

April 2003

General Service Board Report

Elaine McDowell, Ph.D. – Chair of the General Service Board

If I had to characterize this past year since we last gathered for the 2002 General Service Conference, I would say, that through your support, opportunities were provided to bring the A.A. message into communities where alcoholics were without hope.

Our trustees-at-large, Charlie B. and Alex P., traveled with staff from the General Service Office to Oviedo, Spain for the 17th World Service Meeting. This week-long event was characterized by the sharing of strength, hope and experience by 41 delegates representing 29 countries or zones. As with all efforts in A.A., the primary purpose of the World Service Meeting is to seek the best way to carry the A.A. message. The general sharing sessions, committee meetings and workshops were filled with expressions of gratitude and humility as well as good humor. One delegate from Ireland announced that the A.A. service structure in Ireland had become completely self-supporting through the contributions of its members and groups. In fact, they had an abundance of Seventh Tradition funds, and it was their group conscience that some of these funds, \$50,000, be contributed to the International Literature Fund to help provide materials and translations for emerging A.A. groups and service structures around the world. This spirit of reaching out to help others truly exemplified the theme of the meeting, "The A.A. Message - A Message Without Borders." The theme for the 18th World Service Meeting, which will take place in New York in 2004, will be "One Message-Many Languages-One Fellowship."

The G.S.O. general manager, Greg M., and Bill A., the International desk coordinator, to whom we extend our loving support as he grapples with health challenges, traveled to many countries sharing the depth of collected experience of our office. Their travels took them to Belarus, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cambodia, China, Cuba, the Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Mexico, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Slovakia, Slovene, Spain, Thailand, and Turkey. As an added note, we welcomed Jim K., the general secretary of the General Service Office in Great Britain, along with Ann N., who will succeed Jim when he retires.

In early November, Bill and I traveled with members of the French G.S.O. and General Service Board to Cameroon, a country in central Africa. We had been invited to participate in the continuing development of the A.A. service structure in that country. A moment of historic significance occurred when we witnessed the formation of the Cameroon A.A. General Service Board. There, we met with a variety of national and local officials such as the steward or warden and staff of the Monatele Prison; the Cameroon Ministers of Health, Social Affairs and Justice; priests from Catholic missions; and several medical professionals. We visited government offices, health clinics, prisons, Catholic missions, and community centers, and also participated in Public Information (P.I.) and Cooperation With the Professional Community (C.P.C.) meetings in urban and rural settings. We learned that there are some 200 different languages spoken in Cameroon.

From Cameroon, Bill and I flew to Johannesburg, South Africa, where we met with the South African General Service Board and visited the General Service Office. We agreed that the South African G.S.O. will work with the G.S.O.s in Great Britain and the United States/Canada to host an African Zonal meeting in June of this year. Next, in Pretoria, we met with South African government officials, including the South African Minister of Corrections. This was a mutually satisfying meeting and, hopefully, will result in providing A.A. members easier access for bringing meetings into South African correctional facilities. The Minister of Corrections told us that this was the first time he had personally met with a nongovernmental group, and he was quite pleased with the results.

In December, I was invited to speak to a group of business and industry professionals at the 45th International Council on Alcohol and Addictions (ICAA) Conference on the Prevention and Treatment of Dependencies in Sao Paulo, Brazil. My talk was on A.A. as a resource for the professional and how, historically, A.A. has sought to cooperate with the professional community and continues to seek that cooperation today.

In September, A.A. participated in the World Forum 2002 in Montreal, a symposium attended by 2,500 professionals from around the world. Representing Alcoholics Anonymous were Class A (nonalcoholic) trustees Linda Chezem, Leonard Blumenthal, Allen Ault, George Vaillant and I, as well as Greg M., general manager of the General Service Office and Susan U., G.S.O. staff member. At the opening session, the chairperson of the Forum said that the Forum was the realization of a vision to work toward international cooperation between organizations and individuals in the addictions field.

Another C.P.C. event of significance was a visit to G.S.O. and the Grapevine by the new director of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), Dr. T.K. Li and his associate, Dr. Faye Calhoun. Our guests shared about the research initiatives of the NIAAA, as well as the agency's vision for further steps toward the treatment and prevention of alcoholism and reducing the stigma of alcoholism. The trustees and G.S.O. staff clarified A.A.'s role as a resource for the professional and our willingness to cooperate in reaching out to alcoholics who still suffer.

Legal matters in Germany continue to be considered by an appellate court in Frankfurt. The General Service Board is committed to the principles of protecting the integrity of A.A.'s message in print. As I mentioned in my report last year, changes to A.A. literature come through the guidance of the Fellowship represented by the General Service Conference. The Conference process has delegated to the General Service Board and A.A. World Services the responsibility for licensing boards in other countries to publish translations of A.A. literature copyrighted by A.A.W.S. No one individual in A.A. is authorized to make changes to our literature to suit a particular perspective. A wide group conscience is involved in what we do, and we keep you informed through annual reports each year. We look to you, the voice of the Fellowship, for guidance. And as we have said before, a full financial accounting of the costs involved in legal matters will be reported once the case in Germany is resolved.

In July 2002, three new trustees were welcomed to the General Service Board - Pacific regional trustee Phyllis H.; Eastern Canada regional trustee Bob P., and general service

trustee Ron G.. We have welcomed new G.S.O. staff members, Gayle S. R. and Mary C. L., and, sadly, we said good-bye to Susan U., who retired last January. Shortly after this Conference, we say good-bye to our dedicated and wonderful "sweet pea" from Texas, Joanie M., who has worked at G.S.O. for 14 years.

We were delighted to welcome the chairpersons of the Conference Committees to the quarterly General Service Board meeting in February. The chairpersons attended sessions of their corresponding trustees' committees, and were invited to attend other meetings of the trustees, including the board meeting. Having the delegate chairpersons present for the February meeting has become an integral part of the sharing process that brings us together at this Conference.

The General Service Office hired a new publications director, Chris C., who will be present during the Conference. I hope all Conference members will take the time to meet him. Chris has tremendous in-depth experience in the book publishing field. We started Chris off with a light project load as evidenced by the thickness and weight of the Literature Committee's background material. Already the department has spruced up the traveling C.P.C. display and waded through umpteen three-ring binder samples. Chris has overseen the translation of the Big Book into Urdu plus translations of other A.A. literature such as *Living Sober* into Greek, two pamphlets into Setswana and five items into Thai. All this in addition to another dozen or so projects keeps him busy. Chris is doing a wonderful job, and we are delighted that he is with us.

Last year a call came to G.S.O. regarding approximately 200 Sudanese immigrants living in Nebraska, many of whom were described as suffering from alcoholism. A.A. members in Area 41, Nebraska, immediately reached into this community and began helping to carry the message. "The A.A. Fact Sheet" was translated into Nuer, a prominent dialect in the Sudan and several hundred copies were sent to the area. The pamphlet, "is A.A. For You?," in Nuer will soon be ready to distribute. This is a prime example of how your support, your area activities and your contributions help to carry the A.A. message and bring about needed translations of A.A. literature.

Financially, G.S.O. continues to be robust. Contributions to G.S.O. were 6.4 % greater than last year, which continues an exciting five-year trend of growing support from members and groups. The Grapevine financial results reflected a net loss for the year of \$9,500, and a profit of \$4,358 is budgeted for 2003.

Since the 52nd Conference, the board has hosted Regional Forums in Regina, Saskatchewan; Phoenix, Arizona; Fredericton, New Brunswick; and Huntsville, Alabama. Two Special Forums have been held - one in Chicoutami, Quebec and a Special Hispanic Forum in Bakersfield, California. Love of A.A. was manifested at each of these Forums as was interest in finding ways to better carry the A.A. message to the suffering alcoholic.

We often refer to numbers, such as A.A. being in more than 150 countries; A.A. literature is translated into 69 languages, etc. Those are matters for our heads to ponder, but you and I know that A.A. is about the language of the heart. I would like to share with you one of the most moving highlights of the trip to Africa. It occurred after a long, hot day of

meetings. We were informed that a group of 29 A.A. members were waiting in a small, very rural village for us to have an "open" A.A. meeting with them in the local church. It was dusk by the time we arrived, and it soon became apparent that we could no longer meet in the church because of the darkness, as there was no electricity in this parish. The pews of the church were moved outside, and under the vast African sky, with a shining moon and bright stars, members shared their stories of recovery and newcomers expressed the hope that they could stop drinking. The message without borders-the language of the heart.