • Crossing the River of Denial • Winner Takes All • Acceptance Was The Answer • Listening To The Wind • Freedom From Bondage

Those that were not retained include the following 30 stories:

• Our Southern Friend • The Man Who Mastered Fear • He Sold Himself Short • The Missing Link • Fear of Fear • The Housewife Who Drank at Home • Physician, Heal Thyself! • My Chance to Live • Student of Life • Because I'm an Alcoholic • It Might Have Been Worse • Tightrope • Flooded with Feeling • Me an Alcoholic? • The Perpetual Ques	• A Drunk, Like You • Window of Opportunity • My Bottle, My Resentments, and Me • He Lived Only to Drink • Safe Haven • Twice Gifted • Building a New Life • On The Move • A Vision of Recovery • Gutter Bravado • Empty On the Inside • Grounded • Another Chance • A Late Start • A.A. Taught Him to Handle Sobriety

I heard that Conference changed a word in the first 164 pages. Is that true?

Yes. There was an Advisory Action from the 76th General Service Conference to remove an offensive term from the Big Book. This was followed by a Floor Action to remove the same word from the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* book.

The best way to learn more about this process is to connect with your area delegate. In most areas, the delegates organize "report-back" events to share about the General Service Conference. In other areas, those report-backs occur at regular area assembly meetings. For more on the report-back process, see page 36 of *The A.A. Service Manual/Twelve Concepts for World Services*.

Aren't the first 164 pages protected like the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions are?

No, the first 164 pages of the English-language Big Book are not "protected" in the same way as our Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions are "protected" by the Conference Charter. To learn more, you can consult Appendix K, p. 123, of *The A.A. Service Manual/Twelve Concepts for World Services* (2024–2026 Edition) where you will find the current Conference Charter, which was the document that authorized creation of the A.A. General Service Conference in 1955.

Article Three of the Conference Charter states:

3. Conference Relation to A.A.: The Conference will act for A.A. in the perpetuation and guidance of its world services, and it will also be the vehicle by which the A.A. movement can express its view upon all matters of vital A.A. policy and all hazardous deviations from A.A. Tradition. Delegates should be free to vote as their conscience dictates; they should also be free to decide what questions should be taken to the group level, whether for information, discussion, or their own direct instruction. But no change in Article 12 of the Charter or in the Twelve Traditions of A.A. or in the Twelve Steps of A.A. may be made with less than the written consent of three-quarters of the A.A. groups, as described in the Resolution adopted by the 1955 Conference and Convention.

Wasn't there a General Service Conference Advisory Action against changing the first 164 pages of the Big Book?

There have been a few different Advisory Actions recommending that the first 164 pages (as well as other parts of the book like the Forewords and the Appendices) not be changed.

To look those up, as well any other Conference Advisory Actions taken since 1951, you can refer to the *Advisory Actions of the General Service Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous* (Item M-39) Note: this volume gets updated annually.

If there was an Advisory Action not to change the first 164 pages of Alcoholics Anonymous, how can this change have been made?

One important principle built into our Conference process is that one Conference's actions are not binding upon another. This means that as things evolve and new information is made available, the General Service Conference can change its mind (or change something that had been decided at a previous Conference).

This principle derives from Article 12 of the Conference Charter, also known as Concept XII, The General Warranties of the Conference, which can be found on page C-48 of *The A.A. Service Manual/Twelve Concepts for World Services* (2024–2026 Edition)

Why wasn't the change to the word in Chapter 7 "Working With Others" on the 2026 Conference agenda?

The Conference agenda, along with related background materials, has traditionally been circulated to area delegates a few months before the annual meeting of the General

Service Conference. In many areas, delegates share that agenda and background with members, either directly — by email, for example — or at "Pre-Conference assemblies," where they often seek input on items of interest.

At times, however, additional items of importance to A.A. are brought to the Conference through the use of Floor Actions or through a Conference Committee under New Business.

What are "Floor Actions" and how did the practice come about?

A motion made on the floor, or Floor Action, was an integral procedure of the General Service Conference from the very beginning. Evidently, matters not on the Conference agenda were raised for discussion from the floor that resulted in a motion and vote. This was basically the procedure in the early years of the Conference. During these early, experimental years of the Conference, the delegates were still configuring the Conference process. There was no set manner of getting items on the Conference agenda, such as filtering items through the trustees' committees in the fashion it is done today. The agenda at the Conference was much less packed and the delegates thus more able to have informal discussions from the floor. In many cases delegates had to bring up issues on the floor to have them discussed. It was only natural for them to do so.

It may be argued that the concept of a floor action soon evolved into something that was seen as the privilege of any delegate. The delegates would give discretion to the board and the trustees' committees to decide what would go on the Conference agenda, but each delegate retained the right, always, of proposing an idea — even one not accepted as an agenda item by the trustees — as a Floor Action.

Eventually the processes related to how Floor Actions would be handled became organized and spelled out in a document called "How the Conference Operates" provided to Conference members each year as part of the Conference Manual. This information is also provided in a slightly different format on page 41 of *The A.A. Service Manual/Twelve Concepts for World Services* (2024–2026 Edition).

Can area delegates raise topics in their Conference committees that are not on their agendas?

Yes. Matters of pressing importance can also be brought by area delegates to the Conference committees to which they are assigned. These would come to that committee under the umbrella of "New Business" or "Other Subjects." As it notes one

page 44 of *The A.A. Service Manual/Twelve Concepts for World Services* (2024–2026 Edition), under "Committee Activity:"

> During their deliberations, Conference committees have a range of options available to them. They can address the agenda items as they are, modify them, and even consider new agenda items. They can take no action on an agenda item, generally reporting out why they are taking no action in their report. They can report suggestions or observations, usually in the form of Additional Committee Considerations.

Why wasn't the discussion about changing the word in the Big Book paused and brought back for wider discussion among the Fellowship?

The recommendation to change the word came out of the Conference Committee on Literature, along with other recommendations and committee considerations. As it notes in the Conference Manual, recommendations that come to the Conference floor are automatically motions that have been made and seconded.

In terms of spiritual principles, the "Right of Decision" exercised by Conference members can be drawn from Concept III, which outlines the "Right of Decision." On pages C-10–C-11 in the Concept III essay in *The A.A. Service Manual/Twelve Concepts for World Services* (2024–2026 Edition), co-founder Bill W. writes:

> There will always be plenty of ultimate authority to correct inefficiency, ineffectiveness, or abuse. If the Conference does not function well, the groups can send in better Delegates. If the Trustees get badly out of line, the Conference can censure them, or even reorganize them. If the Headquarters' services go sour, the Trustees can elect better directors and hire better help. These remedies are ample and direct. But for so long as our world services function reasonably well — and there should always be charity for occasional mistakes — then "trust" must be our watchword, otherwise we shall wind up leaderless.
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> These are the reasons for my belief that we should forthwith invest in all of our service bodies and people a traditional "Right of Decision." In our structure of world service this "Right of Decision" could be practically applied as follows:
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> A. Excepting its Charter provisions to the contrary, the Conference always should be able to decide which matters it will fully dispose of on its own responsibility, and which questions it will refer to the A.A. groups (or more usually, to their Committee Members or GSRs) for opinion or for definite guidance.

B. Therefore it ought to be clearly understood and agreed that our Conference Delegates are primarily the world servants of A.A. as a whole, that only in a secondary sense do they represent their respective areas. Consequently they should, on final decisions, be entitled to cast their votes in the General Service Conference according to the best dictates of their own judgment and conscience at that time.

Isn't this a slippery slope? Will there now be a huge number of changes to the Big Book?

As with all Conference-approved literature, future changes to the Big Book would need to be approved by substantial unanimity — a two-thirds vote by the Conference. Given the high bar and the reluctance of Conference members to make these kinds of changes, it doesn't seem likely that large numbers of additional changes will be made. Questions like these do underscore the need for each area to elect well-qualified delegates.

- For more information about selection of area delegates, see page 33 of *The A.A. Service Manual/Twelve Concepts for World Services* (2024–2026 Edition),
- Consult the service piece SMF-29 for more information about Conference-approved literature.

What if I don't like the fifth edition? Can I still get a fourth edition of the Big Book?

It is the practice of AAWS to publish only the most current version of a piece of literature. Once the fifth edition of *Alcoholics Anonymous* is made available, AAWS will stop selling the fourth edition (except for the existing stock from the warehouse).

It should be noted, however, that since the fourth edition of *Alcoholics Anonymous* was first introduced in 2001, more than 11 million copies have been printed of the hard cover book alone. This likely means that fourth editions will continue to be available in the marketplace for many years to come.

More importantly, while the A.A. General Service Conference is supposed to serve as the voice and conscience of Alcoholics Anonymous in the United States and Canada, both the Conference Charter and Tradition Four ensure that A.A. members and A.A. groups will continue to be free to choose whatever literature (if any) they use. So, a group could use the fourth edition (or even the first, second or third editions!)

Has an edition of the Big Book ever been changed after the initial publication?

The fourth edition of Alcoholics Anonymous was approved by the General Service Conference in 2001. The following year, an agenda item was added to change a portion of the new Foreword. This resulted in the following Advisory Action in 2002:

> It was recommended that:
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> Although the committee acknowledged the importance of electronic meetings to some A.A. members, the sentence "Fundamentally, though, the difference between an electronic meeting and the home group around the corner is only one of format," in the last paragraph of the Foreword to the Fourth Edition, be deleted in future printings of the Big Book, *Alcoholic Anonymous*.

How has the Fellowship responded to outdated terminology in the past?

Occasionally, the General Service Conference will decide to update language used in our literature, in order to make it more accessible, accurate or helpful.

For example, in 2021 there was the following General Service Conference Advisory Action:

> It was recommended that:
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> Revisions be made to AAWS literature directed to members behind the walls and that the terms "inmate" and "offender" be replaced with "person in custody."

What happened to the discussion about the "founders' writings"?

Questions about whether or not publications written by A.A. cofounders Bill W. and Dr. Bob should be preserved exactly as originally written have been circulating for decades.

Some members strongly believe that our texts should change with the times, while others just as strongly believe that the language of our key texts should remain as originally published. Still others take a middle ground, expressing the idea that necessary changes might be made, but only when absolutely necessary, as determined by the General Service Conference.

In 2022, this topic came to the General Service Conference and was subsequently referred to the trustees' Literature Committee for further consideration.

In 2025, the topic came up again in the form of a Conference agenda item that suggested that the Conference Charter should be revised to protect the first 164 pages of the Big Book.

In 2026, this topic was again referred to the trustees' Literature Committee, where a subcommittee has been established to explore some possible avenues for the Fellowship to consider.

What other changes have been made to the first 164 pages?

There have been lots of minor editorial changes — but one major one stands out:

One of the most recognized changes in the first edition of the Big Book was when the phrase "spiritual experience" in the first printing of the first edition (Chapter 5, "How It Works") was changed to "spiritual awakening" in the second printing, thus prompting the need for Appendix II. Bill's intent in changing the wording was to offer a wider sense of identification to members, regardless of whether one's spiritual growth is sudden or if it unfolds more slowly.

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