

# A · R · O · U · N · D

## 39th General Service Conference: "Anonymity-Living Our Traditions"

On July 3, 1955, at the St. Louis Convention, Bill W. turned over to the AA membership, through a General Service Conference, full responsibility as "the guardian of the Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous, the perpetrator of the world services of our Society, the voice of the group conscience of our entire Fellowship, and the sole successors to its co-founders, Dr. Bob and Bill." At that time, the Conference had existed on a trial basis for five years, and had proved itself capable of carrying on the work of the founders, "inheriting from them all their former duties and special responsibilities, thus avoiding in future time all possible strivings for individual prestige or personal power, and also providing our Society with the means of functioning on a permanent basis." (*AA Comes of Age*, page 226)

The theme of the 39th General Service Conference, "Anonymity — Living Our Traditions," underlined the dangers of individual prestige and personal power. In the keynote address, Dr. William E. Flynn, Class A (non-alcoholic) trustee, said: "History is filled with the stories of movements that began with great promise and potential and then floundered in their relatively early days on controversy, personality conflicts, and destructive self-interest. This Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous has not floundered and instead now continues its growth and development."

The Advisory Actions that flow from the annual Conference meeting guide the growth and development of the Fellowship in the U.S. and Canada. Through these Actions, arrived at after extensive consideration in eleven committees followed by often-lively floor debate, the Conference makes decisions about a myriad of policy matters, including AA literature and audiovisual resources, guiding principles

for groups and other AA entities, ways of carrying out public information, carrying the message to prisons or hospitals, cooperating with professionals who work with alcoholics, and many more. In the AA way, no Advisory Action is binding on any AA group, or for that matter, on any succeeding Conference. (A shortened version of this year's Actions begins on the next page.)

Not surprisingly, the week-long session resembles the business meeting of any home group — the major difference being size and length of the meeting. Its membership consists of 91 delegates from all over the U.S. and Canada, members of the Board of Trustees, and directors and staff of AA World Services/GSO and the AA Grapevine, Inc. This year, sessions were held in a new location, the Omni Park Central Hotel in New York City, where in a busy week filled with committee meetings, presentation/discussions, "What's on Your Mind?" sharing sessions, a workshop, and nearly two full days of discussion of committee recommendations, Conference members talked and listened, agreed and disagreed, laughed and cried, and in the end, through AA's own unique process of group conscience decision-making, achieved the "substantial unanimity" that is needed to pass any Advisory Action.

Each day began with a 7:30 a.m. meeting of the GSC Serenity Group, for those who wished to attend. There were reports from the General Service Board and its two operating corporations, and presentation/discussions included Self-Support, Finance, Back to Basics, and the Grapevine (see page 42). The Conference also heard a report from a trip to the U.S.S.R., an update on plans for the 55th Anniversary International Convention in 1990 in Seattle, and a short presentation on the 50th anniversary of the publication of the Big Book.

Wednesday afternoon, new trustees were elected: Jan W. of Greenville, Mich. will become East Central U.S. trustee, replacing Jack W.; Jacqueline M. of Louisville, Ky. will replace Joe P. in the Southeast U.S. region; and the new trustee-at-large U.S. will be John Q. of New Jersey, filling the position of Don P. Two general service trustees, Stanley S. and Harold G., will replace Jim S. and Shepherd R., and the Conference approved the recommendation of the trustees' Nominating Committee that John Nelson Chappel, MD of Las Vegas, Nev. will replace Class A (nonalcoholic) trustee William E. Flynn, MD.

It was a time of farewells for the Conference, as it has been a year of farewells for the Fellowship. In the keynote address on Monday and in several talks and presentations throughout the week, Conference members recalled with love the lives of Lois W., wife of our co-founder, and of two nonalcoholic trustees who made significant contributions to AA: Dr. John L. Norris ("Dr. Jack") and Milton A. Maxwell, Ph.D. Friday afternoon, when all the committee reports had been discussed, closing talks were given by two rotating trusted servants: John B., who stepped down April 1 as general manager of the General Service Office (his successor, Wayne P., co-chaired the Conference), and Betty L., GSO staff member who will retire in September after 15 years of service. And at the Saturday morning brunch, there were farewell talks by the six rotating trustees and closing remarks by Michael Alexander, nonalcoholic chairman of the Board of Trustees and Conference chairman.

How does the Twelfth Tradition's emphasis on "principles before personalities" work, in a Conference session where the loss of several personalities was keenly felt? A presentation by Panel 38 delegate Betty C. set this apparent conflict in perspective: "The Twelfth Tradition urges 'principles *before* personalities,' not principles *without* personalities. Think for a moment about how you came to understand and practice the principles of Recovery, Unity, and Service. Most of us have been profoundly influenced by individual recovering alcoholics — personalities — as we've made our own journeys in recovery and service. Our principles were forged from the experiences and insights of countless dynamic personalities and it is personalities who pass it on today. If our Fellowship is to remain healthy and strong it must have effective leadership. With

continued vigilance and a careful balance of principles *and* personalities, we will preserve Bill's dream."

## 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*.

**Floor Action** • that the 1989 Conference appoint an ad hoc committee of Panel 39 delegates and G.S.O. employees to study the problems of group registration and the A.A. directories.

**Agenda** • that the following themes be considered for the 1990 General Service Conference: Home Group — Where Love and Service Begin; Home Group — Our Link to the Fellowship; Home Group — Our Responsibility and Link to AA's Future.

**Cooperation with the Professional Community** • that in carrying the AA message to minorities: a) all CPC committees continue to gather information on how the AA message can better be carried to and through minorities, minority professionals, and all professionals who work with minorities, b) any minority initiative to and through minorities media and schools with high minorities populations, be referred to the appropriate public information committees, c) any further consideration of how minorities may better be reached within the AA Fellowship with the message of becoming involved in service, be through future consideration by the General Service Conference, d) our minorities initiatives reflect our primary concern for helping all alcoholics - that consideration be given for a video to inform both professionals and AA members how our friends historically have helped the Fellowship and how we can cooperate within the framework of our purpose, experience, and traditions.

**Correctional Facilities** • that the name of the "Institutions Correspondence Service" (ICS) be changed to "Corrections Correspondence Service" (CCS) as literature comes up for reprint • that the flyer "Carrying the Message Inside the Walls" be replaced with the revised

version entitled "Carrying the Message into Correctional Facilities."

**Finance** • that the Conference strongly reaffirm the 1986 Conference Advisory Action on self-support which reads: "That the area delegates strongly consider implementation of the following suggestions to improve contributions to GSO, area assemblies, districts, and central or intergroup offices: a) GSO make available to all delegates an itemized list of group service expenses and other expenses of the board, combined into one total, representing group services supported by group contributions. (Now a part of the financial statements in the Final Conference Report.) b) Area delegates contact groups quarterly, either directly or through the DCM, distributing self-support pamphlets and contributions statements. c) The delegates encourage each group to have a folder which includes a list of addresses to whom monthly contributions could be sent (District, Intergroup/Central Offices, Area Committees and GSO). d) Each area affix a list of addresses or stamp addresses on finance flyers and distribute to groups to provide them with the information on 'where to send their money.' e) Areas could provide groups with pre-addressed envelopes as to where they should contribute to the area treasury."

**Grapevine** • that the Grapevine develop an ongoing AA history section, drawing on archival material, including area and regional histories • in recognition of the need for a magazine price increase in the near future, that delegates clarify in their areas the fact that the Grapevine is supported by subscription income and does not accept group contributions to cover operating expenses.

**International Convention** • that due to the International Convention, state, provincial, and regional convention committees be alerted to the possible effect on attendance at local conventions held between May 11 and August 24, 1990 • that a TV camera be permitted to film the Flag Ceremony from afar at the Kingdome Stadium, if appropriate precautions are taken to protect the anonymity of those in attendance at the 1990 International Convention • that the Registration Form for the 1990 International Convention include a statement on travel option discounts.

**Literature** • that work continue on a definitive book on AA History from 1955, focusing on

major events and developments • that a complete manuscript of Daily Reflections be prepared for review by the 1990 Conference Literature Committee • that the pamphlet "The AA Group" be thoroughly revised to address the many issues and concerns related to AA groups such as: The difference between a group and a meeting, Meeting formats, How to obtain a group conscience, The duties of trusted servants and their alternates • that the manuscript for a pamphlet for gay and lesbian alcoholics be approved and the title be "AA and the Gay/Lesbian Alcoholic" • that the book *Alcoholics Anonymous* be made available in large print.

**Policy/Admissions** • that all Conference-approved literature shall be developed within the Conference structure, but that identification of need may be established by use of questionnaires developed in cooperation with the appropriate Conference committees.

**Public Information** • that the 1989 Membership Survey be conducted on a random basis, by area, and that we use the same questionnaire used in the 1986 survey • that the following 1980 Conference Action be reaffirmed: "In keeping with our Eleventh and Twelfth Traditions, AA members who are requested to videotape talks and meetings preserve anonymity at the level of press, radio, film, and videotapes, realizing that anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions. The committee further recommended that talks by AA members be given in person rather than videotaped, in view of the temptation for videotaping to place personalities before principles."

**Report and Charter** • that in order to economize financially the Eastern and Western U.S. directories be combined • that the listing of clubs be deleted from the AA directories • that the *Final Report* for GSRs be sent to the delegate with the quantity to be determined by each delegate • that the *Final Report* be translated into French and Spanish.

**Treatment Facilities** • that a fifteen minute film be produced for AA members carrying the message into treatment facilities and be presented to the 1990 Conference.

**Trustees** • that an effort be made to rectify contradictions and inconsistencies between *The AA Service Manual* and legal charters and corporate by-laws.