

June 1956

AA AT WORK

EVEN OUR BUSINESS MEETINGS ARE SPIRITUAL, *said the inner voice, as we stood waiting for Bill to lead the closing session of the Sixth General Service Conference of AA in the Lord's Prayer, They have to be, the voice went on, as we joined in the farewell bustle of seventy-five Conference delegates, preparing for return journeys to "AA Land" far and wide in North America and overseas . . . , otherwise we couldn't stay alive and well as a group, any more than we could as individuals, if we let our old destructive ways take over.*

The big news always looks the same: the sick are well—we, a "bunch of drunks," are sober, living in the real world, and managing our affairs with dignity and efficiency.

Look at the 1953 Conference Report:

"It is not nearly so important what we do here as that we are here at all."

Yes, indeed, says the editor, but let's just tell what happened, what the 1956 Conference did.

Well, the reporter begins, scarcely glancing at a huge pile of notes, one man was so worried about whether AA tradition was endangered by a certain proposal that he said a prayer before he got up to express his thoughts . . . another fellow said, "The groups in my area voted 'Hell no' on this proposal, but they sent me down here to consider the good of the

whole Fellowship—as I might see it after talking with the rest of you guys!" . . . when a proposal warmly favored by Bill W. was overwhelmingly defeated in a loud vote with prolonged applause, the co-founder grinned, "I'm a member at last!" and resumed his seat in the back of the room . . . the observer from AA in Norway said he had learned more about how AA functions, in two days of listening at Conference sessions, than he ever could in a year of study . . . the Chairman of one session, concerned about the silence of a small minority opposed to a resolution, reopened discussion of the issue at the next session, with a minority spokesman at the rostrum to re-state his views—just to make sure that nothing important to AA's welfare was overlooked in a sweeping majority vote . . . and whoever heard of the resigna-

tion of a Chairman of the Board of Trustees accompanied by the throat-clearing and eyeglass-polishing that signifies emotion in an audience of adult males?

So OK, the editor says, let's get on with the story . . . could we start off, maybe with at least one cardinal rule of reporting and tell the people Who, What, Where, When and Why—and, for the eternal skeptic alcoholic, So What, perhaps?

WHO ... 75 AA members chosen by area committees representing local groups in all parts of the United States (including Puerto Rico) and Canada; 29 AAs and non-AAs on the General Service Board, the AA Publishing Board, General Service Headquarters staff, and the Grapevine; 4 AA observers from Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, and South Africa;

WHAT ... the Sixth Annual General Service Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous of North America; the eyes, ears, and nose of AA-as-a-whole; the link between 6,000 local groups (with 135,000 individual members) and those who carry on the work of AA's worldwide Twelfth Step services;

WHERE ... in New York City's Hotel Commodore, a stone's throw and inspection-tour away from the building where the service offices are located: the Grapevine, AA Publishing, General Service Headquarters, and the

General Service Board (which used to be called The Alcoholic Foundation, the name many AAs still cling to);

WHEN . . . April 18th through the 23rd, 1956—morning, noon and night, at mealtimes and over coffee cups;

WHY ... to give all of AA, on whose support the services depend, a close look at activities for the past year and a voice in plans for the coming one, and to provide those entrusted to carry on this work at Headquarters with guidance in the form of suggestions, decisions, criticism and questions;

and finally, the inevitable SO WHAT? of the curious newcomer, the blase' old-timer, and the average group member who devotes (properly) most of his attention to his own and his nearest fellow-members' sobriety, and thinks of AA's General Service structure perhaps once a year ... so here's what:

"We are filled with gratitude," said Bill in his closing remarks to the Conference, "that God has taught us how to love Him—and each other—enough . . . so that those destructive things native to us drunks—excessive pride and anger—cannot utterly destroy us. We know, now, that our collective wisdom works, over the long run; that when we are educated, informed, and responsible, there is tolerance and love."

And this:

"It has been a wonderful experience for me," Bernard B. Smith, retiring non-Alcoholic Chairman of the Board of Trustees, told the delegates at the final session, "to see men so individualistic by nature subordinate their individual points of view—and perhaps their individual emotional needs—to the welfare of the whole. Just because AA is a program of faith does not mean that we have no responsibility toward each other, and to those who will follow. . . ."

"AA is a way of life *that works*, and its followers achieve a greater degree of happiness than the average

human being today. We must become and remain aware of the structure of AA which protects this way of life. . . . We are bound to a faith that makes us free."

H'm, the editor h'ms, from behind two large items entitled "Combined Balance Sheet and Income Statement, The General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous, Inc., Alcoholics Anonymous Publishing, Inc., The Alcoholics Anonymous Grapevine, Inc.," might be a few things here that people want to know about—or would if they understood how important it is for AA to manage its affairs right.

HERE IS WHAT THE 1956 CONFERENCE DID

- approved the concept of AA's General Service Board arranging for the production of one or more network programs about AA, with script approval resting with the Board, the Public Information Committee, and Bill W.;

- declared that use of the phrase "made in cooperation with AA," or one of similar meaning, will not be permitted in the case of anything appearing in any public media, except where prior script approval has been granted to the General Service Board;

- suggested that AA groups discuss with the General Service Board proposals relating to all media of national circulation, except in the case of local television programs where no pro-

prietary right to the material or title is granted;

- adopted as temporary policy the principle of accepting expense money for Bill's time and travel in connection with specific television and motion picture projects in the coming year, and of requesting prints of films, if available;

- agreed that individuals wishing to make "AA Birthday" contributions to General Service Headquarters be encouraged to do so through their local group;

- endorsed Bill's latest writing project—a preliminary history of AA, accompanied (if possible) by photographs of historic interest to AAs and friends of the movement;

- recommended that the 1957 Conference consider publishing a leather-bound gift edition of the Big Book;

- reiterated the need recognized at the 1955 Conference for reading material specifically for the older member;

- assumed responsibility for individual delegates' setting up "Grapevine Committees" in their areas, to stimulate both circulation and editorial contributions to the magazine;

- decided that area Committeemen and local group General Service Representatives should carry the message of the Third Legacy of Service and tell the story of General Service Headquarters activities to each group twice a year;

- supported action taken by the Trustees of the General Service Board in creating—for more efficient functioning of AA's worldwide service agencies—three committees: Finance and Budgetary, Policy, and Public Information;

- approved the Public Information Committee's work in preparing a basic "AA Fact File" for distribution (on request) to writers, editors, and others in publishing, radio, television, and motion pictures; and in developing a "general purpose" exhibit display on AA, suitable for use at meetings of professional people in medicine, penology, law enforcement, public health, etc.;

- reviewed a projected 1956 budget for the three service arms and the

General Service Board, based on an expected continuing increase in group contributions;

- voted to maintain the current structure of the Board of Trustees: eight non-alcoholics and seven alcoholics;

- tabled a proposal that the annual General Service Conference be geographically "rotated" in odd years;

- recommended that the next movement-wide general convention of AA—when, as, and if held—take place in Los Angeles, California;

- disagreed on the merits of using paid space advertising for AA literature, and voted to reopen the question at a future Conference;

- heard individual reports of all activities and operations of AA's service arms;

- inspected detailed financial records of all these services;

- participated in a "Questions Anonymous" session in which several dozen specific questions, dropped anonymously by delegates in an "Ask-it-Basket," were answered by Headquarters personnel and other delegates;

- and completed other vital business during the five-day session, a full report of which may be ordered from General Service Headquarters.