

Report on the Fifty-Eighth General Service Conference

COMMUNICATION AND PARTICIPATION

Our theme this year "Communication and Participation – the Key to Unity and Self-Support" was not only discussed and explored during the weeklong conference, it was lived out by all Conference members in attendance.

I gave a presentation on *Giving a Conference Report* at the Delegates Only meeting as the Conference kicked off on Saturday evening, April 26th, 2008. Sunday morning the Remote Communities committee held their annual seminar and panelists spoke about reaching out to communities separated from mainstream AA by barriers of language, culture, and geographic distance. The official start of the 58th General Service Conference (GSC) began with a roll call of all Conference Members – delegates, directors, trustees and voting staff. Business wrapped up late night Friday, or rather Saturday morning, at 12:16 am with the 'Serenity Prayer' in English, French and Spanish.

Over these eight days, meetings by region and by committee assignment, workshops and presentations as well as general sharing and voting sessions kept me busy from 9 am until 10 pm or later most days. I assisted with the elections of two regional trustees and our committee approved the slate of officers, directors and trustees of the General Service Board (GSB) and its two subsidiary boards, Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. (AAWS) and The AA Grapevine, Inc. (AAGV) for 2008-09.

In his opening comments, Leonard Blumenthal, Class A trustee and Chairman of the GSB, reminded us, "None of us is as smart as all of us." In his closing comments, Leonard stated that "Now each of us is smarter because of all of us."

PROCESS vs. PRODUCT

It was the longest General Service Conference on record since 1951 going past midnight on Friday. We kept one committee chair on the dais for 7.5 hours over two days answering questions – that may be a record as well.

We had 15 floor actions and, consequently, did not have the usual farewells from Panel 57 before closing. We delegates were content to continue debate well into the evening and then into the wee hours of the morning, because we felt it important to finish this work.

Most delegates left with a feeling of being part of a bigger whole. I was made more aware that our communications to/from the boards and committees need to be more timely and substantive. We all heard a message loud and clear throughout the conference structure that we must consider new and more effective ways to communicate with each other. One of the things I noticed this year over last was the conference members' absolute willingness to speak in French, Spanish or English as needed.

What I have come to appreciate was that this year was all about process over product. The advisory actions passed by the Conference and approved by the Board are not ground-

breaking or particularly glamorous. Last year, I was able to point to some very tangible items and changes; the Spanish language Big Book third edition came out and Class B trustees were recognized as eligible to serve as chair of the General Service Board. This year, we kept circling back to the theme of Communication and Participation. The relatively small number of agenda items forwarded by the trustees to the conference was discussed. And, not for lack of items from the fellowship. Overall, the Conference this year was a successful and necessary exercise in communication and participation. The General Service Conference structure is still serving our Fellowship well, 58 years later.

On my visit to the General Service Office, I asked Doug R. to show me the local sharing files. Doug took me back to the far reaches of the 11th floor and showed me a set of sliding bookcases – 1,500 cubic feet of shelving – which contain files of thousands of letters on every subject the Fellowship has ever asked the office. There are even letters from Bill W. still in those files. A staffer can pull a folder from the shelf and find out how a question was answered before. When new problems arise, a new folder is begun.

GENERAL SERVICE BOARD ACTIVITY

A.A. AROUND THE WORLD

Dorothy W., Trustee-at-Large for the US and Joanne L., Trustee-at-Large, Canada reported that,

Mongolia struggles to understand the full meaning and spiritual significance of our principle of self-support.

Poland is working on a translation of the Twelve Concepts for World Service. Some words just don't have an equivalent meaning.

Julio E., international desk, reports that there are now 59 GSO's worldwide in 180 countries. He attended the first meeting of the French-speaking African countries. Cameroon has eleven intergroups since AA was first established there in 1996. A sober community in Mali began meeting in 2006.

CLOSER TO HOME

The search has begun for the next General Manager of your GSO. Greg M., who began his employment as the President of AAWS and General Manager of the General Service Office on January 1, 1999 will be retiring on December 31, 2008.

This time next year, the Board will also be selecting its next Chairperson. Leonard Blumenthal, Class A non-alcoholic trustee, will rotate off the Board in April 2009.

Many of the preparations for our 2010 International Convention celebrating AA's 75th birthday have begun in San Antonio, Texas. Tens of thousands of AAs, Al-Anons, and Double-winners will be streaming south to the border from all over the world for our 'diamond jubilee'. More information on "A Vision for You" will be appearing on the AA.org website next year.

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Speaking of websites, a new yellow Guideline on the Internet has been published by the Office and will be available in mid-June. The guideline addresses concerns of local committees who want to set up an AA web site for intergroups, districts, etc.

FINANCES

Functional expenses of running GSO cost \$8.5M in 2007, or \$6.50 per member. Contributions from the fellowship totaled \$6.5M or \$4.09 per member across US/Canada. Meanwhile, per capita contributions from northeast Ohio lagged behind at only \$2.07. The \$2M shortfall was met by literature proceeds. Contributions to the GSB were up 7.8% over last year. Please accept my thanks for all the hard work you've done to bring this about. We could do better, though. While contributions continue to grow slowly from the fellowship in total, the number of groups participating in the Seventh Tradition has fallen steadily since 1987 from about 58% down to 45% now. Our underfunded pension liabilities to retired members of the GSO and GV staff remains about \$4.5M.

EXECUTIVE COMPENSATION

This question came up at the Conference briefly. The chair of the trustees Committee on Compensation, Class A trustee Herb Goodman, responded. We subscribe to a yearly study conducted of 125 organizations in the NYC area about levels of compensation of comparable non-profit organizations. Our compensation policy is set by the boards of our two service corporations (AAWS and AAGV) informed by this yearly study.

AAWS ACTIVITY

During 2007, AAWS distributed 6.5M pieces of literature in English, almost ½ million pieces in Spanish and 140K pieces of French literature. 1,178,167 units were the Big Book in printed, audio or electronic format.

In 2007, 16 translations were completed in Amharic (a Semitic language spoken in North Central Ethiopia), Indonesian, Mongolian, Polish and Tahitian. Currently, the Big Book is printed in 59 languages and 3 translation projects are in process. Translations vary in cost -- \$5,000 to \$10,000 to check a foreign translation done by members of that country; \$10-14K to do the translation for the country or language group. Overall, our literature has been translated into 84 languages worldwide.

AAGV ACTIVITY

AAGV distributed 135,828 books and other items in addition to 120,000 issues of the Grapevine and La Viña magazines monthly. La Viña is slowly moving toward self-sufficiency. The Grapevine continues to serve the fellowship well also. One GV director has been quoted to say, "If you don't subscribe, we don't survive."

ACTION HIGHLIGHTS

The Theme of the 2009 General Service Conference will be

"Our Commitment to Carry AA's Message – Enthusiasm and Gratitude in Action."

Our Workshop topic for the 2009 General Service Conference will be "**Language of the Heart - Keeping it Simple**".

About \$10M in free air time was provided in the airing of AA's public service announcements nationwide this last year. This was determined via tracking chips embedded in our PSAs.

Approved a request that a draft wall poster with information about Alcoholics Anonymous be developed for placement in school guidance counselor offices.

Public Information Committee recommended and the GSC approved the final draft of the 2007 Membership Survey for publication. We surveyed about 750 groups in the US and Canada.

The management of the General Service Office was charged with finding a more cost-effective means of holding the General Service Conference in or near New York City.

During the **Corrections Committee** report, Class A trustee, Hon. Rogelio Flores reported that he has had good response with his probationers by giving them assignments to read articles in the AAGV and write a report back to him instead of requiring attendance papers to be signed at meetings.

The agenda item submitted from our area last fall was given a full hearing in the trustees' and the Conference **Finance Committees**. The self-support packet [FV-19] will be reformatted and enlarged to accommodate our requests and will become a regularly stocked item in the Literature Catalog from AAWS.

AAGV will start production on a **portable GvR Handbook**. They will also publish two CDs of stories from La Viña on Traditions One – Twelve.

Four cities will be considered as a site for the International Convention in 2020 – **Detroit, Los Angeles, New Orleans and Vancouver BC** were moved forward and approved for site visits. The trustees will make a final decision this November.

In conclusion, I cannot close this report without pausing to thank you all for the privilege and responsibility of serving our Fellowship as one of fewer than 2,500 delegates over the history of the Conference. I will never view service work the same way as a result of this experience. The Panel 57 and Panel 58 delegates and the rest of the Conference members have come together and worked as a team. I've learned that like-minded individuals do not have to agree all the time to be of one mind; we can disagree agreeably so long as you and I remember our primary purpose and the Three Legacies we uphold in common. Thank you for that lesson. God Bless You All.

In Love and Service,
Jeff Y., Panel 57 Delegate