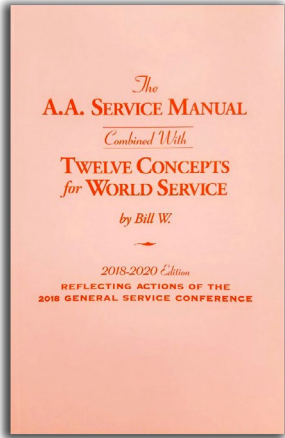


The 71st General Service Conference Report



A.A. In a Time of Change was the theme of this year's 71st General Service Conference. And what a Conference it was. Begun in 1951 by Bill W. as a way to put the Groups in charge of Alcoholics Anonymous, the General Service Conference

has shaped A.A. for the past 70 years. So what sort of 'shaping' will Alcoholics Anonymous undergo in the near future?

The work done this year was like no other Conference in history. After last year's truncated Conference (4 days) and its rather paltry number (16) of Advisory Actions, this year's Conference came roaring out of the gate to the tune of 49 Recommendations which resulted in 46 Advisory Actions.

Some of the more talked-about things to look for in the near future are the revised A.A. Preamble, which will now state a 'Fellowship of People,' the 5th Edition of the Big Book (which will probably take 4 years or so), the completely revised A.A. Service Manual (due out this Fall), and a plain language translation of the 4th Edition of the Big Book.

The Preamble is probably the lightning rod of the group. Area 61 was split down the middle at our Pre-Conference Assembly and through our polls. As one of the 132 voting members of the Conference, I voted in favor of the change. Although I feel welcome in A.A. there are those who don't feel like they belong. And if the change to the word 'people' saves one life from the misery of active alcoholism to a life of recovery, we will have done our job as a Conference. The final vote was 90 in favor and 38 against, a substantial unanimity of agreement. We always strive for substantial unanimity (2/3 vote) at the Conference where the hand of God shows up in our Group Conscience and that's what happened here.

Work on the 5th Edition of the Big Book will begin shortly. There will be no changes to the first 164 pages. There will be a new Foreword, an updated Preface, some new stories in the back and

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(overdue) updates to Appendices III (The Medical View On A.A.) & V (The Religious View On A.A.). But again, THE FIRST 164 PAGES WILL NOT BE TOUCHED. The final vote on this one was 97 – 31 in favor.

The new Service Manual is fabulous! Completely rewritten, with a slant towards the newcomer in General Service, it is reader-friendly and it flows beautifully. There are Frequently Asked Questions at the end of each chapter as well as space for notes. There's color, there are side tabs, and I loved being part of the Report & Charter Committee which had direct input into this Edition. The Publishing Dept at A.A. World Services were very gracious in implementing tons of suggestions from me and all the folks on our Committee. So I was a part of the production of this book and I'm so grateful for that.

And then there's the plain language adaptation of the Big Book. This one passed 110-19. When I first heard this idea about six years ago, I was a little leery of it. However, I've come to understand that this is an accessibility issue for some folks. 40% of the people in prison have a reading disability. 10% of ALL adults have a reading disability. This book could be the difference for recovery for some of them and, again, if one person is helped by this action, we will have done our job. And it's not a new or radical idea, as there are books of this nature

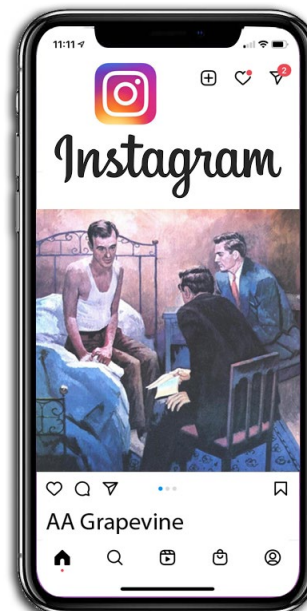
about the 12 Steps on the market already. We felt that, instead of having books out there interpreting our message and putting it into their words, we should put our message into our words so that our message stays intact.

Also, a new 4th Edition Spanish Big Book, a newly revised LinkedIn page, and an Instagram page for Grapevine are on the immediate horizon. And now, should they choose to, Virtual Groups will be listed as part of the General Service structure, instead of being automatically placed in the Online Inter-group pool with no GSR and no Group representation. So Virtual Groups will now be embraced in the General Service structure instead of being looked at as an outside entity.

So that's a snapshot of what happened at the 8-day long Conference. We worked long and hard for the good of A.A. as a whole, finally ending at 2:14 AM on a Sunday morning (maybe it was 9 days?). So, once again the theme for this year's Conference - A.A. In a Time Of Change. I believe we more than lived up to the theme with broad, sweeping changes all across the board. It was a very long week with lots of preparation ahead of time (1467 pages of background material to be digested) but in the end I am so grateful to be serving as Delegate for RI, and I would gladly – eagerly – do the whole thing again if I had to.

Any questions or comments can be sent to areadelegate@aainri.com

With Eternal Gratitude,
Steve



"YOU WANT TO GO WHERE EVERYBODY KNOWS YOUR NAME"

(Or at least your first name)

Coronavirus has disrupted our lives, as well as altered AA; that being said, we have survived!

The fellowship has adapted, but now we need to measure what we have learned.

The use of Zoom likely saved many lives, as well as opened new paths for us to share with others, but at what cost?

I was told by those before me--the importance of the newcomer, how the newcomer is crucial to the continuance of our fellowship.

If AA closed the doors tomorrow, many of us would continue to meet in our homes, Dunkin Donuts and even church basements following the same principles as we currently share. How then do we make sure that the unity we share continues on?

What of the person struggling and beaten by alcoholism? Where would they go?

As a sponsor of a young person, whom I met at an outdoor meeting; has stayed sober for 8 months and has formed relationships with 4 other newcomers, all staying close to meetings, IN PERSON, and through a connection with their Higher Power as well as each other.

So the question still needing an answer is: What has Zoom done for AA and what has it done to AA?

Certainly being able to share with others from around the world has been exciting. Learning that AA fellowship principles work just as well in Ireland, France or wherever. That homebound members can now continue to have a meeting as long as they have a cell phone or computer is a bonus.

As we transition back, we as a fellowship may want to take an inventory of same. Revisit the principles founded in our Traditions.

I first think of anonymity and how that has been put aside. Yes, we had the option of hiding our faces and offering a different name on Zoom, but that felt uncomfortable to many; so we trusted the protection of a PW; however, the PW on Zoom was easily compromised and so we exposed our identity.

Singleness of purpose continues to be lessened.

Bill W. reminds us that we cannot be all things to all people, and yet during this time I have heard folks from GA (Gamblers Anonymous) sharing at meetings. I sat through a lecture by a member of NA (Narcotics Anonymous) at an AA meeting who felt AA has some responsibility to the dry addicts who return to their drug of choice. I've listened to comments about politics and cringe while people try to bring outside issues to AA.

Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of MEN AND WOMEN, alcoholics banding with each other to solve their common problem, ALCOHOLISM.

Bill suggests that it is our ego that promotes us to save the world.

Many groups have splintered and now have had to adjust their sails to accommodate the immediate needs. We have Zoom, telephone and some outdoor meetings, all which have served a purpose, and now some of these groups have decided to continue, which is great; except are they informed? Are they aware that while they are autonomous, they also have a responsibility to AA as a whole? Each group must be self-supporting, as well as assisting in the support to the entities serving AA.

I know of a member who said, "I don't believe I should pay for my sobriety" and refuses to contribute when the collections are made.

Have we through this pandemic become so separated that we forgot the BASIC principles that

have helped us survive for over 85 years? Are we neglecting our responsibility to the new person coming into AA?

Group unity in earlier years--when someone objected to what their group was doing, often it would be suggested that they want to "take a coffee pot and start your own meeting", hence many a meeting was started due to resentments. A fellow alcoholic suggested that we are better off staying with the group and working towards resolving our differences when the group goes astray.

We have provisions for the minority voice to be heard, yet sometimes the minority voice feels stifled for fear of being labeled and rejected by the group. Questioning the group has become hazardous.

I think an inventory by the groups, the Area and AA as a whole is in order, but most of all perhaps we ought to start with our own inventory.

CHEERS!

Cliff C., Past Delegate, Panel 36

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