

June 1952

*A Grapevine
Milestone
Report*

*Progress, Humility, Unity,
Mark Sessions Of Delegates*

AA GENERAL SERVICE CONFERENCE

Memo To The Folks Back Home

SEVENTY-FIVE AAs, chosen as representatives by the fellowships of each state, each province of Canada, and 20 metropolitan centers of large AA population have written a new chapter in the history of Alcoholics Anonymous during the four days of the Second General Service Conference. The joining of 38 Second Panel delegates with the 37 returning veterans

of last year's inaugural conference provided the meeting in New York, held April 23rd through April 27th, with the "broad, complete and reliable cross-section of AA opinion" upon which must rest the effective future of our society's service arms.

Crowding 11 sessions into the time from Wednesday evening until late Sunday afternoon, the delegates (1) heard reports of activity during

the past year by headquarters service groups, including the *Grapevine*; (2) heard Bill announce his shift from active participation in AA activities to a five-year writing-and-research project; (3) discussed and approved proposals to strengthen specific headquarters service, notably in the field of AA literature; (4) joined in "panel" discussions of specific problems that seem to

be common to AA groups throughout the country; (5) asked the General Service office to provide certain additional services for the groups; and, (6) registered certain "advisory actions" on key questions of AA policy presented to the Conference.

Before reporting on the transactions and deliberations of the Conference, it seems only fair to bring

you, and you there in the back row, to the international meeting by proxy ... by reporting the feeling and the flavor of the four days at the Hotel Commodore.

This was not a convention. It was coffee, and good new friendships, and "after hours" get-togethers in somebody's room to talk just solid AA and "how we do it where I come from." This was work. Meetings of the Conference convened at 10 a.m. sharp. Lunch was in the same meeting room, and the afternoon meetings began while waiters were still clearing the tables. Dinner together was followed by evening sessions. At the request of the delegates themselves, all sessions opened with recitation of the AA Serenity Prayer and closed with the Lord's Prayer.

Only one evening was open for the delegates' individual use, Saturday night. And many delegates went to meetings of New York groups or spent the time studying the reports and financial analyses that had been presented in sessions. One delegate had taken 124 pages of longhand notes by Saturday night!

A sense of dedication and serious responsibility identified the delegates as surely as did the simple badges they wore for admission to the meeting rooms. These were men and two women (one from Vermont and one from Georgia) who were intent upon the work at hand ... the fulfillment of the Third Legacy.

1952 Reports To The Conference

In the formal opening of the Conference, Mr. Bernard R. Smith, non-alcoholic Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Alcoholic Foundation, preceded two days of progress reports and financial statements by sounding the spiritual overtones of the Second General Service Conference. Mr. Smith said:

"We here must dedicate ourselves to insure that there is never any government in the hearts of Alcoholics Anonymous. And so what we do here is designed to the purpose of insuring that there be no government, no power, no money, nothing save an assurance that somewhere rests sufficient authority to insure that these principles are maintained."

Board of Trustees: On behalf of the 15 members of the Trustees of The Alcoholic Foundation, a brief report was rendered by Mr. Smith. He noted that the financial situation of the Foundation had improved and attributed a large measure of the improvement to the work of delegates to the 1951 panel. Changes in the membership of the Board since the 1951 Conference were reported with Jack Alexander, associate editor of the *Saturday Evening Post* joining the non-alcoholic majority of trustees and two alcoholic members succeeding to the Board in the rotation of minority members.

Financial Statements: Detailed

operations of the headquarters were explained to the delegates, who learned that contributions from the groups during 1951 were approximately \$21,000 above contributions during 1950. The General Service office operated at a small deficit of \$17.83 as against a deficit for the previous year of \$12,853.00.

The A.A. *Grapevine* which had had an annual operating deficit of \$6,775 at the end of March, 1951, showed net income of \$593 for the year ending in March, 1952. The *Grapevine* still has a debt of \$13,660 loaned to it by the Alcoholic Foundation.

The net impression of the financial statements is that the movement is in a healthier position, financially, than it has been since the "explosive" expansion stage of the Society got under way about a decade ago.

General Service Office: "It's a question of lives that may be lost if AA does not survive," Bill told the delegates in the presentation of the work of the General Service Office. This office is the "long arm of service" that reaches out to the "loner," the inquiring drunk "who has tried everything else," and to the newcomer, the oldtimer and the group with letters, bulletins, books and pamphlets. In the year ending in March, 1952, 131,000 individual pieces of mail left 141 East 44th Street for "out there." Twenty six-thousand copies of the *Big Book* were distributed and approximately

465,000 copies of AA pamphlets. Group directories to 4,000 groups, letters answering appeals for help and general information bulletins were daily mail assignments, along with 26,000 incoming pieces of mail that required handling.

The A.A. Grapevine: An increase of 6,000 subscriptions and group orders bringing the circulation of the international journal to 29,600 was reported to the delegates. To aid in bringing circulation up to a minimal 33,000, several delegates suggested the possibility of having a *Grapevine* chairman in each group. The "chairman" would be responsible not only for helping to get the magazine into the hands of as many AAs as possible, but would also encourage the development of editorial material. Criticisms and suggestions for the magazine were invited by the new editor, and a plea was made for reports, articles and commentaries on AA from members everywhere.

The big problem for the magazine's survival was reported by the *Grapevine's* new treasurer as the laxity of readers in renewing expired subscriptions.

Many delegates reported that groups in their areas use the *Grapevine* as the basis for one meeting each month, and other delegates reported on the use of the magazine as an aid in Twelfth Stepping and as an anniversary gift.

New Literature for AA: Delegates previewed copies of the new pam-

phlet "AA for the Woman," first in a series of new publications which will represent AA to the alcoholic who is still drinking, and represent AA to the general public, including relatives, friends, and employers of alcoholics and their medical and spiritual advisors. Another new pamphlet, "*The Alcoholic Employee*" is in manuscript.

Major literature projects for which a need has been expressed by the groups include the following:

- (1) Sponsorship pamphlet,
- (2) Pamphlet on "slips,"
- (3) A new "Sedatives" pamphlet.

It was recommended by the Delegates committee on literature that all material published by Works Publishing Company be inscribed with "Issued by Works Publishing Company, Inc., sole publishing agency of the Society of Alcoholics Anonymous. Approved by the General Service Conference of AA."

Panel Discussions By Delegates

While the reports received eager listening from the delegates, it was in the three panel discussion sessions that the liveliest interest was shown. Here was a forum for many voices, and here was the pooling of many experiences.

Local Group Problems: Four main subjects were covered. 1. The problem of the "easy-does-it" fellow who loaf around the clubhouse, stays sober, but makes no effort to support himself. General agreement of comment from the floor was that

this is a problem that "tends to take care of itself." Criticism of the type of fellow involved may indicate that the critic is taking moral inventory of the wrong person, several speakers suggested. Many apparent "phonies" eventually get their teeth into the AA program, and it's a mistake to be overly concerned about the problem, others commented.

2. The problem of getting an accurate count of group membership, particularly where there is considerable visiting among groups. Various local census methods were discussed, but all speakers indicated that 90 days sobriety be considered the least dryness to be counted. Activity and willingness to assume group responsibilities were offered as criteria by many delegates.

3. The problem of non-AAs who tend to dominate AA groups. It was generally agreed by delegates that the best policy is a firm policy, that a forthright assertion of the unique characteristics of AA is the sound approach. Several speakers emphasized that AA in some areas owes its beginnings to helpful, generous non-AAs . . . but occasionally the clergy, politicians and others miss the point of AA and associate it with temperance or religious objectives.

4. The problem of joint administration of AA and "club facilities." There was general agreement among delegates that "strictly AA group services" must be divorced from

problems involved in running a clubhouse.

Other discussions in panel sessions concerned central and inter-group office set-ups and deviations from traditions and relations with state and local alcoholic commissions.

Sessions On AA Policy

Three policy sessions closed the Conference and were its proof of true group conscience. For here were 75 voices to speak, where there had once been but the voices of the co-founders. Here now was the wisdom of Maine joined with the experience of Manitoba. Here was our common welfare considered by the many for one good.

Non-Alcoholic Trustees: Chairman Smith stated that he had felt for some time, "as this Society rapidly matures, that there is no further need for the presence of non-alcoholics on the Board." Delegate after delegate rose to report that groups in his territory had instructed him to vote for the retention of non-alcoholic trustees. "We want the non-alcoholic trustees. They perform a very special service that no money could buy," one delegate phrased it.

It was unanimously and enthusiastically voted to continue the non-alcoholic trustees.

Congressional Incorporation: It was proposed that to "protect" the name of AA and to prevent non-AA

groups from using the name, an Act of Congress should be sought to incorporate the Society much as the American Red Cross, D.A.R., Boy Scouts and other organizations are incorporated.

One delegate asked: "Can we incorporate a way of life? Can we incorporate a philosophy? Can we incorporate principles that were first presented to us nearly 2,000 years ago?"

It was voted to table the proposal and to appoint a committee to report at next year's Conference.

Terms Of Office Of Delegates: The present two-year term for Conference Delegates was discussed. As significant, perhaps, as anything that happened at the 1952 Conference was the recurring affirmation of the delegates that the principle of rotation at all levels of AA affairs should be preserved and strengthened. No delegate even remotely suggested that the term of office of the present panel should be extended.

Family Groups: This discussion originally concerned whether or not "family groups" of non-alcoholics might or might not use the AA name in connection with themselves.

Pointing out that wives of the earliest members used to get together in Akron in the first days of the Fellowship, it was reported that there are now more than 250 groups of relatives of AAs who are in some state of organization and in some communication with other

such groups. A year-and-a-half ago, there were only about 50 to 70 groups. Representatives of the family groups have affirmed their distinct entity and are not seeking to use the AA name.

Development of family groups' is viewed sympathetically in virtually all areas, delegates reported, and a resolution was adopted by standing vote approving unanimously the work that Lois and Bill have done to encourage and support the sound growth of the family group movement.

Bill's Project: When the General Service Conference of 1951 proved such a success, Bill told the delegates to this year's meeting, he began to ponder, "What particular thing could I do that would be of the greatest service to the greatest number and to the longest future."

The result of his pondering, as he outlined it during the policy session on Foundation literature, is a five-year writing-research project designed to preserve and strengthen the unity of the Society and help it to reach out with increasing effectiveness to "the million who still don't know."

Briefly, the project involves a new series of anecdotal analyses of the Twelve Traditions (currently appearing in the *Grapevine*); a series of orderly, point-by-point essays on the Twelve Steps; a kind of popular history of AA and its ideas of recovery, tradition and service; a book on the application of AA philosophy to the "total

problem of living;" and, a reference manual stating our total experience with the whole idea of service functions.

His new program for serving the Fellowship means, Bill said, "that I will have to become a great deal of a recluse ... It will mean, too, that I won't be available for a long time to make those treasured visits to all parts of the AA world."

Conference Closing, Two Messages

In the final session of the 1952 Conference (Sunday afternoon), Mr. Smith addressed the delegates:

"What we do here, and what we have done here, great as it has been, is not nearly or remotely as important, in my judgment, as the fact that we *are* here. For it is the existence and the preservation of this General Service Conference, that is vital. The decisions we make here, important as they are, must in the last analysis, be subordinated to the greater significance of the existence of this Conference, for as long in the future as we can see, as a preserving arm of this great society of ours.

"Actually as I look back, I feel the most important decisions that were here made were decisions to table decisions. And to me that had a very, very profound implication. For here, unlike any political group, *we seek not compromise but certainty*. And in seeking certainty, it is frequently, as we found in the last few days, essential that mo-

tions be tabled because we were not yet sure.

"And I cannot reiterate too strongly my feeling that unless we are sure, unless we are certain, if there is yet time left to us to make a decision, I regard no decision as important as the willingness in American society to postpone ultimate consideration. For again I like to reiterate those two words: *We seek not compromise but certainty*. And if we can think of that concept, we will not here fail, we will not err, we will be right and we will never, I trust, be wrong.

"I cannot tell you how profoundly I was affected by the discussions that took place here yesterday morning on the motion that related to the extension and the length of office of delegates. I am sure that everyone here enjoys serving as a delegate. I am sure that everyone would like to be a delegate for as long as people would have him.

"But complete and utter selflessness was implicit in the discussion, the feeling that each individual who spoke never thought of himself but thought of this great society, and therefore decided that far more important than whether he should continue to serve, was the question that it was far better for him *not to* serve than to take the slightest risk with this great and delicate instrument of yours.

"I am going to take the liberty now if you will permit me ... I have been all through this Confer-

ence an AA in spirit and in mind, our only difference is that I haven't suffered ... but for a few brief moments, I would like to tell you as I stand here, from my living with AA, what AA means to me as a non-alcoholic. You in AA have done something with the concept, 'Love Thy Neighbor,' which has removed it from the cliche.

"For you have staked out a specific neighborhood.

"Out of the depth of your suffering you have been given the light to see how black was the darkness from which you emerged and to feel for everyone who still blunders along in that darkness, and what is more important, to do something about it. You in your own way have found that man is not a lonely, friendless creature, tossing helplessly about in a hostile world, for you here in AA have found how deep are the roots of the wellspring of human love and friendship. And those roots *can* be tapped and the world can look upon you who sit here and upon the groups all over this country as evidence that human love and human friendship and human decency is still possible in this world of ours.

"We have learned that the spiritual can take hold of our material world and completely transform it. For AA stands before the world as living proof and evidence that in this industrial, mechanized, materialistic world of ours, man need no longer cower in the shadows

but, functioning effectively as an economic and social being, walk the earth fearlessly and erect in the sunlight before his God."

A Benediction From Bill . . .

"This too is an hour that will ever stir memory. With me, perhaps more than most, the wellsprings of memory are at flood tide. I think of a psychiatrist at Zurich, Switzerland, who had a patient, an American businessman . . . treated him a year. The patient thought greatly of his psychiatrist, none other than the famous Dr. Jung. The patient thought he was well, but leaving the doctor, he found himself drunk. So he retimed to Dr. Jung, who yet unknowing to this day, is one of the founders of this society. And he said to this patient, "Unless you have a spiritual experience, there is nothing that can be done. You are too much committed to alcoholism to be saved in any other way."

Our friend thought it was a hard sentence, but like many of us since, he began to seek such an experience. He found it in the confines of the Oxford Group, an evangelical movement of that time. He sobered at once. There he found the grace to achieve it. It was then called to his attention that a friend of his was about to be committed for alcoholism to an asylum in Vermont. Together with some other "Groupers," he interceded. The result was our beloved Ebby, who first

brought the essentials of recovery to me.

Meanwhile, there was a little Jesuit, Ed Dowling, laboring among his flock, lame and relatively obscure. He too, was to light a candle for AA.

There was a nun in Akron who was to become the companion of Dr. Bob, who as you know, was the prince of our Twelfth Steppers. She too, was to light a candle for us.

Even Francis of Assisi, holding for the principle of corporate poverty, had lit a candle for AA. So had William James, the father of modern psychology, whose book, *"The Varieties of Religious Experience,"* had such a profound influence upon us. He had lit a candle for Alcoholics Anonymous.

Then, too, there were to be couriers to all the world. Harry Emerson Fosdick. Fulton Oursler of *Liberty*. Jack Alexander. And the owner of the *Saturday Evening Post*. They were to become couriers. They, too, were to light candles for Alcoholics Anonymous.

But back there in the summer of 1934, the alcoholics of the world felt as hopeless as ever. And yet, as you see, a table was being prepared in the presence of our ancient enemy, John Barleycorn. Candles were already upon it, and meat and drink was there, but the guests had not arrived.

Then came some guests and they partook and the spark that was to become Alcoholics Anonymous was

struck. Then ensued our period of flying blind, at the end of which, about 1937 or 1938, we realized that indeed, a table had been prepared in the presence of our enemy. And that the candles upon that table might one day shine around the world and touch every distant beachhead. There were more years of travail in that pioneering time which ended in 1941, with the advent of the Post article. Meanwhile, our book of experience had appeared. No longer need we travel in person. The message could be taken through those printed pages to distant ones who suffered.

Our recovery program was really complete. Then came the test whether our growing groups could live and work together, whether the enormous explosive quality of our fellowship would find in our principles of recovery a sufficient containing power to hold us in unity. But in the ensuing period of adolescence, we realized little by little that we of Alcoholics Anonymous must hang together or indeed we should hang separately.

And in that exciting and sometimes frightening experience, the Tradition of Alcoholics Anonymous was forged. And at Cleveland, in 1950, it was confirmed by our Fellowship as the traditional platform

upon which our society intended to stand.

No body of law was this Tradition. A set of principles, infused with the spirit of our 12 Steps of recovery and enshrined in the heart of each of us — that would be our protection, we thought, from any blows with which the outside world might assail us, our protection from any temptations to which we might be subjected within. Such was the Tradition of Alcoholics Anonymous.

In this period of infancy and in adolescence this Society discovered that it had to function. This Conference culminates that long process of discovery through which we have learned how we can best act to carry this message to those who suffer. Yes, the advent of this Conference in full strength will mark a great day in the annals of Alcoholics Anonymous.

For me, it marks a time when I must shift from activity to reflection and meditation and to the task of acting as your scrivner, to record the experience of these marvelous years just past. I realize that I shall be but a reflector, a recorder only. I hope the task will be completed, useful and pleasing to you.. and pleasing to God.

My heart is too full to say anymore, excepting au revoir.



NOTICE

Tradition Three of the new series of articles by Bill explaining the Twelve Traditions will appear in the July issue.