

August 1986

# A · R · O · U · N · D

## 36th General Service Conference Looks to AA's Future

Picture a week-long business meeting, with 134 AA members from all pans of the U.S. and Canada discussing matters of importance to AA as a whole. That's the closest most of us can come to envisioning the General Service Conference, the Fellowship's annual business meeting, where the group conscience of AA in North America comes together, deliberates, and approves a body of Advisory Actions that will guide the groups in coming years.

Appropriately, the 1986 Conference inaugurated AA's second fifty years under the theme "AA's Future — Our Responsibility." The scene was the Hotel Roosevelt in New York City; the time, April 20-26, 1986. Halls and meeting rooms were crowded with delegates from the 91 Conference areas, trustees (14 alcoholic and 6 nonalcoholic), and the directors and staff of AA World Services and The AA Grapevine. It was highly organized chaos as everyone moved from general sessions to workshops to committee meetings and back again to general sessions.

The week began Sunday afternoon, when a reception and sharing session provided an opportunity for Conference members to meet and talk informally before the hard work began. Sunday night's opening dinner, with five Conference members telling their stories, was as always an inspiring occasion.

The official opening came Monday morning, and Gordon Patrick, nonalcoholic chairman of the Board of Trustees, opened with a moment of silence in memory of Class A trustee Kenneth Williams, who died April 14th. Class A trustee Jim Estelle, in the keynote address, set the tone for the week by reminding all of the often-quoted words, "Those who ignore history are bound to repeat it." He continued: "We in AA certainly have not ignored our history; instead, we have devel-



oped a pardonable and justifiable reverence for our history. In spite of this seeming flaw, if we can only keep repeating that part of our history which is stated so eloquently in the simplicity of our Twelfth Step, our future is indeed assured."

Quoting from Bill W.'s February 1961 Grapevine article, "The Shape of Things to Come," Jim asked: "So then, if our basics are so firmly fixed as all this, what is there left to change or to improve? The answer will immediately occur to us. While we need not alter our truths, we can surely improve their application to ourselves, to AA as a whole, and to our relation with the world around us... As we now enter upon the next great phase of

AA's life, let us therefore rededicate ourselves to an ever greater responsibility for our general welfare. Let us continue to take our inventory as a fellowship, searching out our flaws and confessing them freely... And above all, let us remember that great legion who still suffer from alcoholism and who are still without hope. Let us, at any cost or sacrifice, so improve our communication with all these that they may find what we have found — a new life of freedom under God."

Jim went on to say that we can take risks and make changes and modify attitudes "without compromising those immutable and timeless truths which have served as the very foundation of our future for now over 50 years.... Our future is defined, in part, by those who still suffer [and] by our demonstrated responsibility of collective deliberations here and in our individual actions at home.... As we have been and continue to be part of the future of AA... there have been, I am sure, some who were uncomfortable in accepting us — and yet they have done so! And so must we put aside prejudice and predilection as to who is salvageable from the ravages of alcoholism....

"As part of our necessary trust, we need to be ever vigilant that we as trusted servants do not inadvertently falter. Don't ever let us take ourselves more seriously than our work [of] carrying the message and providing the opportunity for recovery. We need also take care that our understandable love for and protection of tradition does not become ceremonial ritual; for this would ultimately result in pomp and show, which predicts the diminishment of humility, gratitude, and anonymity."

The importance of heeding our history was reaffirmed in workshops and presentation topics. Workshops examined the subject of letting go of old ideas and the possibility that AA might become too rigid, while presentation topics included the home group, back to basics, and anonymity.

Of the many important issues considered by the Conference, one has its roots as far back as 1967, when the copyright of the first edition of the Big Book was permitted to lapse. Everyone (including Bill W.) believed that the copyright of the second edition also protected the first, but this was not the case. The first edition, and later new material in the second, went into the public domain.

In a presentation-discussion, the Conference asked whether, as a result of this copy-

right loss, others might publish modified or distorted versions of the AA recovery program as contained in the Big Book. This in turn raised the question whether alternate formats of all or part of the Big Book should be published by AAWS to avoid widespread distribution by others. The answer for now came in a Literature Committee recommendation that delegates survey their areas to determine the need for additional formats. Should the survey results (to be reported to Conference members by August 1, 1986) show, in the judgment of the General Service Board, substantial requests for additional formats, AAWS may act as necessary. The Literature Committee also recommended that since the story section is still up to date, there is no need to publish a fourth edition of the Big Book.

The broad question of self-support was also a serious concern. Until now, revenues from literature sales have supported much of the work of the General Service Office, because group contributions have never been sufficient to cover the cost of group services. However, while AA literature prices have not been increased for 10 years, inflation has pushed up the cost of producing and distributing literature, and the 1986 GSO budget is at the break-even point. It seems clear that unless group contributions go beyond the present level, price increases on literature will be necessary.

During the coming year, the subject of self-support — including the way in which all elements of the service structure are supported — will be a primary focus of Conference and board activity.

Looking to the future through additional resources, the Conference viewed an audiovisual report by the Public Information Committee of ideas for a 28-minute film targeting young people, and approved the development of this film, to come to the 1987 Conference for approval. It also approved further development of a Correctional Facilities Committee film project based on the pamphlet "It Sure Beats Sitting in a Cell" (also coming to the 1987 Conference for approval).

Leadership in coming years was assured by the election of new trusted servants. Three new Class A trustees were approved: John King, Amos Reed, and John Hartley Smith, MD, and two regional trustees were elected: Ruth J. of Las Vegas, Nevada, will replace Natalie S. as Pacific regional trustee, and Tom H. from Eastern Ontario will replace

outgoing Ken D., Eastern Canada.

Always a moment of excitement at the Conference following an International Convention is the announcement of the site for the *next* Convention — planned well in advance. This year, the selection process was somewhat different. Instead of announcing one choice, the ad hoc Site Selection Committee named three cities: Houston, Texas; Seattle, Washington; and Vancouver, British Columbia. Convention planners will visit all three cities to evaluate their facilities, and final site selection will take place at the July meeting of the General Service Board.

Committee meetings are the heart of the Conference, and after joint sessions with their corresponding trustees committees on Monday, the eleven committees met on Tuesday and Wednesday to consider full agendas. Thursday and Friday, the main business was discussion and voting on the committee reports (see below for many of the resulting Advisory Actions). Following up on a 1985 Advisory Action that the general manager of GSO designate a staff person to pull together all available information about spreading the AA message to the native North American Indian population, staff member Betty L. reported the findings, which will go to the trustees committee on cooperation with the professional community for further investigation and implementation.

The closing breakfast on Saturday morning capped off the week with talks by rotating trustees Ken D., Natalie S., and Jim Estelle. Saturday also featured the closing talk by Bob P., senior advisor and past general manager of the General Service Office, who was attending his 17th (and last) Conference. He reminded Conference members once again that "all of us are part of the continuum of AA history. To some small degree, then... each of us is responsible for AA's future."

A digest of the Conference Advisory Actions follows and a complete listing will appear in the 1986 *Conference Report*. It was recommended that:

**Agenda** — one of the following be the 1987 Conference theme: "Our Primary Purpose — The Second Fifty Years," "The Promises: Our Today — Their Tomorrow," "The Seventh Tradition — A Turning Point," "AA — A Spiritualized Society."

— two workshops for 1987 be: "Unity — Let's Talk About It," "Living Sober —

Growing Together or Growing Apart?"

— that finance and publishing be among the 1987 presentation topics.

**Cooperation with the Professional Community** — the CPC staff person explore the possibility of seeking to send the AA professional exhibit to conferences and conventions outside the field of alcoholism, where there is a need.

— when an exhibit is scheduled, the staff person notify the area delegate.

— the new "If You Are a Professional" pamphlet be approved.

**Correctional Facilities** — a 15-minute film be produced and presented to the 1987 Conference for approval.

— area committees, district committees, central/intergroup office committees, and group correctional facility representatives discuss specific ways to coordinate efforts to sponsor inmates on release.

— the Institutions Correspondence Service be utilized by groups as a means of effective sponsorship for inmates.

**Finance** — area delegates strongly consider implementing several suggestions for improving contributions to GSO, area assemblies, districts, and central or intergroup offices.

— the limit contributed from individual AA members be increased from \$500 to \$1,000, and that such contributions and bequests be one-time-only.

**Grapevine** — the draft of the workbook for Grapevine committees be approved.

— the Grapevine produce a trial tape in French and a trial tape in Spanish, at a price comparable to that of the cassette tapes in English.

— the draft of the proposed book of Bill W.'s Grapevine writings be brought to the 1987 Conference for approval.

**Literature** — the manuscript and illustrations for the pamphlet "The Twelve Concepts for World Service Illustrated" be approved.

— a draft of a definitive book on AA history (1955-1985) be prepared and brought to the 1987 Conference.

— groups appoint literature coordinators.

— the trustees literature committee complete the updating of the pamphlet "Too Young?" for presentation at the 1987 Conference for approval.

— since the preface to the Big Book clearly



states that the text was written in 1939 and has not been changed, no further explanation regarding out-of-date phrases and/or gender oriented pronouns or chapter titles is necessary.

— the AAWS editorial staff continue to de-genderize AA literature, with the exception of Bill W.'s writings, as the items are reprinted.

— in order to determine the need for more literature in large print, Conference members seek the experience of AA members and agencies for the visually impaired.

— in order to determine the need for a daily reflections book, Conference members ask AAs in their areas and report findings to the literature coordinator.

— suggested that AA groups be encouraged to display or sell only literature published and distributed by the General Service Office, the AA Grapevine, and other AA entities.

**Policy/Admissions** — reaffirmed the 1963 recommendation that "GSO continue to refer local matters back to the area involved, with the suggestion that they contact the local delegate and that copies of all correspondence referring to such local matters be sent to the delegate."

— delegates assume more responsibility in encouraging GSRs and local AAs to take their suggestions and concerns to district meetings and area assemblies, in order to accommodate the growing number of topics submitted for consideration by Conference committees.

**Public Information** — the focus in public service announcements be on alcoholism identification, although mention of other addictions as part of a "story" is acceptable.

— the 28-minute film targeting young people be made, with the focus only on alcoholism identification in the "reprise" sections, and brought to the 1987 Conference for approval.

**Report and Charter** — the draft of the responsibilities of the World Service Meeting delegate be included in the AA Service Manual.

— new copy defining the role of Grapevine representatives at all levels and giving more information on the operation of The AA Grapevine, Inc. be submitted to the 1987 Conference, with the objective of creating an 11th chapter of the Service Manual specifically devoted to the Grapevine.

— double-trouble groups not be listed in the AA directories.

**Treatment Facilities** — each area treatment facilities committee conduct workshops to effectively utilize the Treatment Facilities Workbook.

— treatment facilities committees send liaisons to other service entities' meetings and invite liaisons from these other entities to attend their meetings.

— the trustees' committee on treatment facilities study ways to develop contact sponsorship committees for prospective newcomers leaving treatment facilities.

**Trustees** — the practice of having a Class A trustee serve as chairperson of the General Service Board continue.

— elected officers and directors of AA World Services, Inc. and The AA Grapevine, Inc.

— the regional trustee-GSO resume sheet be updated to include the 1985 Conference Advisory Action: "Resumes for trustee candidate be sent to GSO by the area delegate *only*..."