

GETTING AN INFORMED GROUP CONSCIENCE [1]

Our sole authority is a loving God as He may express himself in our group conscience...

WHAT?

*A “group conscience” is the collective conscience of the group membership. The term “informed” group conscience implies that all the pertinent information is identified and has been reviewed, AA principles have been consulted, and that all the viewpoints have been heard and discussed before a vote is taken. To be fully informed requires the willingness and open mindedness to always hear to the minority opinion.

*On sensitive issues the group works slowly, **discouraging formal motions** until a clear sense of the group conscience is apparent, and taking care to ensure that dominant voices and opinions do not overrun the minority voice.

*Ideally after achieving an informed group conscience and taking a vote, there will be *substantial unanimity* (unanimous or near unanimous agreement). This ensures that the actions we take are in accord with the principles of AA and ensures that we work slowly until a clear sense of our collective view emerges.

*While the difference between substantial unanimity and majority vote may be unclear, it can be helpful to look at the discussion process for clarification. In a majority vote, usually one loud competitive voice pushes its idea on others and loudly or extensively argues to gain majority agreement. In substantial unanimity, there is a feeling of common agreement and a spiritual bond that moves the members toward a group decision, not one individual’s personal triumph.

Suggestions for achieving an informed group conscience:

*If there is an issue to be discussed, announce it a few weeks prior to the discussion in order to allow members time to pray, talk and think about it beforehand.

*Before discussion, present all pertinent information *from both sides* to the group for their consideration. Both pros and cons should be considered.

*During group discussion, have the chairperson call on each member in turn to ensure that all members have the opportunity to voice their opinions, not just the most vocal ones. No member should speak again until all others have had their turn. The chair expresses his/her opinion after all others have shared to avoid influencing the group.

*It is vital that the minority voice always be heard; but it should be remembered that even the loudest, most opinionated majority can be right, while the quietest, most humble minority can be wrong. (See Concept 9 in *The Service Manual* for more information.)

*Through the group conscience, we are able to rise above personal ambitions and unite in our common purpose. The group conscience will, in the end, prove to be a far more intelligent and infallible guide for our group affairs than the decision of any one member, however good or wise. We don’t need to depend overmuch on inspired leaders. Because our active leadership is truly rotating, we are certain that there is but one ultimate authority.

[1]¹Adapted from a talk given by Ottis D. In Area 57, Edmond, February 2005