

August 1997

AROUND



## ***"Spirituality: Our Foundation" Is Theme of Conference***

The 47th General Service Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous convened in New York City on Sunday, April 13, 1997. The proceedings took place at a midtown hotel. On Monday morning, before the welcome by the chairperson of the General Service Board and the roll call, the archivist of the General Service Office placed a tape recorder on the podium of the large meeting room. Via an old and somewhat scratchy recording, participants heard these words:

"Perhaps this is not the time or place to talk at length of my own recovery, of our AA program in detail, or of our astounding growth. This room is filled with fellow alcoholics who know and practice the AA way of life as well as I. The accomplishments of Alcoholics Anonymous are headlined in the press of the world. So I shall be

content if I can remind myself, and any who would hear, that Alcoholics Anonymous is not, after all, a personal success story. It is instead, the story of our colossal human failures now converted into the happiest kind of usefulness by that divine alchemy — the loving Grace of God."

The faint Yankee accent gave the hint that these words were being spoken by AA co-founder Bill W.; they were from a talk he made to a gathering of AA members on April 9, 1947 in Los Angeles. There could not be a better sense of the spirit of the Conference than that recognition that indeed "our colossal human failures" have been transformed into true usefulness by the Grace of a Higher Power. This recognition seems to bring both laughter and tears to any gathering of clear-eyed, sober drunks, and it certainly did so all during the

week of the Conference.

The General Service Conference, which is the deliberative body of AA in the United States and Canada, met from April 13 to April 18. It is composed of ninety-two delegates, who were chosen by their service area, as well as nondelegate members who include twenty-one members of the General Service Board, three members of AA-World Services, three members of the AA Grapevine Corporate Board, thirteen staff members from the General Service Office, and two Grapevine staff members: the Executive Editor and the Senior Editor. The Conference is indeed "deliberative" — its members try to be thorough and careful, committing themselves — whatever their differences and disagreements may be — to affirming what is best for our Fellowship as a whole.

During Conference week there were presentations, workshops, and delegates' reports, but the heart of the Conference lies in the reports and recommendations of committees. The Conference Committees are Agenda, Cooperation with the Professional Community, Correctional Facilities, Finance, Grapevine, International Conventions/Regional Forums, Literature, Policy/Admissions, Public Information, Report and Charter, Treatment Facilities, and Trustees. Delegates are chosen to serve on committees by random selection. The committees meet early in the Conference week and deliberate on agenda items relevant to that committee. Having considered an agenda item, committees may choose to make a recommendation to the Conference body as a whole; if that recommenda-

tion is passed by a two-thirds vote, it becomes an Advisory Action. An Advisory Action is not binding on the Fellowship but is a recommendation only; many Advisory Actions act as guides and directives to the General Service Board, AAWS, the General Service Office, and the Grapevine.

Three Advisory Actions concerning the Grapevine were passed. It was recommended that: information about *La Vina* be included in the 1997-98 edition of *The AA Service Manual* (Chapter XI: "The A.A. Grapevine"); the manuscript providing basic information on the AA Grapevine magazine and its place in Alcoholics Anonymous be produced as a pamphlet; the Grapevine use mailing lists to provide introductory information about the Grapevine and *La Vina* to correctional facilities and treatment facilities. The intent of this last recommendation is to help the two magazines better carry the AA message to inmates and those in treatment. In addition to its recommendations, the committee suggested that in 1999 the Grapevine produce two sets of tapes based on articles previously published in the magazine.

The theme of this year's Conference was "Spirituality: Our Foundation." In a presentation addressing this theme, as it concerns the spirit of rotation, Joycie W., delegate from Georgia, said she believed that in AA service, we rotate "on" not "out" — we continue to serve: "There is always something for us to do in Alcoholics Anonymous, even if it's rotating to the back of the room to become the 'elder statesman.'"

She continued: "It was through the examples of my sponsor and older members as they rotated on that I began to understand the spirit of rotation, and they encouraged me to become more involved and active in Alcoholics Anonymous. I saw some of them rotate on graciously; others had a little difficulty letting go. But as time went on, I saw the healing experience come about as they began to understand the spirit behind it. They gave me the opportunity to serve. They allowed me to make mistakes. They gave me the right to be right and the right to be wrong...."

"New trusted servants are just as important to the future of Alcoholics Anonymous as newcomers are to the group. Sometimes we can be somewhere too long and become stagnant. We may stop growing, as well as prevent growth. I also believe rotation has helped me to grow and allowed me to want and seek humility in my life's journey."

Southern New Jersey delegate, John K., had this to say about "Group Conscience — Seeking Our Ultimate Authority": "I have had the privilege of being a sponsor to several members whose lives ended prematurely. One died of a stroke which took him suddenly and instantly, two died slowly and sadly of AIDS, and one died unexpectedly and violently of a self-inflicted gunshot wound. The first three were sober at their deaths, but the suicide victim was drunk when he shot himself in the head with a handgun on a street corner. I identified his body in the morgue and, as I looked on his countenance, I knew that alcohol had pulled the trigger and that he

had not found the peace he sought by ending his life. I know that God loves him unconditionally. I also know that my friend never got our message. Although we can't carry the drunk, we can ask ourselves if our message was less attractive to him than it should have been. We can ask if it was denied to him and millions like him by what we of this Society have either done or failed to do in achieving our primary purpose."

Bill A., delegate from Southwest Quebec, talked about "Taking Financial Responsibility Beyond Our Home Group": "The Conference structure is the vehicle for the myriad of groups throughout our nations to take hold of the rope of the bell. It is here that we come together to renew and reaffirm our Fellowship's commitment to carrying the message. This work gets done not just here in this lovely hotel, but in the trenches of the AA groups. These trenches and the members' contributions are the lifeblood of the Conference. It only gets here when the groups get outside themselves."

It is good to be reminded, as Bill A. reminds us, that in AA, small and large entities are always connected by our primary purpose. Whether we're talking about a home group, a district meeting, a Grapevine workshop, the annual convening of the General Service Conference, or a one on one conversation with a newcomer, the way we stay sober is to carry AA's simple message of hope.



## Digest of Advisory Actions

What follows is a sampling of Advisory Actions from the 1997 Conference. The full listing of Advisory Actions can be found in the 1997 Conference Final Report (available through the General Service Office).

**Agenda** — It was recommended that: the theme for the 1998 General Service Conference be "Our 12th Step Work."

**Correctional Facilities** — It was recommended that: the video on encouraging more AA members to participate in carrying the AA message into correctional facilities be completed and brought back to the 1998 Conference Committee on Correctional Facilities for review.

**Literature** — It was recommended that: a draft Fourth Edition of the Big Book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, be developed and a progress report be brought to the 1998 Conference Literature Committee, keeping in mind the 1995 Advisory Action that: "The first 164 pages of the Big Book, Alcoholics Anonymous, the Preface, the Forewards, 'The Doctor's Opinion,' 'Dr. Bob's Nightmare,' and the Appendices remain as is."

**Public Information** — It was recommended that: a minimum of three television Public Service Announcements emphasizing membership of young people, membership of minorities, and generic AA information be produced (cost not to ex-

ceed \$40,000) and be presented to the 1998 Conference Public Information Committee for approval.

**Report and Charter** — It was recommended that: a thorough review of *The AA Service Manual* be undertaken by the Publications department of the General Service Office for the purpose of increasing readability, consolidating and clarifying the text, and that a preliminary draft be sent to the 1998 Conference Committee on Report and Charter no later than February 1, 1998 for consideration.

— on-line AA meetings that request to be listed in AA directories be added to the "International Correspondence Meetings" in AA directories, that each listing include the internet address of the on-line meeting, and that each on-line meeting requesting to be listed in our directories furnish GSO with the name and physical address of a member willing to serve as "mail" contact.

— an intergroup serving on-line AA meetings should be listed adjacent to on-line AA meetings in the section on "International Correspondence Meetings."