Trust and Unity Characterize 35th General Service Conference

AA's annual U.S./Canada General Service Conference is the regular “business meeting” of the Fellowship as a whole, and like any AA business meeting it is sometimes an equal mix of sparks and spirituality. This year, at the 35th General Service Conference, held the week of April 14-20 at the Hotel Roosevelt in New York City, the sparks consisted primarily of excitement over AA’s 50th Anniversary year, and a spirit of trust and unity reigned.

The Conference membership always includes representatives of various service entities: 91 delegates from areas of the U.S. and Canada make up two-thirds of the whole. Other Conference members are the trustees of the General Service Board (14 alcoholic, 7 nonalcoholic), the directors of AA World Services and the Grapevine, Inc., and staff of the GV and the General Service Office.

Conference week opened Sunday night with a dinner for all 135 Conference members and their guests, followed by a five-speaker AA meeting. Dennis Manders, nonalcoholic controller of AAWS, who has been at all 35 Conferences, remembered earlier opening dinners in his closing address on Friday afternoon: “We had a wandering accordion player meander from table to table.... The dinner, of course, was followed by a welcoming talk by Bill. And there were times when this would be followed by a stinging rendition of ‘Sweet Adeline’ sung by Class A trustees and led by Archie Roosevelt.”

Conference business began Monday morning, with a keynote address by Class A (nonalcoholic) trustee Michael Alexander, who focused on major events in AA’s history. The rest of the week was filled with committee meetings, presentations/discussions, workshops, reports, and Ask-It Basket sharing sessions. The week ended on Saturday morning with an inspiring closing breakfast, at which rotating Class B trustees David A., Buck B., Joe K., and Jacquelyn S. and Class A trustee Michael Alexander made their farewell talks.

A highlight of this year’s Conference was decision-making about the Twelve Concepts for World Service, the principles that govern our service structure, Bill W.’s last major work. The Conference decided that the Fellowship should return to the practice of publishing the Concepts as they were originally written by Bill in 1962, and that any changes or updating (now bracketed in the text for the most part) be in the form of footnotes at the end of each section. The Conference also approved a related proposal that the Report and Charter Committee at future Conferences be responsible for reviewing the Concepts and recommending any necessary changes.

The Conference elected five new trustees to the General Service Board. Jack W. of Novi, Michigan, will replace Buck B. as trustee for the East Central U.S. region; Joe P. of Atlanta, Georgia, will replace Joe K. as Southeast U.S. regional trustee; and Don P. of Aurora, Colorado succeeds David A. as trustee-at-large/U.S. Each board of directors will also include a new general service trustee; for AAWS, Shepherd R. will replace Jacquelyn S., and Jim S. will serve on the Grapevine Corporate Board.

All participants could look back on well-thought-out decisions. Each report from a Conference committee (identified in heavy type below), recommendations included were considered and discussed by the whole Conference. Some significant Advisory Actions resulting are summarized here as they appeared in the Conference edition of the GSO bulletin Box 4-5-9, and are reprinted with permission. The 1985 Conference recommended that:

- the 1986 committee view dates for the Conference two years in advance.
- all Class B trustees be elected for a four-year term, regardless of when vacant.
- Correctional Facilities, Treatment Facilities, and other service functions be recognized by the AA Grapevine as an international journal.
- any changes or updating be rewritten in a simpler style, with two male stories replaced by female stories.
- a condensed version of the Twelve Concepts be reproduced and distributed by GSO as service material; that cassette tapes of “Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age” be produced.
- sections be added to the Service Manual defining the role of Grapevine Representatives at all levels and providing more information about the operation of The AA Grapevine, Inc., and that this item be referred to the Report and Charter Committee.

Closing addresses were given on Saturday by Class A trustee Michael A. Alexander, who focused on major events in AA’s history. The rest of the week was filled with committee meetings, presentations/discussions, workshops, reports, and Ask-It Basket sharing sessions. The week ended on Saturday morning with an inspiring closing breakfast, at which rotating Class B trustees David A., Buck B., Joe K., and Jacquelyn S. and Class A trustee Michael Alexander made their farewell talks.

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