

66th General Service Conference Delegate's Report

My name is Larry M. and I am an alcoholic. I am also humbled and blessed to be your Panel 66 Area 78 AB/NT Delegate. From April 17-24, 2016, I had the privilege of representing Area 78 at the 66th General Service Conference held at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in New York City. The theme of the 66th General Service Conference was "Our Spiritual Way of Life: Steps, Traditions and Concepts."

One of the last things that Bill W. and Dr. Bob agreed on before Dr. Bob died was the need for a General Service Conference to provide final and ultimate authority to the groups themselves for the future of our Fellowship.

Page S20 of our A.A. Manual states: "...We may not need a General Service Conference to ensure our own recovery. We do need it to ensure the Recovery of the alcoholic who still stumbles in the darkness one short block from this room. We need it to ensure the recovery of a child being born tonight, destined for alcoholism. We need it to provide, in keeping with our Twelfth Step, a permanent haven for all alcoholics who, in the ages ahead, can find in A.A. that rebirth that brought us back to life."

I have been asked by several people if attending the Conference was spiritual experience. There was nothing of an earth shattering profound single experience but it was a series of many uplifting, enlightening and rewarding mix of spiritual events. For me, the Conference wasn't just a series of meetings – it was a spiritual journey that connected me with the whole of AA and more importantly, I believe it helped me to be a better Trusted Servant. Throughout the week I felt I was being guided by the principles of love, tolerance, humility and respect

I left the Conference with a feeling of fulfillment. I have a greater passion and love for this fellowship and I developed a greater compassion, empathy, respect and acceptance of the feelings and ideas of others. I rediscovered that together we can make a difference and that we all have a part to play in making sure this Fellowship is there for future generations. I have experienced a great feeling of being at peace with myself and I found a quiet serenity that can only come from walking along a spiritual pathway. I hope I have become more tolerant, patient, caring, understanding and loving.

The Conference proceedings were a gruelling seven days of meetings that started early and ended late. Meetings were even conducted during most meals. Even though it was go, go, go for the whole week, I felt I quickly became so connected with Conference activities I rarely felt distracted or exhausted. Since I am an easily distracted individual, this was quite unusual for me. Mind you, I completely crashed for two days upon my return home.

I thank the members of Area 78 for the fruit basket that you lovingly sent to my hotel room. The fruit was a welcomed refreshing snack both late night after a hectic long day and in the morning when I was rushing to get ready for the day's events. Thank you so much for your kindness, generosity and thoughtfulness.

I made it a point to sit with different people at each session and during each luncheon and dinner. It gave me a chance to interact with people from all over the Conference area. Sharing our Area experiences was

in itself enriching. Our cultures, ethnicity, geography, language, economic status were varied, but all 134 Conference members shared a common spiritual focus – the good of A.A. To witness and experience the passion and love for AA that was shared amongst us was in indeed spiritual. I absorbed so much about service throughout this fellowship and interacted with so many marvellous trusted servants whose love and friendship I will cherish forever.

Throughout the week, many opinions and ideas were shared before a decision was made. Everyone was allowed to share freely and their comments were received with respect and dignity. There was no derision or put downs. At times the debate was heated between opposing views but decisions made were accepted without resentment, animosity or anger. I could feel the spiritual qualities of love and tolerance and sacrifice that were so prevalent throughout the entire Conference. Discussions stayed within the confines of the Conference and Committee meetings and issues were never discussed outside these rooms.

It was a powerful experience to witness as the minority voice brought new thought and direction to deliberations. On three occasions the minority voice brought discussion back to the floor and on two of these the vote on the recommendation was reversed. The right to reconsider through the minority voice is so very significant in a making sure that discussion and deliberations are thorough and that everyone has to express their thoughts openly and with respect. This thoroughness makes sure that decisions are made by the Conference only after all alternatives are examined.

I heard some interesting comments at the Conference. Here are a few.

- It doesn't matter how the donkey got in the ditch but what we can do about it.
- Tolerance is the key to unity
- Instead of trying what you suggested, why don't we try a spiritual solution?
- Mahalo palenta 'ole (Hawaiian for Gratitude Beyond Measure)
- It takes two years to make instant coffee in AA
- Responding to the need to remove the term "Special Needs" -- I am an alcoholic who is blind; just like you are an alcoholic who is bald
- Once we share with each other, we care about each other
- Alcohol did not make me do things – my character defects made me do things
- We have to fish where the fish are
- Open arms, open hearts and open minds."
- Delegates are heirs of Bill and Bob.
- You/we can't break AA.
- Please help me.
- Oh my god, I can't believe this is real. I'm at the center of AA.
- You can pretend to care but you can't pretend to show up.'
- Some ask why does AA do things so slowly? Answer – we don't do things well fast.
- Good is the enemy of the best but sometimes perfection is the enemy of progress
- If we screw something up at this Conference, the next Conference will fix it

I arrived two days early so I could participate in some pre-Conference activities. I attended the weekly Friday morning AA meeting at the General Service Office where I shared in the laughter and comradery that filled the meeting room with a heartwarming atmosphere of being happy, joyous and free.

Following the meeting several Delegates went on a two-hour boat cruise around Manhattan. The tour was great but what stood out most was the feeling of love for one another that grew out the laughter and joy as we got to know each other on a more personal level.

On the Saturday we spent the day at Stepping Stones. This was the property that Bill W. and his wife Lois lived in from 1941 until their passing in 1971 and 1988 respectively. It was here that they nurtured the AA and Al-Anon programs and today continues to nurture those new to recovery along with those celebrating long-term sobriety. I won't go into details in this report of what I saw, but suffice it to say; for me it was a spiritual walk into part of our AA heritage. On the trip to Stepping Stones the bus was noisy but on the way back to New York there was barely a spoken word. I wondered if the others were feeling as I was –at peace with myself – truly something wondrous had happened within to me while there.

On Saturday afternoon I attended the 1728 AA meeting. This Meeting was started several years ago at the request of one of our past Class A Trustees who was hoping for more sharing between Class A's and AA members concerning the 12 Steps, 12 Traditions, and 12 Concepts. 12X12X12=1728.

It was at this 1728 AA meeting that I had the opportunity to speak with Leonard Blumenthal a Class A Trustee Emeritus who was a Chairman of the General Service Board and is still highly respected in the Fellowship. He attends the Conference every year as a guest. Leonard lives a few miles from my home in Devon and we had bumped in to each other over the years when he was the director of the now defunct Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (AADAC) and oversaw the formation of the provincial treatment centres such as Henwood and the Lander Centre. All Panel 66 Delegates are assigned a Panel 65 Conference Buddy. I met mine but we never really connected. Leonard took me under his wing and he became my unofficial Conference Buddy. In those seven days, I learned so much from him about the Conference and the roles of the Trustees, all interspersed with tidbits about his experiences as a Class A Trustee and as the AADAC director. I was spiritually enriched by the bond we formed in those seven days. On a side note, without knowing it, my wife connected with Leonard's wife during the week and they too formed a bond of friendship.

The Remote Communities Meeting followed the 1728 AA meeting. Since Remote Communities is not a Conference Committee those interested attend a meeting prior to the Conference. Very quickly, a connection was made amongst those in the packed room whose Areas experience the challenge of carrying the message to the alcoholic who are remote by geography, ethnicity and linguistics. Yury, one of the guests from Ukraine was in my sharing group and it was enlightening to hear of the special remote challenges facing his country. Over the course of the Conference, Yury and I developed a closeness which I will cherish forever. At the end of the meeting Jim C. from Area 84 Eastern Ontario and myself were selected to chair next year's Remote Communities meeting.

During the week there were two Delegates only meetings. The first one focussed on helpful tips to Panel 66 Delegates. The second meeting, later in the week, was an opportunity for the Panel 66 Delegates to share and ask questions.

The Delegates also met by region twice during the week. The four Western Canada Region Delegates discussed items of mutual concern which included the 2016 Forum in Kamloops, B.C.; 2017 WRAASA in Winnipeg; the election for the Western Canada Regional Trustee and the status of the two lawsuits against the General Service Board. Since there was not a Western Canada Regional Trustee, Scott H. the Trustee at Large for Canada chaired our meetings. These meetings also fostered a strong bond between the four western Areas and their Delegates, Jennifer, Ian and myself.

There were also three presentation topics:

- Connecting with the Newcomer
- Connecting with Each Other and
- Connecting with AA as Whole.

Throughout the week were three sets of presentations followed by discussion on each of these topics. These nine presentations covered a wide range of AA experience and generated a great deal of discussion.

The Conference began on Sunday with roll call. The 134 voting and participating Conference members were composed of 93 Delegates, 25 Trustees, AAWS and Grapevine Directors and 16 General Service and Grapevine Staff. Every voting member is equal and no person or group is in authority over another.

The Average age of the Conference members was 57, the oldest was 76, the youngest was 33. Average length of sobriety was 22 years, the longest sobriety was 50 years and the shortest was 9 years. Average length of service was 17 years, the longest 49 and the shortest 6.

The silence in the room during roll call was deafening as the name of each Conference member's name was called and you to reply with either "here" or "present". We were all individuals responding but through this roll call we were bonded into one single body united for a common purpose - the good of AA.

Each Conference session began and closed, with an inspirational reading from AA approved literature. I found this to be a peaceful moment for personal reflection – an excellent way to start and end the day.

At the Conference opening, the General Service Board Chair, Terry B.'s introductory remarks focussed on the need to protect the minority and keep our eyes on the horizon in order to steer a straight path. The keynote speaker, Andrew W. West Central United States Regional Trustee spoke that tolerance is the key to unity. Tolerance is allowing everyone to operate as they wish and unity is hearing the full range of ideas in order to find the group conscience.

Greg T., The General Service Office Manager, went over in detail the mechanics of the Conference. Generally speaking, the Conference follows Robert's Rules of Order, with some exceptions, and proceeds on as informal a basis as possible consistent with the rights of all concerned. As the week's work

progressed I internalized the significance of acceptance and respect for these Conference rules of order as being fundamental to conducting the business of AA.

Sunday ended with a Conference dinner open to the Conference members and their guests. The five after dinner speakers spoke emotionally and with great humility on their experiences as they related to the Conference theme.

Interspersed through the week, the Panel 66 Delegates from each region were allowed two minutes to introduce their respective Areas. I was proud to tell the Conference some of the wonderful things occurring in Area 78. Every Canadian Delegate who spoke punctuated their talks with several Canadian heh's which brought some levity to the proceedings.

On Tuesday afternoon we took the subway for a tour of the newly renovated General Service Office. The offices are spacious and now all services are consolidated on one floor including Grapevine. The Archives offices were especially interesting as they had many items of our history on display.

On Wednesday morning we broke into pre-designated workshop groups to discuss one of four Feasibility Study topics:

- Ideas for Improving Internal & External Communication
- Ideas for Increasing Revenues
- Ideas for Reducing Expenses
- Ideas on Organizational Structure

I was assigned to a group discussing Communications. Each workshop group gave a very brief summary of the discussions to the entire Conference.

On the Wednesday afternoon, the Western Canada Regional and the West Central United States Regional Trustees were elected for a four-year term of office. Those allowed to vote were the Delegates from their region and two members randomly selected from each of the Trustees Nominating Committee Conference Committee on Trustees. There were a total of 8 eligible voters for Western Canada Regional Trustee. We were seated in a roped off section of the Conference so everyone else could observe. Each Delegate was allowed two minutes to introduce their Area's nominee and I was privileged to introduce our nominee, Walter S. Voting followed the Third Legacy and our election went to the hat after the fifth ballot. The new Western Canada Regional Trustee is Cate W. from Area 80 Manitoba.

The Conference was to finish at 3:00 pm Friday but we did not complete business until close to 9:30 pm. The Conference ended with each Panel 65 giving a brief 2-minute farewell. This was very moving. The Conference closed with the reciting of the Serenity Prayer in English, Spanish and French.

On Saturday morning there was a farewell brunch where we were privileged to hear thoughts from departing Trustees who were rotating out –Class B Trustee Andrew W., Class A Trustees – John Fromson and Michele Grinberg. The rotating Class B Regional Trustee from West Central U.S., Andrew W. paid a loving tribute to the our recently departed Western Canada Regional Trustee, Marty W. Following brunch, we then said our final farewells and began our long journey home.

Here are some of the highlights from the reports of the General Service Board, AA World Services Board, Grapevine Board, the General Service Office along with highlights from the financial presentation.

- **General Service Board**
 - Hosted six Regional and Local Forums
 - New General Manger is Greg Tobin
 - Major focus of the GSB in 2015 was the Strategic Planning
 - Long range planning includes a focus on:
 - Self support
 - Impact of move to digital communication and services
 - Lack of growth in the Fellowship
 - Decline in literature sales and subscriptions
 - Social media and anonymity
- **Alcoholics Anonymous World Services (AAWS)**
 - The General Service Office has completed renovations and now the GSO staff and Grapevine staff are all located on the same floor
 - General Service Office has 79 full time employees, 4 part-time and 5 temporary
 - There were close to **1700 visitors** to GSO in 2015
 - Website had **over 12.8 million visits** in 2015 which is an increase of 35%
 - Staff members responded to more than **90,000 emails and letters** from AA members, suffering alcoholics, distraught family members, professionals, students, the press and others interested in AA
 - Archives received **1,300 requests** & published **3 e-newsletters** (*Markings*)
 - Shipping Distributed **8 million** books, pamphlets & audio materials
 - Online requests for **PI information for the media and press** averaged **3,000 per month**
 - The Public Service Announcement “**Doors**” has generated 50% more airings to date than the industry average. It has one several major awards and has been aired over **32,000 times**.
 - Corrections answers over **6,500 letters** that’s **18 letters per day**, every day. Over the holidays in 2015 the Corrections desk answered **600 letters** and connected over **100 inmates with outside AA members** through the Corrections Correspondence Services.
 - **Cooperation with the Professional Community** provided information to hundreds of professionals every year and coordinates 25 national conferences for professionals in various fields in addition to publishing “**About AA**” our newsletter for the professionals.
 - The Big Book is available in **69 languages**. Currently there are 58 translation projects across 28 languages being shepherded through the translation process
 - E-books sold were **62,000 units**
 - Publishing sales were **\$2.1 million below** the estimated value
 - Last year AAWS Inc. was a defendant in two lawsuits
 - In California the trial court dismissed the allegation of liability for wrongful death
 - In Toronto an action for violation of the Human Rights code remains pending
 - International Convention
 - The International Convention in Atlanta suffered a **loss of \$210, 000**

- Reasons given were increases in security costs, increases in budgeted transportation costs, increase in costs due to more than anticipated attendees with special needs and mobility issues
 - **56,900 people** attended the International Convention – largest ever
- **Grapevine**
 - Coming in the winter of 2016 will be pages for the 8 regions
 - The AA Grapevine has just come out with a new Grapevine Subscription App.
 - The cost is \$23.99 for a 12- month subscription.
 - It is being phased in in three stages – the first is for iPhones and iPads, the second for Android phones and tablets and the third for Windows 10 and Amazon Kindle Fire.
 - Sign up now and there is a free trial period.
 - Gives you access to the monthly issue, access to past issues, notices from Grapevine, option to email an article to a friend, enabled for audio stories and featured videos
 - Grapevine has experienced a **downward** trend in subscriptions of **4% per year** but in **2015 the decline was only 2%** due in a large part to the Grapevine Challenge and the special subscription rate offered at the International Convention.
 - Grapevine had a profit of **\$240,000 in 2015 down from \$326,000 in 2014**
 - La Vina’s deficit continues to grow and the shortfalls are covered through the Reserve Fund and the General Fund.

The **Financial** presentation stressed the need for increasing communication with the fellowship about:

- The importance of supporting the services that we are requesting
- The spiritual value of contributing
- The need to embrace the Seventh Tradition as print sales decline
- That expenses are climbing at a rate of 2-3% per year
- Of the 40% of groups contributing, only 80% do so regularly
- Remember inflation when deciding on your contributions to your group, through birthday gifts, gratitude month and individual donations to the General Service Board. A dollar in 1935 is the equivalent of \$13.00 today.

	2015	2014	2013
Number of MEMBERS	1,348,072	1,373,497	1,389,602
Cost of Services per MEMBER	\$7.14	\$7.08	\$6.84
2015 7 th Tradition Self-Support Contributions per MEMBER	\$5.24	\$5.02	\$4.97
Cost of Services NOT covered by Self-Support per MEMBER	\$ 1.90	\$ 2.06	\$ 1.87

Number of GROUPS	65,741	65,222	64,694
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Cost of Services per GROUP	\$146.48	\$149.11	\$146.96
2015 7 th Tradition Self-Support Contributions per GROUP	\$108.82	\$105.76	\$106.75
Cost of Services NOT covered by Self-Support per GROUP	\$ 37.66	\$ 43.35	\$ 40.21

Percentage of Groups Contributing	40.30%	41.60%	42.50%
Number of Groups that Contributed	26,500	27,103	27,841

- **Literature Sales**

- Used to overcome shortfall in 7th Tradition contributions
- 2015 actual sales were **down 14.2% below budget**
- Gross literature sales were **down 25.7% from 2014** with meant a **36.2% decline in net profit**
- There were royalty payments of \$19, 078 and the last person to receive a royalty payment passed away in 2015 at the age of 102
- 53.4% of books sold were the Big Book and e-Books accounted for 4.2% of books sold
- Sales of the Big Book are the lowest in twenty years. **793, 000 were sold in 2015** which was down from **1.3 million in 2014**

- **Budget**

- Net income at end of 2015 was \$206, 000. In 2014 this amount was \$1.4 million
- 2016 budget has an expected shortfall of \$325, 000
- Projected losses beyond 2016 are \$862,000 for 2017 and \$1.45 million in 2018
- To cover the short falls the reserve fund is expected to drop from 10.2 months in 2015 to 7.0 months by 2018
- The financial trends are:
 - Membership levels are flat
 - Contributions show little growth
 - Literature sales show slow to no growth
 - Expenses continue to grow slowly 2-3% per year

The remainder of the Conference time was devoted to the conducting of the business of Alcoholics Anonymous. I wish to take a moment to explain the evolution of a Conference Advisory Action.

- An idea, suggestion, question, concern or subject comes from AA members, GSRs, DCMs, Area Committee members, Delegates, Trustees, or GSO/GV Staff, and may be shared or discussed at the group, district or Area Assembly and sent to the Conference Coordinator at GSO.
- The idea is reviewed by GSO/GV Staff and forwarded to the appropriate Trustee's Committee
- The Trustee's Committee may then may refer the matter to the appropriate Conference Committee
- The principal work of the Conference is done by the thirteen Committees. They discuss each of their agenda items in exhaustive detail and then through substantial unanimity make

recommendations to the Conference. Not all agenda items become recommendations. The Committees also make “considerations” for possible future action

- All Committee “recommendations” are discussed and voted upon by the Conference. Committee “considerations” are not discussed and are not voted upon. However, the Conference may ask questions for clarification.
- If a Conference Committee recommendation is approved by substantial unanimity, after full floor discussion, it becomes a Conference Advisory Action, which becomes binding when approved by the General Service Board. Advisory Actions advise the Trustees on how the Conference wants them to serve the fellowship. Voting was by show of hands except for Friday when electronic voting was used.
- Any Conference member can make a motion from the floor which are called Floor Actions. All Floor Actions are dealt with at the same time after all Committee reports, recommendations and considerations have been dealt with. If approved, then they too become advisory actions.

On Sunday afternoon each Conference Committee met with their respective Trustees’ Committee. I was privileged and honored to be selected to be part of the Conference Literature Committee for my two-year rotation. This Committee had four Panel 65 Delegates and five Panel 66 Delegates and the GSO Staff member with the Literature desk assignment, Sandra W., who acted as the Committee secretary. The Sunday meeting gave us a chance to ask the Trustees’ questions with respect to the items they forwarded to the Conference Committee and items that the Trustees chose not to forward to the Conference Committee – items the Trustees felt no action was required.

The Conference Committees were scheduled to meet for six hours over the next two days. The Literature Committee ended up meeting for over 16 hours. We would meet whenever we found the time most of which was before the start of the day and after the finish of the day. Somehow we found the time as the Committee work had to be done so reports could start on Wednesday afternoon.

All 13 Conference Committees reported to the Conference and their recommendations were discussed and voted upon. At the 66th General Service Conference 34 Recommendations and 3 Floor Actions became Advisory Actions. Two Recommendations did not result in Advisory Actions and five Floor Actions did not result in Advisory Actions.

Here are some of the highlights from the Advisory Action and the Committee Considerations.

Refer to handout package of Advisory Actions and Considerations

Thank you for listening but more importantly I thank you for allowing me to be your Delegate. I am so blessed.

Yours in Fellowship, Love and Service
Larry M.
Delegate Panel 66 Area 78 AB/NT