

A · R · O · U · N · D

38th General Service Conference Looks at Singleness of Purpose



Name of meeting: GSC Serenity Group. Location: the Terrace Room of the Hotel Roosevelt, New York City. Time: 7:30-8:30 a.m., April 19, 20, 21, and 22, 1988. Purpose of meeting: Like any other, to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers. The only difference between that AA meeting and any other was that it took place during the week of the 38th U.S./Canada General Service Conference, and all those present were attendees at the Conference.

After starting the day with the opportunity for reflection and one-to-one sharing with other alcoholics. Conference members settled down to AA's annual week-long business meeting. "Our Singleness of Purpose — Key to Unity" was the theme, as delegates from the 91 service areas of the U.S. and Canada, along with trustees, directors, and GSO and Grapevine staff members, met to reach and express

AA's collective group conscience on a variety of common issues.

Conference week is an exceptionally busy one, with each day's agenda packed full of committee meetings, presentation/discussions, workshops, sharing sessions, highlights from the service areas, and — for most of the time on the last two days — searching discussion and voting on the various committee recommendations that result in Conference Advisory Actions.

In the keynote address Monday morning, Jack F., regional trustee from Western Canada, said: "The direction of our Conference and the mood of our Fellowship seem to be asking us to really examine the Traditions." A

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striking example of such a reexamination has been the solid response of AA groups to the self-support initiative — the challenge of the Seventh Tradition — since the 1987 Conference. This year's focus on Tradition Five will be followed by a 39th Conference theme in 1989 that will emphasize anonymity.

The heart of the Conference is the work of the 11 Conference committees, and many committee agendas, in keeping with the theme, were concerned with more and better ways of achieving our primary purpose — reaching the still-suffering alcoholic. The Literature Committee considered the draft of a new pamphlet to carry the message to Native North Americans, revisions of the pamphlets "AA and the Armed Services" and "Young People and AA," and the suggestion of a pamphlet for gay/lesbian alcoholics; that same committee wrestled with new ways of approaching alcoholics with reading disabilities in the hope of developing easy-to-read recovery literature. The Committee on Cooperation With the Professional Community discussed an initiative for carrying the message to the black community, while the Correctional Facilities Committee explored better ways to encourage AA members to carry the AA message inside the walls.

In order to allow as much time as possible for committee meetings and discussion of committee recommendations, there was only one workshop this year, on the Conference theme. Much of the time allotted for "What's on Your Mind?" sharing sessions was preempted for discussion and voting on committee reports. Presentation/discussion sessions were held throughout the week, on the topics: "Singleness of Purpose — Our Key to Unity"; Self-support; Area Structure; and Focus on the Positive. On Tuesday afternoon Ed Gordon, GSO's nonalcoholic director of finance and business administration, gave a report on finance. Most AAs know by now that the 1990 International Convention will be held in Seattle, Washington. But most will be surprised to learn that the Site Selection Committee for the 1995 International met during Conference week and selected four cities (in alphabetical order) for final decision at the 39th Conference: Atlanta, Minneapolis/St. Paul, San Diego, and Toronto.

Wednesday afternoon, the Conference elected two new alcoholic (Class B) regional trustees: Donald B. of Southern Minnesota replaces Dan B. in the West Central region, and Phil C., Manitoba, replaces Jack F. in Western

Canada. Desmond T. of New York, replacing Ralph R. as general service trustee, was approved on Friday.

Friday afternoon marked the close of Conference business, and Conference members met again Saturday morning for the closing brunch, which traditionally features farewell talks by rotating trustees. This year, talks by alcoholics Dan B., Jack F., and Ralph R. were followed by a moving farewell from Gordon Patrick, who has served as a Class A (nonalcoholic) trustee for the past thirteen years, six of them as chairperson of the General Service Board.

"Having shared some of my observations and thoughts as a result of my experiences as a trusted servant," said Gordon, "what do I think of AA's future? Will the pressures of rapid changes in our world and the tremendous growth in the Fellowship overwhelm us? I don't think so. I am convinced by my experience over the past 13 years that if we retain our singleness of purpose and unity, AA will be around for many future generations.

"Why am I so sure? Because of the unique talents or gifts every member brings to the Fellowship... It seems we discover our unique gift when we are willing to serve... be it washing coffee cups, being a GSR, chairing a meeting, speaking, becoming a trustee, or whatever. Everyone in this room has witnessed the process when they heard a member say, 'I didn't know I could do that!'"

Officially, the Conference is over for another year, but unofficially it merely moves to different locales throughout the U.S. and Canada. Panel 37 (second-year) delegates have returned home to give their reports and eventually to blend back into their groups and other forms of service work; Panel 38 (first-year) delegates will spend the next year not only reporting on the Conference but in taking the pulse of their areas to bring to the 39th Conference in April 1989. Trustees, directors, and staff will return to their work of carrying out the Advisory Actions. And next April, Conference members will convene once more at the Roosevelt Hotel to express AA's collective group conscience and reinforce the unity of the Fellowship.

Conference Advisory Actions

Conference Advisory Actions represent recommendations made by the standing committees and approved by the Conference body as a whole; or recommendations discussed and voted upon by all Conference members during general sessions. The most significant Advisory

Actions appear below in condensed form. A complete list will be published in the *Final Conference Report*.

Agenda — that the theme of the 39th Conference be either "Anonymity — Our Past, Present, and Future" or "Anonymity — Living Our Traditions"; that anonymity be a presentation/discussion and workshop topic.

Cooperation With the Professional Community — that the suggestions listed in the PI/CPC Bulletin (Fall 1981) be used as guidelines for carrying the message to all minorities.

Correctional Facilities — that the pamphlet "AA in Prisons" be replaced with two separate revisions of the material: a pamphlet for inmates and outside AAs interested in starting AA groups in correctional facilities, and a brief pamphlet or leaflet to provide information about AA to correctional facilities' administrators.

Finance — that the single pricing of all AAWS literature is in line with the goals of becoming fully self-supporting through our own contributions and eliminates dependence on excess profits from sales to entities outside the Fellowship; that literature price reduction be the primary mechanism in maintaining the Reserve Fund within the limits established by the Conference.

Grapevine — that since the Grapevine Corporate Board has fully complied with 1987 Advisory Action number 30, timely communication from the board to all Conference members regarding resolution of the management problems is no longer necessary; that the Grapevine proceed with a one time trial distribution of complimentary Grapevines to nonsubscribing groups (selected on a random basis) in order to make them aware of the Grapevine as an effective recovery tool; that the Grapevine proceed with publication of Bill W.'s collected Grapevine writings, with brief factual introductory material to be prepared by the Grapevine staff and approved by the Grapevine Corporate Board; that in order to encourage full participation, the Grapevine consider establishing a Grapevine awareness month and areas continue to hold Grapevine workshops,

Grape-a-thons and Grapevine meetings; in response to concerns about the elapsed time between ordering and receiving the Grapevine, that the Grapevine Corporate Board investigate the feasibility of early acknowledgment of new subscription orders.

Literature—that the draft of the pamphlet for the Native American be approved after further editing; that a draft for a pamphlet for the gay alcoholic be developed for next year's Conference; that copy on the home group be included in "The AA Group" pamphlet.

Policy/Admissions — that in order to reinforce the importance of the committee system more time for Conference committees to meet and conduct their business be provided on the Conference Agenda.

Public Information — that new radio spots be developed to reach specific audiences currently being targeted by radio stations and be presented to the 1989 Conference PI Committee for approval; that the AA Archives continue to protect the anonymity of deceased AA members, as well as other members.

Report and Charter — that the Conference Charter should appear in its original 1955 form in future editions of *The AA Service Manual*, with General Service Conference Advisory Action amendments and editorial changes indicated by footnotes, followed by the current version of the Charter, recommended that the *Final Conference Report* be made available to all GSRs, with the distribution method and quantity to be determined by area delegates.

Treatment Facilities — that an audiovisual presentation, including three minutes of sample footage, be made and brought to the 1989 Conference for further review, and that topics to be covered include: what AA is and is not; anonymity; Steps; Traditions; meeting types; sponsorship; and home groups.

Trustees — that in regard to selection of Corporate Board directors of AAWS, Inc. and Grapevine, Inc., no additional specific limitations should be made regarding qualifications for candidates.