

Delegate's Report  
61<sup>st</sup> General Service Conference  
May 1 – 7, 2011

The 61<sup>st</sup> General Service Conference was held at the Crowne Plaza Times Square Hotel May 1-7, 2011. The conference body was composed of the 93 delegates representing the U.S. & Canada, 27 Trustees, AAWS and Grapevine Directors and 15 GSO & Grapevine Staff members. Total size of the conference voting body this year was 135. Also in attendance were various non-voting personnel and special guests, including trustees emeriti, French & Spanish interpreters, and four guests from the service structures in Peru and Great Britain. Our conference materials stated that *“Every Conference member has not only a vote but a voice; not only a right but a responsibility to express his or her views.”* This was evident throughout the week as staff, trustees, directors and delegates all thoroughly discussed and voted on matters affecting our worldwide fellowship as a whole.

The Conference opened Sunday with a welcome from Ward Ewing, Class A Chairman of the General Service Board and a roll call by Phyllis H., General Manager of GSO. Outgoing SW Regional Trustee Conley B. gave the keynote address. After an overview of some conference mechanics and rules, Jo-Anne L., Trustee-at-Large Canada, gave a report on the 21<sup>st</sup> World Service Meeting held last October in Mexico City with the theme of *“Sponsorship: Our Responsibility.”* The conference then convened for delegate orientation luncheons where the delegates met with their regional trustees. Following a presentation on *“Diversity in AA,”* the rest of the afternoon was devoted to joint Trustee and Conference Committee meetings between with the delegates and the trustees serving on their corresponding standing committees.

It is traditional at every conference to have an opening dinner and AA meeting in the ballroom on Sunday night, with various guests invited to attend. Five conference members shared their abbreviated personal stories of recovery with the audience, which consisted of current and past conference members and their guests.

On Monday the conference continued with committee meetings, board reports, sharing sessions and Area Highlights from the Panel 61 delegates. The final event was a Presentation/Discussion on *“An Informed Group Conscience: The Voice of AA”* followed by a *“What’s on Your Mind?”* Sharing Session. Tuesday’s agenda was very similar, with the exception of an afternoon trip to the GSO/Grapevine Offices. A Delegate Dinner and Delegates Only Meeting were held that evening.

On Wednesday, breakout session workshops were held on *“How to Increase Participation in AA—Striving for Self-Support in all our Affairs.”* Wednesday afternoon we held the elections for new Regional and At-Large Trustees. Election results were:

SW Regional Trustee:	Clayton V., Area 38 Eastern MO
NE Regional Trustee:	Gary L., Area 59 Eastern PA
Trustee-at-Large Canada:	Barb K., Eastern Canada

On Wednesday evening after dinner, the conference began to hear Committee Reports. Each Standing Conference Committee reported their Recommendations, which were followed by discussion and voting, plus “Additional Considerations”, which were not open for discussion. Recommendations which were passed became “Advisory Actions” for the various Boards, GSO & Grapevine Staff, Trustees and Ad-Hoc Committees to implement throughout the year. In this respect, the Conference is really a year long process, culminating with the annual week-long meeting held each spring in New York. Most Advisory Actions are reported back to the next General Service Conference via progress reports and additional agenda items. Some Advisory Actions will not be fully implemented until they’ve been discussed and voted on by several conference bodies. This is especially true of revisions to our literature or policies.

Some of the highlights from this year’s conference were:

- **The eBook Initiative**—A presentation was given on the new “app” GSO is developing which will enable digital downloading of the *Big Book* and *Twelve Steps & Twelve Traditions* onto iPads, iPods and iPhones, with a new projected rollout date of October 2011. The free app will give the purchaser a choice of two options: purchasing AA’s eBooks from an existing iTunes account or directly from AAWS via a link to our new online “eStore”. Under the current contract, when purchased through iTunes, 30% of the book’s purchase price will go to Apple, Inc. Purchasing through AAWS will not result in any third-party fees. This digital delivery system will enable AAWS to control the publishing, distribution, copyrights and pricing of AA’s eBook content. Apple currently has 300,000 digital apps available. Pricing of our eBooks has yet to be determined. Digital infrastructure costs are estimated at \$400K over a two-year period
- **Financial Support & Re-structuring of The Grapevine, Inc.**—The current state of the Grapevine Magazine, our “meeting in print,” dominated much of the discussion at this year’s conference. A recommendation passed which would allow the AA Grapevine, Inc. to utilize digital channels for the sale and distribution of the GV magazine, books and products, in a similar fashion to AAWS. While only 4.5% of our membership currently subscribes to the Grapevine, the recent GV Survey indicated that 97% of the fellowship wants to keep the magazine. Digital Grapevine sales will cut operating expenses and coincide with more aggressive “engagement” (aka marketing) to help the Grapevine become self supporting. The GV Budget in 2010 resulted in a net loss of \$394,335. This was a result of the Grapevine, Inc.’s “drawdown” from the Reserve Fund of \$588,000. (Traditionally the Reserve Fund is only used for “extraordinary expenses.”) In an effort to combat the financial woes of the Grapevine, the GV office staff has been reduced, a new Executive Publisher, Ami B., has been hired, and an overall re-structuring of the GV business model has begun. So far, belt-tightening and cuts have resulted in a 60% reduction in the projected deficit—\$94,000—for 2011. *75% of the Grapevine’s gross profits come from magazine subscriptions.* An agenda item requesting the GV be allowed to accept contributions resulted in a “No Action” from the GV Committee.

- **Intellectual Properties/Loss of Copyright on Twelve Concepts**—We continue to struggle with the loss of copyrights to our “intellectual properties” such as the Twelve Concepts. Though originally reported in the 2007 Final Conference Report, it was news to many of us that, back in 1990, we had lost the copyright on the original 1962 version of the Twelve Concepts. Many conference members expressed dismay that, despite being repeatedly assured that there are safeguards in place to prevent future copyright losses, AAWS continues to overlook copyright renewals which “slip through the cracks.” Phyllis H. reported that an ad hoc committee has been formed to review all of our intellectual properties and will also work to create a policy on copyrighting. A part-time staff member has been hired to further research pending copyright renewals.
- **The “Spirituality” Pamphlet**— Over the years several requests have come through the conference structure for development of literature focusing on atheists and agnostics in AA. At the 60<sup>th</sup> GSC a Floor Action was passed to “develop literature which focuses on spirituality that includes stories from atheists and agnostics who are successfully sober in Alcoholics Anonymous.” The Literature Committee reviewed the progress report on the pamphlet, including a draft introduction, and recommended that the Trustees’ Literature Committee continue to develop such literature, expressing “support for the trustees’ efforts to develop a pamphlet which reflects the wide range of spiritual experiences of AA members.” A friendly amendment to the recommendation resulted in deleting the word “successfully” from the motion, since the conference felt the term could not be satisfactorily defined. This recommendation passed. A separate agenda item requesting that the committee reconsider the 2010 Advisory Action to develop such literature was thoroughly reviewed, with the committee unanimously agreeing to “take no action.”
- **GSB Procedure for Concept V Appeals to the General Service Conference**— The Policy/Admissions Committee recommendation to establish a written procedure drafted by the General Service Board for the submission of Concept V minority appeals to the Conference was passed. This was primarily a result of the minority appeal submitted by several trustees during Panels 57/58, which many felt did not receive due process. That minority appeal ultimately resulted in the resignation of then General Manager Greg M. The new procedure clearly defines how a minority appeal should be filed, stating that the appeal, along with a minority report and any background materials, must be received in writing 30 days prior to the General Service Conference. *The Concept V appeals process only applies to those members below the General Service Conference level on the inverted triangle of our service structure; that is staffs, committees, corporate boards or trustees.* The Report & Charter Committee recommended the GSB develop similar text to add to Article III in the current Conference Charter found in our Service Manual, which could possibly apply to other members within the fellowship.

- **Reduced Slate of Directors on the Grapevine Board**—One of the most hotly contested items concerned the General Service Board’s decision to leave two vacancies on the Grapevine board unfilled. Both positions would have been non-trustee directors, and candidates had already applied and been interviewed prior to the decision being made. By charter, the GV Board consists of 7-10 directors, but traditionally consists of nine. The outgoing GV Board Chair and an outgoing general service trustee and past GV board member were most vocal in their opposition to the proposed slate. The proposed slate was passed by the conference 92-34. A motion to reconsider failed by one vote. *Overall, it appeared that lack of communication between the AAWS Board and the Grapevine Board had been the primary source of this conflict, and the two corporate boards were encouraged and admonished by the delegates to improve their levels of communication and cooperation with each other.*
- **Clearer Financial Reporting**—The power point presentation/financial report given by Class A Trustee Terry Bedient, who chairs the Finance and Budgetary Committees, resulted in some confusion and what appeared to some to be conflicting information. A request for further clarification resulted in additional financial statement handouts on the GV’s proposed budget and a cash flow summary supplied by Ami B. which included several scenarios dependent on the level of marketing implemented in 2011. Incoming GV Chair Don M. and various staff members pointed out that many of the projections were dependent on actions voted on by the conference, and that the entire publishing industry is in a state of flux. As requested, the financial power point presentation was emailed to all delegates immediately following the conference.

A partial list of Advisory Actions and Additional Considerations will be included in the May mailing of Box 4-5-9 and a complete listing will appear in the final conference report, which will be mailed out in July and distributed at our area assembly.

This was a tremendous experience for me and a great learning opportunity. I found it comforting that the General Service Conference is much like our own area assembly, only on a larger scale. All voices are heard, and all issues are thoroughly debated until the conference is satisfied that it has reached substantial unanimity, and therefore the effective conscience of our entire fellowship through “one ultimate authority--a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience.” Our leaders are indeed but trusted servants, and all of us must answer to the groups and the membership at large which we serve, all the way from the Chairman of the General Service Board to the delegates, trustees, directors and staff members at GSO and the Grapevine. What an incredible privilege to have served you all at the 61<sup>st</sup> General Service Conference. You have my heartfelt thanks and gratitude for this honor, and I hope to continue to earn your trust throughout the rest of this rotation.

In ongoing love and service to the One who presides over us all,

Your delegate,  
 Laura V.  
 Panel 61, Area 38