

June 1953

THIRD
GENERAL SERVICE CONFERENCE
OF AA 1953



A Grapevine Milestone Report Conference

Closing with the Lord's Prayer at 4:56 p.m., Sunday April 26th, 1953, the Third Annual General Service Conference of AA ended nine long and busy sessions which in four days did these things:

1. Considered more subjects than had come before either the 1951 or 1952 meetings;
2. Rejected unanimously the 1952 proposal that AA be incorporated by an Act of Congress;
3. Discussed and exchanged advice and opinions on specific problems of AA groups back home;
4. Reviewed financial reports and work reports of the General Service Office, Works Publishing Company, and *The Grapevine*; and
5. Expressed its convictions on more basic policy problems concerning the whole society of AA than any previous Conference.

Arriving at New York's Hotel Roosevelt by such diverse transportation as transcontinental plane from Delegate Walter B's native British Columbia and by IRT subway express from Delegate Wesley I's native Bronx, seventy-four AAs participated in the Conference as chosen rep-

representatives of forty-six states, each province of Canada, and twenty metropolitan centers of large AA population. Thirty-seven delegates were hold-over veterans of the 1952 sessions; thirty-seven were newcomers who will be the elder statesmen of the 1954 meeting.

For Freshmen Only

For the first time in Conference history, the panel of first-year men (and two new lady delegates) had a day of their own. Arriving in New York they registered on Wednesday, April 22nd. At a luncheon, Bill opened this "advance session" with an outline of the business to come and an introduction of Headquarters personnel. This was followed by an inspection of the offices at 141 East 44th Street and various AA facilities in the metropolitan area.

Barberton, Ohio, and Ashland, Massachusetts, contributed the lady newcomers. The thirty-five third-panel men representatives came from Tuscaloosa, Alabama; Gould, Arkansas; Beverly Hills and San Francisco, California; Denver, Colorado; Farmington, Connecticut; Silver Spring, Maryland; Gainesville and Miami Beach, Florida; Chicago and Paxton, Illinois; North Webster, Indiana; Dubuque, Iowa; Maplewood, Louisiana; Detroit and Grand Rapids, Michigan; Mankato, Minnesota; Monroe City, Missouri; Maplewood, New Jersey; The Bronx and Rochester, New York; Rich Square, North Carolina; Columbus, Ohio; Tulsa, Okla-

homa; New Westminster, B. C. and Toronto, Ontario, Canada; Bethlehem and Erie, Pennsylvania; Palestine and Texas City, Texas; Provo, Utah; Staunton, Virginia; Seattle, Washington; Huntington, West Virginia; and Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

On Thursday, April 23rd, the Conference opened its nine sessions with the 10 a.m. session entirely filled with a message from Bill . . . "The Milestones Ahead." Speaking to the seventy-four delegates (their wives were permitted to attend this session only of the four-day meeting). Bill gave mention to domestic relations when he said:

"How many of us are there now who can go home with the same kind of love for a faithful and long-suffering wife that we have had down at the clubhouse for our alcoholic brother? Lots of us can, but lots of us can't—not yet—because there has been a profound distortion of family life due to our drinking. There is a whole area of personal relationships which has not only to do with sobriety, but with *emotional* sobriety. It has to do with the joy of living, and that is an area in which there is a vast amount to be learned and a vast amount to be done. Are we able 'to carry these principles into all our affairs'?"

3rd Legacy in Action

The Conference got down to work with the second session, Thursday afternoon. Restricted to delegates and General Service Headquarters staff personnel, committees were selected

to report on closing day on Literature, Agenda for 1954, Finance, Policy, Trustees, and Conference Report. Then notebooks and pencils became the order of the day, as four hours of reporting by Headquarters personnel on their stewardship of AA filled the afternoon and evening sessions. This was the inventory for one year of service.

To suggest the scope of AA Headquarters staff's 1952 activities, these figures were given the delegates:

115,000 letters and bulletins mailed out
13,000 packages cleared through mail room,
30,000 inquiries of all types received and handled
28,000 copies of the Big Book shipped out
498,000 pamphlets shipped, plus other printed material

Behind these figures were the human stories of people "out there," turning to the long arm of service that is day after day reaching out from the few office rooms that are at first known to them only as "Post Office Box 459, Grand Central Annex, New York." From the five Secretaries, Marian M., Helen B., Lib S., Ann M., and Eve L., the year had seen an increasing flow of mail to inquiring families, employers of drunks, puzzled newcomers to AA, bothered oldtimers, and "loners" in far places.

To carry the message, AA literature went out in 1952 in record quantity, delegates were told with the audited report of Works Publishing (see page 9 for a special notice). Net sales of the book *Alcoholics Anony-*

mous reached \$67,599; pamphlet sales increased nearly \$10,000 to a total of \$36,411 in 1952.

Since last year's Conference these items have been released for distribution to the groups: *AA for the Woman*; *The Alcoholic Employee*; *Saturday Evening Post* article by Jack Alexander (new format); *Fortune Magazine* AA article (new format); *Your Third Legacy* (the meaning and plan of the General Service Conference); *Sedatives and the Alcoholic*; *AA—44 Questions and Answers*; *This Is AA*; *Structure and Services of AA*; *Secretary's Handbook* (combining the *World Directory* with the *Secretary's Manual*).

Delegates saw the first copy of Bill's new book . . . *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, his first full-length commentary on AA since the writing of the Big Book.

Bill reiterated his hope that a beginning can be made on a preliminary outline history of AA. It may be impossible to record the detailed history of the movement impartially for a number of years, he reminded the delegates. Meantime, he said, preliminary research is already under way to establish factual records on major milestones in the birth, growth and development of the Society.

Recommended literature for the next year, reported on by the delegates' own committee, stressed early need for a revision of *Medicine Looks at AA*, revision of *About the Alcoholic Husband* to include alcoholic wives, new pamphlets on AA for

young people, and a pamphlet on the problem of slips.

The AA Grapevine

Improved and more efficient operating procedures put AA's international journal safely "in the black" during the past fiscal year although circulation growth fell far below expectations, the editor of *The Grapevine* reported.

Operating profit for the year ended was \$3,942 compared with \$593 during the preceding twelve-month period. It was emphasized, however, that substantial loans by The Alcoholic Foundation to keep the magazine afloat in previous years still remain to be liquidated.

Circulation of *The Grapevine* is now 28,700, representing an increase of 429 copies over circulation totals a year ago. Present renewal rate on subscriptions is 38 per cent.

Plans are now under way for a careful readership survey to determine how effectively *The Grapevine's* current editorial policy is meeting the needs and interests of the membership. Many delegates reported an increased use of *The Grapevine* to provide topics for meetings and as a "must" in sponsorship of new members.

Service Program Highlights

In concise special reports on AA's broad-based services, the seventy-four delegates heard these work summaries by the General Headquarters Secretaries:

Prisons and Hospitals: There are now 180 AA prison groups with 9,304 members, and 101 hospital groups with 2,253 members. This total of more than 11,600 members in prisons and hospitals alone is greater than the total AA membership at the time when many Conference delegates were first introduced to AA. It is now clear that groups of this type have two specific needs that can be met most effectively through local group action: (1) the need for visitors, speakers and sponsor-contacts, and (2) the need for literature donated by local groups.

Said one delegate at the prison session: "When we think of the members in our prison groups, we might well recall the little sign seen so often where AA meets: *But for the grace of God!*"

Foreign Groups: In five years AA foreign groups including Canada have grown from eighty-two, with a membership of approximately 2,000, to 773 groups with a total membership of more than 15,250. A new group in Buenos Aires, and two groups in Nassau were announced to the delegates.

AA and Stale Alcoholism Programs: In a panel discussion, delegates evolved a general policy that AA should always be on tap, but never on top, when asked to assist state-sponsored alcoholism programs. Participation should always be as an individual, and strict adherence to the Traditions was recommended to AAs helping local agencies.

Intergroup Offices: Delegates from Massachusetts, California, Illinois, Maryland and British Columbia participated in a panel discussion of intergroup and central office facilities. General agreement stressed the fact that efficient intergroup set-ups evolve slowly; agreement on administrative responsibility and authority is important; fair distribution of Twelfth Step work is crucial to success; and more central offices are working more closely with the national General Service Headquarters.

Congressional Incorporation: Acting on a report of a delegates' committee set up at the 1952 meeting, the Conference unanimously recommended to the Board of Trustees that AA should *not* incorporate by an Act of Congress. Drafted by Bob T. of Mississippi, the recommendation stated "We believe that spiritual faith and a way of life cannot be incorporated . . . Incorporation could conceivably become the opening wedge that might engender politics and a struggle for power within our ranks. . . . AA can and will survive so long as it remains a spiritual faith and a way of life to all men and women who suffer from alcoholism."

Foundation Name Change: That the "collective conscience of AA" is more than a mystic phrase was well demonstrated when the Conference was asked to consider a proposal, previously reviewed by the Board of Trustees, to change the name of The Alcoholic Foundation to "Alcoholics Anonymous International, Inc." More

than thirty delegates expressed themselves on this proposal, the consensus being that more stress on the *service* aspects of the Trustees' work should be in the name, and less of the *international* aspects. It seemed generally agreed that "Alcoholics Anonymous" was desired as part of a new name and that the word "Foundation" should be dropped.

The Conference, AA and Society

The crowded schedules of the Third General Service Conference came to a close on Sunday, April 26th, when Bernard B. Smith, Chairman of the Board of Trustees and a non-alcoholic, summarized the meaning of the 1953 meeting. The distinguished international lawyer had been in England on a business trip when the Conference opened. Interrupting the trip for a hasty flight back for the meeting, he was stricken ill in Scotland, was hospitalized, but with all the fervor of an AA on his first Twelfth Step call, Mr. Smith came on to New York for the final two days of the Conference. To the delegates he gave this unforgettable closing message:

"Our Conferences are basically dedicated to the purpose of insuring that our Twelve Steps and our Twelve Traditions are insulated and protected, so far as possible, for all time; for the basis of our way of life is, after all, timeless. These Conferences serve, therefore, to insure that the concepts of life and of living which have brought

us our recovery are available to all who may suffer from alcoholism today, one hundred or one thousand years from now.

"Our real message to society is that we have found a way to live in God's world. While the discarded bottle may be the yardstick of our recovery from alcohol it is by no means the measure of our spiritual health. Our message to the world is not that we have succeeded in ceasing to drink, but that in so ceasing to drink we have succeeded in learning to live.

"There is another message which AA has for a sick society. This message is implicit in our 24-hour concept... the concept of asking an individual who has found his life unmanageable because of alcohol to refrain from drinking for 24 hours. That is all that the individual with a drinking problem is asked to do—and yet, I have learned in these years in AA that this simple concept of 24 hours has far greater significance than the simple statement 'I will not drink for 24 hours' would connote . . . Goethe expresses it: 'Yes! To this thought I hold with firm persistence—the last result of wisdom Stamps it true. *He only earns his freedom and existence who daily conquers them anew.*'

"We who have learned to live through AA can remember—for we talk of it at our meetings—of the days when faith was giving way to fear, hope to despair, and love to distrust. With the help of those who had found recovery within AA, and who practiced the Twelfth Step, based on the concept

'Love thy neighbor as thyself', distrust turned to love, despair to hope, and fear to faith.

"But I say again that the important aspect of our recovery—and our message to society—is that each AA, in becoming one of us, made a decision to abandon fear, to abandon despair, to abandon distrust. For he had a choice, and that was to go on the way he was going, and that was the easier way. But he made the choice—a choice to live within the maximum of his capacity, in keeping with God's will and the doing of His will."



So closed the Third Annual General Service Conference of the fellowship that is world-wide Alcoholics Anonymous. For the calendar year of 1953, this was the Third Legacy, proposed by Dr. Bob and Bill as the instrument of passing on to the membership the safe-keeping and the stewardship of the society they had founded.

In this its eighteenth year of proof that "there is a solution," Alcoholics Anonymous has for the third year sent its servants to counsel and consider the problems of many areas, to deliberate and recommend for the welfare of groups, to ponder and plan for the good of many.

For the delegates these were crowded days and nights filled with reports, filled with the wisdom and goodness of Bill, filled with the dedication of themselves to the purposes for which they had been chosen and

dispatched from back home. In faith and in humility they gave themselves to the many tasks . . . but through all the long hours of note taking, parliamentary procedures and orderly business there was one still small voice that spoke most clearly within each heart.

This be the proudest record of the

Conference. . . . "They never once forgot the primary purpose of Alcoholics Anonymous."

This meeting, a new measure of the maturity of AA, is but another beckoning hand to some confused alcoholic, another phone call answered, another message that we are strong enough to give our help . . .

FIFTEENTH TRUSTEE

At their annual meeting, following the close of the Third General Service Conference of AA, the Board of Trustees of the Alcoholic Foundation announced the election of Clifford W. of Los Angeles to fill a vacancy among the alcoholic members of the Board. C. W. was a delegate to the 1951 and 1952 Conferences.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

In order more clearly to identify AA's publishing interests, the name of Works Publishing, Inc., has been changed to Alcoholics Anonymous Publishing, Inc., in line with suggestions presented by the General Service Committee. The new name appears in Bill's new book, *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, and in other recent Conference-approved literature. The mailing address still remains Box 459, Grand Central Annex, New York 17, N. Y.