

40th General Service Conference— “The Home Group—Our Responsibility and Link to A.A.’s Future”

Monday morning, in his keynote address, Tom H., Eastern Canada regional trustee, told members of the 40th U.S./Canada General Service Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous: “The compassion, the bonding of one alcoholic with another, begins at the group level. The handshake and the eye contact start at the door to the group. The Seventh Tradition basket and the business meeting that keeps everyone informed of news from G.S.O. and of the local church’s increase in rent, are the items that form the building blocks of our future.”

The 40th Conference’s theme, chosen by the previous Conference, was “The Home Group—Our Responsibility and Link to A.A.’s Future.” The home group stands as the basic unit of our entire Fellowship, for it is from this multiplicity of groups, through the districts and the areas, up to the General Service Conference that the direction for the Fellowship as a whole emerges.



Just as the life of an A.A. group extends well beyond the couple of hours a week that group members come together for a meeting, so does the work of the General Service Conference extend throughout the year following its annual week-long business meeting. Traditionally held during the last week of April, this meeting is made up of 135 Conference members, including the 91 area delegates, Class A and Class B trustees, along with directors and staff of the two corporations, Alcoholics Anonymous World Services and the Grapevine.

Conference week is long, often arduous, but ultimately rewarding—filled with board and committee reports, presentations and discussions, workshops, area service highlights, sharing sessions and, most of all, committee meetings.

This year’s Conference was held at the Omni Park Central Hotel, New York City, April 22-28. Co-chairmen of the Conference were Michael Alexander, chairman of the General Service Board and Wayne P., G.S.O.’s general manager. G.S.O. staff member Eileen G. was Conference coordinator.

Sunday afternoon began with registration and orientation, a welcome from board chairman Michael Alexander and greetings from the delegate chairperson, Reba W., Eastern Pennsylvania. Sunday evening was the Conference opening dinner, attended by Conference members and their spouses as well as office personnel, volunteers, and others who are a part of the operation of the General Service Office throughout the year. The evening ended with an open A.A. meeting which was chaired by Robert B., Arkansas. Speakers for the evening were: Karen N., Southern Wisconsin; Ann W., District of Columbia; Vicente M., G.S.O. staff; Jan W., East Central regional trustee; Gareth D., Northwest Ontario; and Jane S., Grapevine director.

This wasn’t the only A.A. meeting of the week, however, and as the Conference progressed, for those who chose to, each day could begin with a 7:30 a.m. meeting of the General Service Conference Serenity Group, which was chaired by Frances C., South Florida/Bahamas/V.I.

The main focus of the Conference though, is on the

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deliberations of each of the twelve Conference committees, and it is during the committee meetings that the major work of the Conference is done. After a joint meeting with each corresponding standing trustees' committee, the Conference committees review material and recommendations, weigh and discuss various issues and come up with recommendations which may result in Conference Advisory Actions (Highlights of Advisory Actions, p. 3).

This year the Conference Correctional Facilities Committee considered the concept of developing a manuscript for a booklet of former Grapevine articles, that would aid in carrying the message to A.A.s behind the walls. The Cooperation With the Professional Community Committee reviewed a revised manuscript of the pamphlet "Members of the Clergy Ask About A.A." As always, the Conference Literature Committee had a very full agenda. Committee members reviewed a completely revised manuscript of the "The A.A. Group" pamphlet; text and illustrations for an easy-to-read "Twelve Steps Illustrated" pamphlet; and a proposed manuscript for a daily reflections book.

Thursday morning, before the Conference Treatment Facilities Committee presented their report, Conference members viewed a 15-minute film developed by the trustees' T.F. Committee in response to a previous Advisory Action. Entitled "Alcoholics Anonymous: Hope," the film illustrates what A.A. is and is not.

Presentations throughout the week, followed by discussions, addressed: The Importance of the Home Group; Sponsorship; Finance; Self-support; The Ninth International Convention (to be held in Seattle, Washington, July 5-8, 1990); and The General Service Trustee. A report was given by the Ad Hoc Committee on Group Registration and A.A. Directories, as recommended by a 1989 Conference Advisory Action.

Wednesday afternoon the Conference elected two new regional trustees. Marc P. of Iberville, Quebec, will replace Tom H. who will rotate out as Eastern Canada regional trustee. Ruth J., outgoing Pacific U.S. trustee, will be replaced by Greg M. of Kaneohe, Hawaii.

Delegate chairperson of the 1991 General Service Conference will be Vera M., Southwest Ohio; alternate chairperson, John E., Kansas.

After the final committee reports had been given, the resulting Advisory Actions recorded and the final presentation given, the Conference was officially closed Friday afternoon with the Serenity Prayer in three languages, led by Jean-Claude P., Northwest Quebec in French; Juan B., Puerto Rico in Spanish; Betty L., G.S.O. staff in English.

Conference members met once again Saturday morning at the closing brunch, with farewell talks by rotating trustees Bill C., general service trustee; Tom H., Eastern Canada; and Ruth J., Pacific U.S.

Michael Alexander, in the General Service Board Report, Monday morning, said: "The quest for freedom that has dominated world affairs in the past twelve months has profound implications for Alcoholics Anonymous. . . . A.A. has been thrust into world prominence by events over which it has no control and, by those events, has been presented with responsibilities that it cannot ignore. That development brings special significance to this Conference year. Without question, the members of this Conference have a big job ahead of them in the next twelve months. With the grace of God that job will be well done."

And where does that work begin? At the top of the pyramid; in each A.A. member's home group.

Estimates of Groups and Members as of January 1, 1990

	Groups	Members
United States	43,107	896,033
Canada	4,866	82,949
Overseas	38,060 ¹	762,046 ¹
Correctional facilities	1,663 ²	51,553
Internationalists		655
Lone members		598
	<u>87,696</u>	<u>1,793,834</u>

1. At the end of 1989, we had reported members from 72 of the 134 overseas countries with A.A. groups. These totaled 30,359 groups and 634,390 members. To establish an estimate for the 62 countries not yet responding, we excluded the ten largest responding and obtained an average of the balance. This average was applied to the 62 and the overall estimate emerged.

2. U.S. and Canada only.

The estimated group counts in the U.S. and Canada include only those that ask to be listed at G.S.O.; thousands do not.

Among listed groups in the U.S. and Canada, many do not report membership figures. For each nonreporting group, an estimate of membership is arrived at by taking an average among reporting groups within the Conference area concerned. Even among reporting groups, membership figures include only those now active and attending meetings; there is no way to count sober members who no longer have a home group.

1990 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 (Ad Hoc Committee on Group Registration and A.A. Directories)—that the domestic directories be retained as formatted; that directories and group information forms include the long form of Traditions Three and Five.

Agenda—that, in order of preference, the theme for the 1991 Conference be one of the following: Sponsorship: Gratitude in Action; Sponsorship: Our Three Legacies; Sponsorship: The Hand of A.A.

Cooperation With the Professional Community—that the revised pamphlet “Members of the Clergy Ask About Alcoholics Anonymous” be published, with minor changes, once the supply of the old pamphlets is exhausted.

Correctional Facilities—that the trustees’ committee’s recommendation for the development and publication of a collection of correctional facilities stories from previous Grapevines (and other A.A. sources) be approved.

Finance—that no change be made to the newly revised pamphlet, “Self-Supporting Through Our Own Contributions,” which emphasizes the commitment on the part of the individual A.A. member.

Grapevine—that the words “one time trial distribution of complimentary Grapevines to nonsubscribing groups” in 1988 Conference Advisory Action #25 no longer be considered binding.

International Convention—that the 1990 International Convention posters in English, Spanish and French be sold in the registration area as mementos; that the 1991 General Service Conference select three cities for the 2000 International Convention.

Literature—that the manuscript for “The A.A. Group” pamphlet be approved, with minor changes; that the A.A. History book project continue to completion; that the manuscript of the Daily Reflections book be approved, after specific changes.

Policy/Admissions—that a standing committee for central and intergroup offices not be formed at this time, as many of the problems expressed by central offices and intergroups are “home issue” and the doors

of communication need to be opened at the area level.

Public Information—that the trustees’ P.I. Committee consider the feasibility of developing video and television P.S.A.s with the focus on younger A.A. members and all minorities.

Report and Charter—that the Twelve Concepts section of *The A.A. Service Manual* be revised with the short form of the Concepts as the Table of Contents, followed by the long form of the Concepts; that the 1990 *Final Conference Report*, in English, French and Spanish, continue to be distributed “no charge.”

Treatment Facilities—that the film “Hope: Alcoholics Anonymous” be accepted as presented to meet an expressed need from A.A. members carrying the message into treatment facilities; that the film be translated into French and Spanish, and be captioned for the deaf and hearing-impaired alcoholics.

Trustees—that revised text, removing the geographic requirements of the general service trustee, replace the text presently included in *The A.A. Service Manual*.

Bilingual Staff Member Sought for G.S.O.

G.S.O. staff people are members of Alcoholics Anonymous, who carry out rotating assignments and correspond with A.A.s throughout the world on all aspects of recovery and service. Additionally, they represent G.S.O. at A.A. functions throughout the U.S. and Canada and provide the primary staff support for the General Service Board.

Applications are now being sought for a G.S.O. staff position. Fluency in both English and Spanish is required, as well as excellent writing skills in both languages. A minimum of six years’ sobriety is necessary; A.A. service experience will also be a consideration, in addition to the applicant’s willingness to relocate to New York, if necessary. This staff member will rotate into different assignments, but will continue to provide services to the Hispanic A.A. community.

Please send employment and A.A. service resumes, as soon as possible, to: Staff Coordinator, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, N.Y. 10163. Because of the need to fill this position fairly quickly, it will be difficult to review applications received after June 18, 1990.

Reports From G.S.O., the General Service Board, and Trustees' Committees

General Service Board

Trustees' report: Finances of the General Service Office got a lot of attention from the trustees of the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous in the past year. Two years ago the price of literature was reduced by about 25 percent. That caused a deficit for the General Service Office in 1988 and another deficit in 1989.

To cover the deficits, the trustees authorized the withdrawal of \$760,000 from the General Reserve Fund in 1988 and \$1,300,000 in 1989. As a result, the Reserve Fund at the end of 1989 stood at \$6,462,000, equal to about 7.9 months of operating expenses of the General Service Office.

Faced with these facts, the trustees took the only action they could take: they directed that the price of A.A. literature be increased. That has been done.

The trustees also took a good hard look at the proposed General Service Office budget for 1990. For the first time in memory the budget was examined by the trustees' Finance Committee, and virtually by all of the trustees, on a line-by-line basis. The aim was to eliminate any expense that could be safely excluded without diminishing the services rendered by the General Service Office.

The budget process is still under review at this writing. A revised budget will be presented to the trustees during Conference week for their approval. In the interim trustees have appointed an Audit Committee to conduct a review of G.S.O. practices. Through that process the trustees are continuing to search for ways to make G.S.O. ever more efficient, effective and business-like. The computer system, which is about to start up, will contribute significantly to that effort.

The trustees also are continuing to seek ways of achieving closer cooperation with all Conference members throughout the year. In that respect, delegates and trustees attending Regional Forums are convening for informal sharing sessions; the chairpersons of several Conference committees attended the General Service Board weekend last January; minutes of board meetings are being sent to delegates who request them; trustees are encouraged to communicate with delegates, staff members and directors whenever it seems appropriate to do so in terms of Conference matters; and a policy of openness is being observed and fostered at all levels of the General Service Office.

In their work last year, the trustees were mindful of international political developments that were springing up all over the place. The quest for freedom that has

dominated world affairs in the past twelve months has profound implications for Alcoholics Anonymous. Our Fellowship is on the threshold of worldwide service that was just a dream only a few years ago.

Since we last met, representatives of the General Service Office, in the discharge of their responsibilities, have visited Chile, Czechoslovakia, England, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Mexico and Poland. Last year the Big Book and the Twelve and Twelve were translated into Russian and Czech; and the Big Book will be available shortly in Hungarian. Additionally, translations are underway in Arabic, Chinese, Turkish, Hebrew, Polish and Hindi.

The pace of international work at the General Service Office is quickening and expanding. This should be gratifying to all members of A.A. for, in keeping with our stated mission, the hand of A.A. should reach out to all alcoholics who may need it, wherever they may be.

A.A. has been thrust into world prominence by events over which it has no control and, by those events, has been presented with responsibilities that it cannot ignore. That development brings special significance to this Conference year. Without question, the members of this Conference have a big job ahead of them in the next twelve months. With the grace of God that job will be well done.

Michael Alexander
(nonalcoholic) chairperson

A.A. World Services, Inc.

Directors' report: The board met 12 times in 1989, and the following items of significance are highlighted:

- The 1989 budget was examined and approved in January 1989. It was recommended that \$500,000 be moved down from the Reserve Fund to cover the Operating Capital required during 1989. The total budget projected a contributions increase of 7% and an expense increase of approximately 10.8%, creating a shortfall.
- After reviewing the projected cash position through the end of May 1989, which forecasted a negative cash position, we authorized a request to the trustees' Finance Committee to draw \$250,000 from the Reserve Fund, if necessary.
- In October, we undertook a review of anticipated revenue for the balance of 1989, examining contributions and gross profit from sales. Cumulative results for the first nine months of 1989 showed contributions only 2% over the same point for 1988. It was anticipated that contributions for the balance of 1989 and for 1990 would not exceed this 2% trend. An early forecast of

1990 operating expenses combined with this conservative contribution forecast and a desired net excess for all of G.S.O. of approximately \$500,000, required increasing prices of most A.A.W.S. literature to achieve this end. In October, we approved price increases effective January 1, 1990.

• A preliminary 1990 budget was examined and given preliminary approval in December. The final budget forwarded to the trustees' Finance Committee reflected a net operating income of \$675,900, which indicated an increase in operating expenses of 6.8%, as compared to the 1989 projected actual expenses. It also reflected additional cuts in operating expenses and contained recommendations to the trustees and Conference for further cuts amounting to about \$136,500.

• In view of the downward trend in contributions, the Self-support Committee met regularly to discuss ways to reverse this trend. We accepted their recommendation that the board consider the original concept of the five-year plan and define the future role of the committee.

• The computer implementation project moved along on schedule to revised target dates set in December.

• We approved a revised policy on translating the Big Book and Bill W.'s other works.

• We granted the request from the Denmark Literature Committee for \$10,000 to assist them in printing the Big Book under the usual terms.

• We granted permission/did not object to 117 requests to reprint, and three requests to tape-record/videotape from A.A. literature; withheld or objected to 28 requests.

• We priced 13 items, including video tapes and service material.

• Reaffirmed the policy contained in the 1977 Position Paper which explains why the board does not wish to publish study guides.

• Approved producing 1,000, 90-minute tapes at the cost of approximately \$2,830, for the reading disabled.

• We received a request from the Stepping Stones Foundation for a royalty advance in the amount of \$50,000. As there is potential for tax liability on the part of A.A.W.S., which might exceed money we are holding on account of accrued royalties, we agreed to adhere to the original request we had from the executors not to distribute any monies until the tax question is cleared.

• Members of the board were appointed to meet with members of the Audit Committee to review current programs and the direction of major projects.

• Agreed to a long-range planning committee for 1990.

• Forwarded to the board our recommendation for space at the expiration of our lease.

• Toronto, Canada was the site of the fourth A.A. World Services/Intergroup Seminar in November. More than 200 were in attendance, up 20 percent from last year.
Jan W., chairperson

Archives

Trustees' committee: The committee addressed the full range of archival interests: budget development; permission requests to use our collection; overseeing the inclusions of important additions to our holdings. Some of the notable actions were: The design and implementation of a proposal to gather the experiences of former trusted servants and apply these past experiences, in an organized form, to current issues confronting our Fellowship; and revitalizing the "Don't Throw Me Away, I Belong To A.A." Program, to encourage earlytimers and other members to contribute their archivally significant items to local archival centers or to G.S.O.

*John E. King
(nonalcoholic) chairperson*

Archivist's report: Interest in archival matters is running high within our Fellowship. Two small exhibits on our history join the larger, multi-paneled unit in coverage of a range of conventions, round-ups and forums throughout the U.S. and Canada. The addition of a P.C. makes scheduling these items more precise. Soon the computer will save hours of researching time as we place more finding aids, indexes and catalogues into this format. In 1989 our holdings grew markedly. The most important addition was the works of the late Dr. Milton Maxwell, former chairman of the General Service Board and long-time friend of A.A. Many areas report they have begun "History Study" meetings in which *A.A. Comes of Age*, *Dr. Bob and the Good Old-timers*, and *Pass It On* are read and discussed. The study of our history seems to deepen an appreciation of the miraculous wonder of the cohesiveness of our Fellowship.

Frank M.

Conference

Trustees' committee: The committee reviewed suggestions received through the Conference Evaluation Questionnaire, the G.S.O. Post-Conference Sharing Session, and other suggestions and recommended the following:

- That a report/discussion by the Ad Hoc Committee on Group Registration/A.A. Directories be included on the Agenda.
- That other facilities in which to hold the Conference, both within and beyond New York City, be investigated, with agreement

of the Conference members to be obtained before any relocation.

- That a progress report on the upcoming Ninth International Convention be included on the Conference Agenda.

• Reviewed and finalized the Conference Agenda.

- Reaffirmed that we refrain from addressing the same committee agenda topics at consecutive Conferences.

Phil C., chairperson

Staff report: The Conference coordinator is a contact for all Conference members and all those serving on the general service committees in the 91 areas throughout the U.S. and Canada. The responsibilities of this assignment involve coordinating and following through on all arrangements necessary for the Conference. All A.A. members are encouraged to submit suggestions for the agenda. This is usually accomplished through the delegates. All suggestions are presented to the trustees' Conference Committee for discussion, consideration, and referral to appropriate Conference committees. The Conference coordinator serves as secretary of the Conference Agenda Committee and the trustees' Committee on the General Service Conference; corresponds with delegates in preparation for the Conference; works with the general manager and G.S.O. staff in planning and coordinating each phase of the Conference; schedules material for the Conference Manual, Early Bird Edition of *Box 4-5-9* and the *Final Conference Report*.

Eileen G.

Cooperation With the Professional Community

Trustees' committee: The committee reviewed the Professional Exhibit schedule and also proposed that an extra "FS" (smaller) Unit be prepared for area C.P.C. committees for participation in local professional meetings. The revised text of "Members of the Clergy Ask About A.A.," with title change, was recommended to the Conference C.P.C. Committee. The C.P.C. Workbook was reviewed and suggestions were referred to the subcommittee that is working with the Conference C.P.C. Committee to update its contents. Subjects for the *About A.A.* bulletin for 1990-1991 were discussed.

*John Hartley Smith, M.D.
(nonalcoholic) chairperson*

Staff report: The C.P.C. staff person responds to all mail and telephone inquiries from professionals outside the Fellowship. Communication with area, district and central office C.P.C. committees is an ongoing part of the staff assignment; there are approximately 75 area C.P.C. chairpersons listed out of 91 areas, and a total of 833

area, district and central/intergroup office C.P.C. committees. We read minutes of C.P.C. committee meetings and share them with others, and through our bimonthly newsletter *Box 4-5-9*. Information about professional conventions, at which A.A. is scheduled to exhibit, is forwarded to area C.P.C. chairpersons and area delegates. In 1989 A.A.'s exhibits were shown at 26 meetings resulting in more than 1,005 requests for more information about A.A. The mailing list of *About A.A.* has increased to approximately 28,000. The staff member attends meetings of national organizations dealing with alcoholism.

Susan U.

Correctional Facilities

Trustees' committee: The following projects are in progress: Recommendation for a soft-cover book of institutions stories from previous Grapevines was forwarded to the Conference Committee for consideration; the "State of the Nation" survey in the C.F. Workbook is being updated; all material in the Workbook has been reviewed and updating recommended; a tape for beginners is being produced, which will contain several pamphlets recommended for newcomers, and a free tape will be sent to all C.F. chairpersons when available; the easy-to-read pamphlet "Is A.A. for Me?" will be added to the C.F. Workbook.

*Amos E. Reed
(nonalcoholic) chairperson*

Staff report: There are approximately 1,650 correctional facilities groups, served by 700 correctional facilities and institutions chairpersons. The staff member on this assignment answers all correspondence from inmates and C.F. committees and writes approximately 6,000 letters a year. The staff member is also responsible for the correctional facilities section of *Box 4-5-9*. A.A. inmates frequently contact the C.F. desk for help bringing "outside" A.A.s to share in prison meetings. Correctional Correspondence Service, which provides a vital link between "outside" A.A.s and members on the "inside" is coordinated by the staff member on this assignment.

Betty L.

Finance

Trustees' committee: A review of 1989's operations was highlighted by several key items. The first and most important, was the fact that we incurred not only an operating loss of \$69,700, but a total deficit of \$1,204,800, which included 1989's portion of the computer acquisition project of \$507,400. This was due to: contributions were less than budgeted; gross profit from

