

August 1987

# A · R · O · U · N · D



## 37th General Service Conference A Turning Point

In April of every year, delegates from 91 areas join the trustees (14 alcoholic and 7 nonalcoholic) and the staff and directors of AA World Services and the Grapevine for AA's annual "business meeting," the General Service Conference. Actually, the work of the Conference is an ongoing process throughout the year — at the group level, in the districts and areas, at the General Service Office, and in the constant work of committees, from the local areas to the trustees' committees. During Conference week (April 26 - May 1, 1987), the collective group conscience of the Fellowship is heard, through Advisory Actions that guide (not govern) the actions of AA entities.

"The Seventh Tradition — A Turning Point" was the theme for 1987, and even the choice of the theme is a turning point in itself, since financial matters have never been a Conference theme.

On June 10, 1987, the Fellowship will be 52 years old, and the Conference felt the time has come for AA to take a long look at self-support

in the entire service structure. In the keynote address at the opening of the Conference Monday morning, Wayne P., Southwest regional trustee, said: "Obviously, we are talking about money, and I have yet to meet an alcoholic who does not have a deep and abiding love for it as well as a deep conviction that they are experts in fiscal management. However, I do not think most of us got here because of our expertise in this area. The issue of self-support is the tradition that has saved our Fellowship, thanks to Mr. Rockefeller."

In recent years, group contributions to the General Service Office have sometimes failed to fully support group service activities — thus affecting districts, areas, and intergroups as well as GSO. On Monday afternoon the Conference heard presentations on finance, and it was pointed out that GSO has come to rely more and more on publishing income for group services and General Service Board activities, expenses that should be covered by group contributions. It was further brought out that publishing income has come increasingly from non-AA sources. This has the potential for creating Sixth Tradition problems.

In the past year, the General Service Board has had a self-support project, informing areas through the delegates of the details of the current shortfall in contributions. The 37th Conference expressed gratitude that the Fellowship has responded with increases of from 30% to 50% over last year's contributions for the five months preceding the Conference. A continuation of this trend for the next year and a half would bring the Fellowship essentially to a level of self-support from which the rates of increase maintained in the past, in proportion to the growth of the Fellowship, would suffice.

The Grapevine was another primary focus of attention this year, and the Conference noted with approval the long-range planning currently being done by the Corporate Board and staff, and expressed a desire for full communication with the Fellowship on the part of board and staff. The Grapevine has one primary purpose, to carry the AA message, and redefinition of the role of the magazine in Twelfth Step work is a hoped-for outcome of both the Conference and the long-range planning efforts.

The main concern of the Conference was, as always, AA's primary purpose — reaching the still-suffering alcoholic. On Tuesday morning, Conference members heard two reports on the Native North American Project, and Thursday the Conference recommended that the trustees Literature Committee develop a special pamphlet sharing personal experience stories of Native Americans. A similar recommendation urged the Grapevine to consider the possibility of a special issue on Native North Americans.

On Wednesday morning, three presentations gave a rounded picture of the Grapevine: director Stan S. spoke on "The Grapevine: What Is It?"; staff member Ann W. talked about "How Does It Work?" and director Desmond T. looked ahead to "Where Is It Going?"

Problems currently facing the Fellowship were also on the agenda, and were discussed under "Court Programs — Current Problems and Solutions," a subject of much interest in many areas. Presentations brought out such problems as: the misconception among some law enforcement agencies that AA is a treatment organization rather than a recovery program; difficulties with court "sentenced" people being reluctant to attend meetings, and not understanding the anonymity Traditions; and the threat to AA unity when meetings are swamped by court-referred newcomers, who at times outnumber members and radically change the character of meetings. Gene R.,

delegate from Maryland, spoke eloquently of the difficulties the service structure in that area encountered with the court system which, in the view of many AAs, is "using AA" to handle its DWI problem, which amounts to a misuse of the very name "Alcoholics Anonymous." Gene expressed the conviction that "It is a problem AA as a whole, as well as our own area, is going to have to address."

Another problem addressed by the Conference was that of nonalcoholics attending AA meetings and also that of alcoholics with other addictions departing from discussion of alcoholism. After a long and thoughtful discussion, statements (one for open meetings and one for closed) were recommended as service material, for use in groups that need them (see list of Advisory Actions which follows for specific wording of the statements).

Other presentation/discussions included a session on "Are We Carrying the Message to All?" with three presentations addressing what is being done for hearing- and visually-impaired alcoholics and for other language groups. On Friday afternoon, a final and inspiring group of presentations dealt with "Maintaining the Basics — AA's Principles," reiterating once more what AA is all about.

Another statement from the keynote address might sum up the Conference experience: "The Conference structure works, and what we must do is show up when we are asked to and allow our Higher Power to guide us in carrying our message of recovery to the still-suffering alcoholic. After all, that is what all of this is about, one drunk helping another."

### Conference Advisory Actions 37th General Service Conference

This is a digest of the 1987 Conference Advisory Actions. A complete listing of all Actions will appear in the 1987 *Conference Report*.

The 37th General Service Conference recommended that:

#### Floor Actions

— A report on the progress of "The History of AA: 1955-1985" book be made to the 1988 General Service Conference.

— The consideration of inviting intergroups and central offices into the general service structure be referred to the Agenda Committee for the 1988 Conference.

#### Agenda Committee

— "Self-Support" be a presentation/discus-

sion topic for the next five years, in keeping with the spirit of the Seventh Tradition.  
— The theme of the 38th General Service Conference be "Our Singleness of Purpose — Key to Unity."

— The following be presentation/discussion topics for the 1988 Conference:

1. Self-Support
2. Singleness of Purpose — Key to Unity
  - a) Groups vs Meetings
  - b) Are We Being *Too* Friendly With Our Friends?
  - c) Our Primary Purpose — Is Our Message Clear?
3. Focus on the Positive
  - a) Communications-Challenges
  - b) What Are We Doing Right?
  - c) Spirit of Rotation

#### Cooperation With the Professional Community Committee

— The CPC staff person write to all area assembly chairpersons to gather information on their interest in having tabletop exhibits and the areas' desire to purchase them.

#### Correctional Facilities

— The 16-minute video based on the pamphlet, "It Sure Beats Silting in a Cell," be produced for distribution to the Fellowship. The video "It Sure Beats Sitting in a Cell" be produced with closed captions for the hearing impaired, at a cost not exceeding \$1,500.

— The finalized draft of the pamphlet, "Memo to an Inmate Who May be an Alcoholic," be accepted for distribution to the Fellowship.

— The Institutions Correspondence Service not be dissolved at this time.

— All areas be encouraged to begin working in the direction of establishing an area institutions correspondence service, coordinating this with GSO, as necessary.

#### Finance Committee

— The concept of the Self-Support communications plan be approved; the plan is to provide Self-Support information and tools to DCMs and other service people in the Fellowship.

— The objectives of the five-year plan be approved and reviewed monthly; the plan projects increased contributions and periodic literature price decreases, which would make AA self-supporting in five years or less.

— The 1977 Conference Advisory Action which reads:

"It was recommended that a prudent reserve be

established equal to the preceding year's operating expense of the combined expenses of the General Service Board of AA, AA World Services, Inc., and the AA Grapevine, Inc. (with the exception of extra-ordinary expenses); and that the auditing firm be requested to review and comment annually on the availability, feasibility, and adequacy of this reserve"

be amended to replace the phrase "equal to" by the phrase "not to exceed." And that a lower limit to the fund not be provided inasmuch as the auditor is required to comment on the adequacy of the fund.

#### Grapevine Committee

— Staff monitor ongoing distribution of Spanish and French Grapevine cassette tapes and report fuller results to the 1988 Conference.

— No changes or additions be made to the Pre-amble.

— Delegates focus their efforts on the district service structure as a means of reaching individual groups, in order to make every group aware of the value of the Grapevine as a recovery tool.

— Delegates and area Grapevine chairpersons be encouraged to invite Grapevine staff/personnel to attend local, area, and regional conventions, forums, and AA gatherings.

— The Grapevine staff be responsible for communicating updated information to the delegates at appropriate intervals regarding editorial, circulation/fulfillment, and financial matters.

— In view of the need for the entire Grapevine operation to be fully accountable to the Fellowship, the committee recognizes serious management problems and believes them to be the responsibility of the Grapevine Corporate Board. It was recommended that the Grapevine Board establish a mechanism for timely communication to all Conference members of actions taken and progress toward resolution of these problems.

— A disclaimer be prepared by Grapevine staff for the calendar of events and be printed before each month's listing of coming events.

#### Literature Committee

— The following statement regarding AA's primary purpose be available as an AA service piece.

THIS IS A CLOSED MEETING OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

This is a closed meeting of Alcoholics Anony-

mous. In support of AA's singleness of purpose, attendance at closed meetings is limited to persons who have a desire to stop drinking. If you think you have a problem with alcohol, you are welcome to attend this meeting. We ask that when discussing our problems, we confine ourselves to those problems, as they relate to alcoholism.

— The following statement regarding AA's primary purpose be available as an AA service piece.

THIS IS AN OPEN MEETING OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

This is an open meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous. We are glad you are all here — especially newcomers. In keeping with our singleness of purpose and our Third Tradition which states that "The only requirement for AA membership is a desire to stop drinking," we ask that all who participate confine their discussion to their problems with alcohol.

— The trustees' Literature Committee undertake development of a daily reflections book based on individual AA's (including Bill W.'s) sharing based on the Traditions and Steps, and that a progress report be submitted to the 1988 Conference Literature Committee.

— A pamphlet for the Native North American be prepared by the trustees' Literature Committee and brought back to the 1988 General Service Conference.

— The Grapevine Corporate Board consider publishing a special issue written by Native North Americans and devoted to their recovery stories.

— The trustees' Literature Committee further explore the need for simplified material for those with limited vocabularies and report its findings to the 1988 Conference.

#### Policy/Admissions Committee

— The 39th General Service Conference be scheduled for April 23-29, 1989. These dates will not conflict with Easter or Passover.

— While the committee recognizes the need for and encourages the development of Area Archives and Archives Committees, with the resulting benefit to General Service and the Fellowship as a whole, a Conference Archives should not be formed at this time because the needs of local Archives Committees are being well served by the trustee's Archives Committee and the General Service Office Archivist.

— To be more financially responsible, when a Conference Committee recommendation involves a substantial expenditure of money, an

estimate of costs be part of that recommendation.

#### Public Information Committee

— The flyer, one-way display, and poster "The AA Member" be updated to reflect the findings from the 1986 Membership Survey.

— The film targeting young people be approved for completion and distribution; and videocassette versions of the film be closed-captioned for the hearing impaired.

#### Report and Charter Committee

— An eleventh chapter about the Grapevine be included in "The AA Service Manual."

— No change be made at this time in the definition of an AA group in the AA Directories.

— The 1986 Conference Action regarding the directories not listing "Double-Trouble groups be reaffirmed," i.e. "Double-Trouble groups not be listed in the AA Directories;" and the existing Double-Trouble groups in the AA Directories be deleted. (Double-Trouble groups are defined as groups with outside affiliation.)

#### Treatment Facilities Committee

— The report, developed in response to the 1986 General Service Conference recommendation that the trustees' Committee on Treatment Facilities study ways to develop contact sponsorship programs, be returned to the trustees' committee to develop a service piece to be added to the *Treatment Facilities Workbook*. Also that this piece use only shared experience that reflects strict adherence to the Traditions and include sharing from both successful and unsuccessful contact sponsorship programs and those in various states of development.

— The 1986 Conference Action that "each area treatment facilities committee conduct workshops, as frequently as needed, to effectively utilize the *Treatment Facilities Workbook* be reaffirmed. Also, that the workshops include groups and district committees.

— The 1986 Conference Action that "treatment facilities committees send liaisons to other service entities' meetings in their area and, in turn, invite them to send liaisons to the treatment facilities committee meetings" be reaffirmed.

#### Trustees Committee

— We continue with the current practice of selecting directors for both AAWS and Grapevine Boards, but that the positions should not necessarily be restricted to residents of New York City and vicinity.