

April 2017

General Service Board Report

Terrance B., Chair of the General Service Board

Greetings and welcome to the 67th General Service Conference, especially to those who are attending for the first time. This week, as we put the Conference plan into action, we will be addressing a wide range of agenda items that have arisen throughout the Fellowship in the U.S. and Canada. Ours is the structure this week -- and, indeed, throughout the entire year -- that takes the place of government in A.A., that insures that the full voice of A.A. will be heard, whether it represents the great majority or a minority. This Conference plan was established 67 years ago as a guarantee that our movement-wide services would continue to function under all conditions, providing a practical successor to our beloved co-founders.

Thus, we are embarking together on a spiritual adventure this week, under the theme "Supporting Our Future" -- a theme with particular relevance as we focus on what lies ahead for the Fellowship, keeping firmly in our hearts and minds the lessons of the past and the requirements of the present.

The General Service Board has met four times since our last Conference: for the annual members meeting in April, and quarterly board meetings in August, November and February, and as I review some of the highlights of those meetings, I would also like to call your attention to the in-depth reports of the 11 trustees' Committees that appear in your Conference Manuals and will provide greater detail into the work we have undertaken throughout the year.

Following the 2016 General Service Conference, the General Service Board welcomed two new Class A Trustees, Christine C. and Nancy Mc., along with three new Class B trustees: Carole B., general service trustee; Tom A., West Central regional trustee; and Cate W., Western Canada regional trustee. At the end of this year's Conference four trustees will rotate: general service trustee Bill N.; East Central regional trustee Bill F.; Southeast regional trustee Chet P.; trustee-at-large/U.S. Bob W.; and myself, a Class A trustee. We are grateful for the dedication, self-sacrifice and tireless service these trustees have exhibited on behalf of the Fellowship. Sadly, we also note the passing of Joe D., general service trustee and recent chair of A.A.W.S., Inc. Gratefully, we were able to hold two memorials for Joe, recognizing his service and contributions both at the A.A.W.S. meeting in January and at the January General Service Board weekend. Graciously, Richard B., Eastern Canada regional trustee, will serve on the A.A.W.S. Board for an additional year to fill the vacancy left by Joe's death.

New trustee slates of corporate officers will be presented later in the week, for disapproval if any, and we are happy to be putting forward the name of Michele G., Class A, to succeed me as chairperson of the General Service Board. Michele is

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familiar to many of us in her prior time on the Board and we look forward gratefully to the service which is still to come.

On the G.S.O. front, a number of longtime A.A.W.S. employees retired in 2016: order entry manager Andrea B. after 38 years; managing editor Eleanor W. after 34 years; contributions clerk Winsome R. after 29 years; accounts receivable clerk Lauren R. after 26 years; staff member Mary Clare L. after 13 years; and staff assistant Nadine B. after 8 years. To these we express our gratitude and best wishes as they move on to new endeavors.

Additionally, early in 2017, GSO's longtime controller, Don M., retired at the end of February after more than 35 years of devoted service to the Fellowship, providing critical financial information and support to the A.A. World Services, A.A. Grapevine and General Service Boards and offering consistent guidance in every aspect of the Fellowship's finances.

The last year also saw a number of promotions, reorganizations and new hires. Among these, Albin Z., former general service trustee, came on board at the end of 2016 as G.S.O.'s director of administration and staff services; Bob S. was promoted to director of finance and accounting; Malini S. stepped into the new position of publishing operations manager; and Ames S. was hired as G.S.O. managing editor.

The past year has also marked the first full year of Grapevine's relocation to the 11th floor at 475 Riverside Drive, as the G.S.O./Grapevine co-location project has moved through a series of construction phases, with completion expected in 2017.

The Grapevine Board has spent time over the past year doing strategic planning, continuing to develop organization-wide subscription outreach plans and programs and integrating new technology, always with the intention of finding new ways to reach the Fellowship. Carrying the A.A. message through Grapevine and La Viña remains the focus of the Board and staff, and over the past year the two magazines have highlighted the experience, strength and hope of individual members on such important topics as: atheist and agnostic A.A. members, remote communities, emotional sobriety, letting go of resentments, making amends and having a home group. Grapevine recently published a new collection titled "Our Twelve Traditions," in both print and eBook formats, and 2016 marked the 20th anniversary of La Viña, an event celebrated throughout the U.S. and Canada.

Since the 2016 General Service Conference, Regional Forums have been held in the Eastern Canada, Western Canada, Pacific and Southeast regions. The final "Additional" Forum was held for the Southwest Region in Denver, Colorado, and the Western Canada Regional Forum included a small celebration to mark the 200th Forum since their inception in 1975. Over 1,800 enthusiastic A.A. members participated, including more than 1,000 first-time attendees who learned more about the General Service Board, General Service Office and A.A. Grapevine.

On the international front, the 24th World Service Meeting was held October 23-27, 2016 in Rye Brook, New York with the theme “One World, One A.A., One Language of the Heart.” In attendance were 60 delegates representing 41 countries or linguistic zones, including two countries attending for the first time, Paraguay and Slovakia. Representing our General Service Board was first-term delegate Scott H., trustee-at-large/Canada, and second-term delegate Bob W., trustee-at-large/U.S. G.S.O. general manager Greg T. presided, staff member Mary C. served as W.S.M. coordinator, G.S.B. chair Terry B. offered opening and closing presentations, and staff members Racy J., Steve S. and Clay R. acted as committee secretaries. The Trustees recognize that the W.S.M. has a significant impact on the unity of A.A. and on the effectiveness of our Twelve Step efforts.

In 2016 trustees and staff members visited the 37th Central American Convention, the German General Service Conference and Costa Rica’s 38th National Conference Meeting. Tentative international travel for 2017 includes the Cuban General Service Conference, the Barbados 55th Anniversary, the 6th National Convention of A.A. Peru, the 13th National Convention of A.A. Bolivia and the Zonal Meetings (Asia-Oceania Service Meeting, European Service Meeting, Sub-Saharan Africa Service Meeting and the REDELA – Meeting of the Americas).

Since the 66th General Service Conference, the General Service Board has held three General Sharing Sessions, which have covered the topics, “Communication,” “A.A. Unity – Our Common Welfare,” and “Trust, Authority and Reliability.”

The most recent sharing session took place as part of the January 2017 Board weekend, where the General Service Board welcomed Conference committee chairpersons and the Conference delegate chair to the General Service Board weekend, as it has since 1991. During the weekend, delegate committee chairpersons attended an orientation at G.S.O., met with their committee staff secretaries, and participated in sessions of corresponding trustees’ committees. The practice of inviting Conference committee chairs continues to benefit the Conference process in helping delegate chairs fulfill their responsibilities to the Conference and to A.A. as a whole.

Planning for the next International Convention in Detroit, Michigan in 2020 is gaining steam, and the Board has been addressing a number of questions focused on improving the effectiveness and overall experience of the Convention, reviewing past practices and making our best estimates for the future.

The objectives of the International Convention are:

- To provide opportunities for a rededication of attendees to the primary purpose of A.A.
- To enable attendees to witness the success and growth of the A.A. program around the world.
- To let the world know that A.A. is alive, flourishing and available as a community resource, locally and internationally.

And so, with gratitude we look forward to Detroit in 2020, and to Vancouver, British Columbia in 2025.

One additional item I'd like to draw your attention to comes from the report of the trustees' Committee on Corrections, reflecting work done both in the Fellowship and through our committee structure.

The video "A New Freedom" -- approved at the 66th General Service Conference and the culmination of a tremendous amount of hard work throughout the Fellowship -- has been quite well-received. In addition to making the video widely available through our many local, district and area Corrections Committees, we have been monitoring the number of online views on aa.org, with the number reaching 856,770 for 2016 -- well beyond 2016 numbers for the video, "A.A. in Correctional Facilities." We're also happy to report recent progress made with the governmental agency Corrections Canada to reach members behind the walls in Canadian prisons and ongoing efforts to expand the Corrections Correspondence Service (C.C.S.) in Canada, along with additional efforts being made throughout the Fellowship in carrying the message to Native American/First Nations people both in tribal jails and other correctional facilities in the U.S. and Canada. We look forward, as well, to another exciting development in 2017 -- the first National Corrections Conference to be held in November in St. Louis.

Much of the board's focus over the past year has been on our current and projected financial position as a spiritual Fellowship, and the Board's treasurer, David Morris will provide an in-depth look at where we currently stand. The Seventh Tradition remains a cornerstone in any and all discussions about finance, and as we try to plot a stable fiscal course through the years ahead, its continuing importance cannot be overstated.

In 2016, the trustees approved a Strategic Plan. Titled simply "Serving the Fellowship," the Strategic Plan outlines the mission, vision and actions which will be taken by the General Service Board in fulfilling its responsibility to serve the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous. At the July 2016 Board Weekend, the trustees began prioritizing the forty action processes of the Strategic Plan. Thirteen processes were assigned level 1 priority, twenty were assigned level 2 priority, seven were assigned level 3 priority, and three were assigned level 4 priority. Each level 1 priority was assigned a start date, a progress report date and a completion target. At the January 2017 Board Weekend, the trustees reviewed progress on the thirteen priority 1 processes, determining that one was finalized with further action declined by the A.A.W.S. Board. In July, the trustees will receive progress reports on the remainder of the priority 1 action processes.

These, then, are just some of the highlights of a very active year -- a year which has brought the future into greater focus and which culminates in the discussions that will take place here this week as we search for an informed group conscience on the many matters before us.

And so, as we begin our work, let us reaffirm our commitment to carrying A.A.'s lifesaving message. The General Service Conference is a gift passed on to us, and each of us has an obligation to keep the doors of A.A. open to those who so desperately need it – now and in the future – no matter who or where they are or what their background is. Our resolve to communicate effectively with each other and to bring forward what is best for the future of A.A. should be our guidepost and a measure of our success this week.

I look forward to an extremely productive and rewarding week. I sincerely thank you for the opportunity to serve this Fellowship.

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