Admitting that I am an alcoholic did not come easy; it never does. I always thought that an alcoholic had to be a lost soul, a beaten, forgotten man, a rum-soaked derelict who drank himself into a perpetual stupor and who, because he drank liquor instead of eating food, finally died in a gutter of cirrhosis of the liver, or some such dreadful ailment. To me, he had to be at least unmoral, if not downright immoral, unable to control his lust for liquor because his will was weak. And, since I was not that way, I couldn't believe that I was an alcoholic.1

If Father Mathew was the Apostle of Temperance a century earlier, Father Pfau was the anonymous "Father John Doe" who gave spiritual retreats to equally anonymous people, both Protestants and Catholics, and separately for males and females. From 1943, when he joined A. A., until his death in 1967, he also gave lectures at meetings and conventions of A. A., as well as to many other groups.13 His ventures into this unchartered area brought opposition from two directions. Some of the A. A. feared he was trying to convert them to Catholicism. When he sought a location to give weekend retreats he tried several Catholic institutions. "Oh no, Father, not here," was the inevitable reply.14 The well-established houses of retreat were reluctant to associate themselves with alcoholics, even if they were priests.

Traveling as he did Father Pfau made contact with other priests with drinking problems and tried to gather them for a spiritual retreat. Out of this came the establishment of the National Clergy Council on Alcoholism which held its first annual meeting in August, 1949. The shroud of silence and shame that surrounded the existence of alcoholic priests was finally lifted. Bishops and other superiors were fully informed of this event, and the result has been a kind of open and official Catholic recognition of the problem of alcoholism among clergy.

MEETINGS ARE OPEN

From the beginning this organization had an episcopal advisor, a board of directors and an advisory board composed exclusively of clergymen. The annual conference "deals primarily with priests' personal problems. Consequently its sessions are not to be publicized although they are open to all priests who take an interest in these special problems. Laymen may attend only by special invitation from the Board of Directors." 15 In 1959 the Council inaugurated the annual Pastoral Institute which deals only with the professional problems of priests. "Its sessions are publicized and are open to all priests and students of theology in major seminaries."

12 Father John Doe, Prodigal Shepherd (Indianapolis: SMT Guild, 1967) p. 11. After his death in 1967 his book was revealed as having been written by Ralph Pfau with the assistance of Al Hirschberg.

13 His inspirational talks were published anonymously over the years and called The Golden Books, which then became the contents of Father John Doe, Sobriety and Beyond (Indianapolis: SMT Guild, 1965). This book has a sequel, Father John Doe, Sobriety Without End (Indianapolis: SMT Guild, 1957). He also produced a set of thirty recordings, mainly on the spiritual aspects of rehabilitation, which are still in wide distribution.

14 Prodigal Shepherd, p. 217.