

## Work of The General Service Conference Goes on All Year

Every April, A.A.'s annual meeting of the General Service Conference seems to drop out of the blue, as suddenly and effortlessly as the fictitious town of Brigadoon—replete with friendly delegates, thoughtful presentations, stimulating workshops and sharing sessions, and tall, shining urns of hot coffee. The truth, of course, is that the work of the Conference goes on all year long. In fact, says Richard B., the General Service Office staff member who serves as Conference coordinator, “preparations for the '97 Conference began just days after the '96 one was over, starting with an in-depth evaluation of the event to help us iron out any kinks the next time around.”

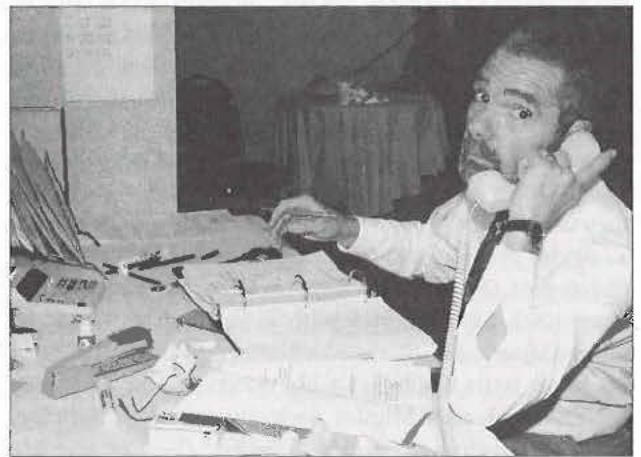
Richard further notes that “no one Conference is like any other. Each is unique, mainly because, thanks to A.A.'s principle of rotation, the cast of characters changes constantly. For instance, there are 92 U.S./Canada delegates; each year one half of them rotate and new ones come in. This year's Conference will include Panel 46 delegates, serving their second and final year, and Panel 47 delegates, here for the first time. Similarly, we staff people at G.S.O. rotate our assignments every two years, so every couple of Conferences there's a different coordinator with a different way of handling things.”

Noting that “Spirituality—Our Foundation” is the theme of the '97 Conference, Richard suggests that rotation figures significantly in the spiritual reservoir of the Fellowship. He recalls that back in 1956, A.A.'s friend and nonalcoholic trustee chairman Bernard Smith retired voluntarily, saying, “. . . A.A. must insulate itself against the 'proprietary right to serve.' No man must have the right to remain in office indefinitely. . . . While A.A. is important to the existence of the individual, no individual must be vital to the existence of A.A.”

“With prescience,” Richard comments, “Smith also said that A.A. members ‘. . . may not need a General Service Conference to insure our own recovery. But we do need it to insure the recovery of the alcoholic who still stumbles in the darkness, seeking the light . . . . We need it because we are conscious of the devastating effect of the human urge for power and prestige which must never be permitted to invade A.A. We need a Conference

to insure A.A. against government while insulating it against anarchy . . . .’” (*A.A. Comes of Age*, p. 281)

Richard, who also serves as secretary of the Conference Committee on Agenda and the trustees' Committee on the General Service Conference, corresponds with delegates and area committees throughout the year. A.A. members are encouraged to submit their concerns for Conference scrutiny through their area delegates. These are reviewed by the trustees' Conference Committee for consideration and referral. “It's astounding,” says Richard, “how at every step everyone, from the newest members of the support staff to the trustees, does the job at hand; they always manage to meet their deadlines and put the Conference together.”



John Kirwin

The logistics of staging the Conference are mind-boggling, even for John Kirwin Jr., nonalcoholic assistant controller/business administrator, who has been with G.S.O. for 21 years. “During Conference week,” he reports, “we use approximately 150 guest rooms per night for the voting members and support staff. There are meeting rooms to accommodate the 11 Conference committees and various workshops and regional meetings, not to mention dining facilities and a workroom for the secretaries. Most of the meeting rooms are approxi-

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mately 500 feet square; however, all four ballrooms are used for the opening dinner—a huge area that covers approximately 7,000 square feet. Importantly, the hotel has excellent access for the handicapped.”

Food is a big item, John points out. “We serve lunch every day of the Conference and dinner every night except Friday—the folks are on their own for breakfast. We work with the hotel’s food and beverage department to come up with tempting menus and also to satisfy special dietary needs. The hotel staff is carefully alerted to use no alcohol whatsoever in its food preparation, and to be prepared to serve about 350 gallons of coffee and decaf and 2,000 small bottles of soda and mineral water.”

Aubrey Pereira, nonalcoholic supervisor of G.S.O.’s shipping and mail department, has seen numerous Conferences in his time. He says his staff sends cartons of Conference kits and workbooks weighing about 40 pounds each to the hotel. “Our work begins long before the Conference,” Aubrey observes. “We’re among the very few here whose main job is done the day the Conference begins. But it can get pretty hectic if the delegates order a lot of literature while they’re here, and they usually do.”

Andre Washington (nonalcoholic), in charge of purchasing at G.S.O., has been on the Conference scene since 1992. He mentions with pride that much of the information used at the Conference is now produced in-house with the help of his nonalcoholic assistants Steven Linek and Miguel Rodriguez. “For example,” Andre explains, “we put together the Conference Manual, consisting of about 300 pages more or less, which saves a lot of money. We also produce the Early Bird edition of *Box 4-5-9* with a turnaround deadline of 24 hours, saving both money and time.” One thing that still must be ordered from the outside, however, is the traditional blue and white banner inscribed with the Conference theme. “But,” says John Kurwin with a grin, “if we had a sewing machine, I think we’d try to do that in-house too!”

The person responsible for inputting all the information for the voluminous Conference Manual is Frank

Segui, nonalcoholic staff assistant to Richard B., who is a vital and experienced part of the team effort. “This is my eighth Conference,” Frank says, “yet I’m still amazed at the amount of material we prepare for the delegates. About six weeks before the Conference we start sending the delegates thick packets of material they will need to study ahead of time. This year we’re sending out as much as 15 pounds of material to each of the Panel 47 delegates — that gives them a lot of reading to do! We also see that first-time Panel 47 delegates are assigned a Panel 46 buddy to show them the ropes and soothe their newcomer jitters.”



*Frank Segui*

Each area contributes at least \$600 toward costs of the General Service Conference. Travel, meals and other expenses of the 132 Conference members — including not only the delegates but the trustees, directors and G.S.O. and Grapevine staff members—are covered by the General Fund, from group contributions. Thus, no area is kept from attending the Conference due to lack of funds.

Many delegates bring their spouses or significant others with them to the Conference. Approximately ten A.A. and Al-Anon hosts are on hand to welcome the visitors and escort them on tours of New York landmarks. But back at the Crowne Plaza, the Conference members will be concentrating on a variety of subjects. They will view sample footage of a video on ways to attract A.A. members to Twelfth Step work in correctional facilities; discuss preliminary results of the 1996 A.A. Membership Survey; weigh the pros and cons of financial incentives in regard to our International Conventions, and ponder many more matters vital to all levels of A.A.’s world affairs. The list is long, but at the core are two questions that reflect A.A.’s reason for being: How well are we carrying the message to the suffering alcoholic? What can we do better, and how?

No matter how diverse the viewpoints, Richard

observes, "each individual, each committee and element of the Conference structure is closely linked through our primary purpose. When joined together like the pieces of a puzzle, the sharing will form a true 'group conscience'—one that offers a wide-angled picture of where A.A. is right now and how best we can steer a sound and spiritual course into the 21st century."

## A Delegate Gets a Heartfelt 'Thank You'

"As your time as our area delegate comes to an end, I thank you for the contribution you have made to my sobriety." Speaking anonymously to "Dear Trusted Servant" in a letter signed simply "an A.A. member," the writer notes, "I have often found fault and indulged in negativity instead of accenting the positive like you, who have consistently taught me by example to look for solutions instead of staying stuck in the problems. So today I wish to share some of what I have seen and learned from watching you:

"1. That service is about gratitude, responsibility and love, not about power or prestige. You shared your sobriety with me and others, instilling in me a desire to keep coming back, and to try to pass along my sobriety as you have yours.

"2. That caring is being willing to share your time and experience with a newcomer. Your actions have taught me that what others need most may be my caring rather than my know-how.

"3. That when you did not have experience to share, you pointed me to someone who did. You have always been accessible to the people you serve, demonstrating time and again that in A.A. it is *we*, not *them*.

"4. That you have given freely of your time and talent at the General Service Conference and at the area and district levels so that we A.A.s may have an informed group conscience; and that you have wholeheartedly accepted that group conscience as your guide, even on occasions when you may not have agreed with the majority view. Your actions are a pathway for me to follow in learning to take the Traditions off the wall and put them into practice in all my affairs."

Finally, the grateful A.A. member extends thanks for "encouraging my enthusiasm, all the while practicing patience and tolerance, and for encouraging me to feel I could make a contribution, even though sober just a few years. You have shown me it is possible to live a happy, useful life in sobriety—a reminder that the Promises do come true."

## It May Take a Twelfth Step 'Relay' To Reach a Village

"The icy Territories of the Great North are broad, rugged and largely impassable much of the year," says Southeast Quebec, Canada past delegate Aime I. "It would be pretentious for us to believe that we can carry the message to alcoholics there without regular collaboration and support from all those who are on the spot by reason of their jobs or lifestyles—among them social and government workers, members of the clergy, doctors and nurses. It would be helpful for Public Information committees to contact these people, explain A.A.'s primary purpose, and furnish literature and other help that may be needed."

Writing in the *Southeast Quebec Area Newsletter*, Aime suggests another way to carry the A.A. message "without necessarily wanting to immediately advance far into the Great North." He says he borrowed the idea from viewing a relay race at the Summer Olympics in Atlanta, Georgia, last year. "Each athlete on the team is responsible for covering a certain distance in the best time before yielding to a fellow runner," he explains. "That distance may be relatively modest in relation to the whole, but covering it, in the shortest time possible, is essential to reaching the finish line and winning the race.

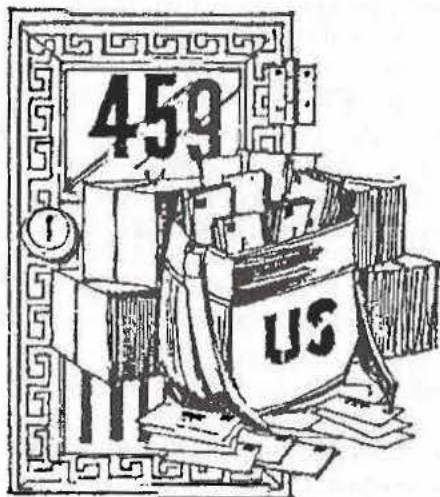
"Allegorically, we can take inspiration from the relay race—and use the concept to reach alcoholics who suffer in the vast Northwest Territories: First, form A.A. groups in the areas closest to us; then, little by little, A.A. members of these new groups can venture farther north, a little at a time, establish more pockets of A.A. and so on, thus ensuring that the A.A. Twelfth Step 'relay' keeps on going."

Meanwhile, Aime adds, "from adjacent A.A. areas and according to the availability of phone lines, perhaps we might temporarily make A.A. WATS lines available in Territories of the Great North. I visualize these lines as a sort of compass for us, guiding us to the places where alcoholics need us the most."

These Twelfth Step possibilities came to Aime one day while he was looking at a map of the Northwest Territories. "I noticed the vastness of these lands," he recalls, "I thought about differences in the ways and customs of the Native Americans living there, and about the hard climate they wrestle with on a daily basis. Far from losing heart, I went back in my mind to the hard time when I was drunk.

"Even if surrounded by people, I felt remote. I was a prisoner of my alcoholism, and to free myself I had to stop drinking. Nobody around me could give me sobriety directly, just like that, but many generous A.A.s showed

me the good tools I needed to make it possible. In the same way, we can't will the alcoholic Native Americans up North to be sober, but with effective tools—the A.A. program, Twelfth Step relays, P.I. efforts that include new lines of communication and hope, we can help them to help themselves.”



## From the Mailbag

The miracle of A.A. knows no bounds. In recent letters to G.S.O. an A.A. tells how she stayed close to the program in the bone-chilling isolation of the Antarctic. . . . And a Denver member shares what happened one evening while he was pulling coffee duty at his group.

Writing via e-mail from the remote South Pole, Jeanne M. expresses thanks to the General Service Office “for sending *Loner* and online information. As I’m preparing to leave the ICE, I want you to know that the online meetings have saved me. Also, I actually met up with another member down here, and we had our own small meetings together.” Jeanne adds, “I’m leaving a Big Book here in the library of this base where I’ve been stationed. Now I know for sure there is no place that A.A. can’t reach.”

Brian B., of Denver, Colorado, writes: “Service work has been the saving grace for me in sobriety. It is like a practice ground for life. I’ll never forget when I first became sober and my sponsor got me the commitment of clean-up chairperson at our Tuesday Night Big Book Study meeting. Let me tell you how much I like to clean up after people. . . I didn’t even clean up after myself! My apartment at the time looked like a living sculpture of a garbage dump.

“Six months later a miracle happened. After the meeting, I was cleaning the coffee pot, like I did every Tuesday night, when a newcomer came into the kitchen

and asked if he could help. I welcomed him but had no idea of how to help this guy. So, I showed him how to clean out the coffee pot and where to store it in the cupboard. Then the miracle happened—I knew at that moment I was part of the meeting. I was no longer a visitor to A.A. or a lost soul looking for a place to rest. I was just a drunk, and I knew how to clean out a coffee pot! For the first time in my life, I belonged.”

## Special Needs Are High-Priority in Eastern Missouri

Before Meredith B. rotated out of her two-year term as chairperson of the Eastern Missouri Area Special Needs Committee in January, she took time out to share her experience in office with Anna B., her counterpart on the recently formed Special Needs Committee of the Colorado Springs Intergroup. “Whatever you do, it will be so appreciated by people with disabilities and other extra difficulties,” she wrote, noting that about 30 areas in the U.S. and Canada now have Special Needs committees and more are needed. “A little goes a very long way with this type of service.”

Meredith, a member of the Steppin’ Up Group in St. Louis, points out that “the term ‘special needs’ encompasses a far broader category than first meets the eye. We try to be there for the physically disabled by encouraging more groups to provide wheelchair access, arrange for a sign-language interpreter at their meetings and provide tapes or Braille material for a sightless member. That’s an important part of our work. But we also urge the groups (and practice what we preach) to be sensitive to alcoholics who have trouble getting to a meeting—from the newcomer who has had his license revoked to the oldtimer who no longer drives and the impoverished A.A. member who can’t afford a car and has no other means of transportation.”

The work of Special Needs committees is constantly evolving, Meredith stresses. “For instance, if we learn that some single mothers aren’t getting to meetings because they can’t afford a sitter, we’ll urge them to get together with other mothers and discuss alternatives.

“A significant aspect of our job is making sure that special-needs information in local newspaper listings and meeting schedules is constantly updated.”

Along with her letter to Anna, Meredith enclosed some helpful materials, among them two guidelines: one, outlining the purpose and work of the Eastern Missouri Area Committee; the other, delineating the responsibilities of a district chairperson. The latter ends

with "A Most Important Note to District Special Needs Chairs: Just by the fact that you hold that title, even if you do nothing but show up at your G.S.R. (general service representative) meetings, you are increasing awareness, you are giving hope to the person with special needs, you are carrying the message."

Meredith further told Anna that the Eastern Missouri Area Committee maintains a display featuring a Braille Big Book, pamphlets in Spanish, and a large-print copy of *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*. "We take this display to workshops, conventions, assemblies, health fairs and more," she said. "We also use the area newsletter to remind members, groups and districts about a variety of things, such as: Remember to speak clearly at meetings, out of regard for people with hearing impairment and hidden disabilities such as dyslexia, learning disorders, and head injuries." Importantly, she adds, "We try to be on the lookout for people with special needs that are not obvious yet pose just as much difficulty."

Often, Meredith says, "People our Special Needs Committee has helped reach will come up and say, 'This is wonderful!' We're always glad to hear that, but as far as I'm concerned, what we do is basically another service job, another way to stay sober and carry the A.A. message."

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## Oldtimers Build a Bridge to the Past In North Florida

The atmosphere was electric in each of the three longtimers meetings—the brainchild of the North Florida Area Archives Committee. Newcomers especially were amazed to meet oldtimers the likes of Katey P. of Melbourne; still in her 20s in 1949, she joined A.A. in West Virginia at a time when there were few women in the Fellowship. They warmed to Eddie D. of Miami, sober 55 years; and to Harold J., who had just celebrated his 50th A.A. birthday with a generous helping of his favorite chocolate cake. And they listened spellbound as Duke P., sober since August 1940, paraphrased what he had said about his sponsor Dr. Bob in the book *Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers* (p. 255): "He made life so pleasant and entertaining. He was just like your father or uncle, and he loved everybody. But he particularly loved Bill Wilson.... There was a love between those two that was like David and Jonathan."

"The longtimers meetings resulted from the Area Archives Committee's long search for early A.A. that we hear so much about," says Kevin B., immediate past area archivist who presently heads his District 12

Archives Committee, in Brevard County. "We firmly believed that what worked in the early days—trust God, clean house and work with another alcoholic—is just as basic today. And there's no more powerful way for newcomers or someone like me, sober 4-1/2 years, to understand that than to hear it from someone who was there, did that and is still around today. We like to think of it as building a bridge to the past—while we still can."

North Florida's first longtimers gathering was held March 1996 in Palm Bay, a suburb of Melbourne. Hosted by the Home Base Group, "it had a panel of seven oldtimers with more than 330 years of collective sobriety, all with one focus: carrying the message to the newcomer," says Kevin. "Other speakers were: Frank M., archivist, the General Service Office; Wally P., past Arizona archivist; and Ray G., archivist of Dr. Bob's house in Akron, Ohio."

Kevin feels that in special situations "a certain energy sometimes causes the sum of the parts to be greater than the whole—but even that couldn't account for the astonishing miracle of recovery in the room. In unifying all these A.A. service and Fellowship bodies into one entity, every difference we had was minimized, every similarity stood out to the max. Those of us who have been blessed with sobriety for a while felt the magic as newcomers came up to receive copies of the Big Book signed by the longtimers on the panel. So rewarding was the Palm Bay meeting that it was repeated in March '97. And this year," Kevin reports, "it was followed by an exciting round table sharing session of A.A. archivists from around the state."

Another "first" was the longtimers meeting hosted by Orlando A.A.s last June, at the Civic Center in neighboring Sanford. Says Kevin: "More than 500 people turned out for that special night; with a June '97 meeting planned, this too promises to become an annual event." Last year's final longtimers meeting, he adds, "was hosted by Jacksonville's Central Group, where A.A. in Florida first began and where oldtimers such as Duke P. put the cork in the bottle for good, a day at a time."

To get the word out about the longtimers meetings, the Archives Committee had "a wealth of help from many," Kevin points out. "For sure, we couldn't have managed without the help of our groups, area, district, dedicated individual A.A.s, our present and past delegates and, very importantly, Bobbie F., manager of the Brevard County Intergroup, and her volunteers, who not only helped distribute several hundred fliers but tirelessly answered questions from callers. Frequently they provided amazing links to our past. We've had interest and support from young and oldtimers in South Florida and from out-of-state too, partly because of our unique retirement population that comes from around the U.S. and Canada. Look at Easy E., who sobered up here in Florida

in 1942; he came from Alabama to take part in the Jacksonville meeting. We've found that most of the old-timers are more than willing to share their experience, strength and hope; all we have to do is seek them out and ask. At the meetings we heard them say over and over again that active Twelfth Step work had always saved the day for them."

For instance, Kevin explains, "as many of the treatment centers close, some of us feel threatened at the thought of drunks at meetings. It is from the longtimers that we have access to two truths: (1) We should not fear Twelfth Stepping an active drunk; and (2) By 'giving away' our sobriety to the suffering alcoholic, we get to keep it—which undoubtedly is a blessing from God."

Now that longtimers meetings are becoming something of a tradition, the Area Archives Committee is turning to yet another project: compiling a history of A.A. in North Florida.

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## Viewpoint

### The Group Conscience —Bedrock of Unity

What is a group conscience? Why is it important? How does it work? When should it be used? What if it turns out to be wrong? These questions were much on the mind of Louisiana past delegate Charlie B. when he spoke at the Southeast Regional Forum last December. He suggested some answers as follows:

*What is a group conscience?* "The concept has been a part of A.A.'s functioning from its earliest days, and co-founder Bill W. undoubtedly drew heavily on the reliance of A.A.'s forerunner, the Oxford Group, upon a 'conscience of the group.' Bill often told the story of how in 1936 the first A.A. group in New York City turned thumbs down on his chance to accept a job as lay counselor at Towns Hospital ('Pass It On,' p. 175). Despite his dire straits, the group thought his acceptance would compromise the principles of the new movement, and Bill reluctantly heeded the conscience of the group.

"The concept was formally defined with publication in 1946 of Tradition Two: 'For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.' This Tradition is used as the principal basis as well for the development of the Twelve Concepts for World Service.

*Why is it important?* "It is my concern that we in service have not made it clear to all in the Fellowship, and the newcomer in particular, the importance of arriving at a group conscience. I have often heard members refer to a simple business meeting or a vote on a simple house-keeping problem as a 'group conscience.' Such disregard for the basic nature of the concept serves only to cheapen its intent. After all, this spiritual principle that allows us to formally define the will of God as we understand Him is one of the principles that sets our Fellowship apart from other movements. It requires a great leap of faith that we alcoholics accept with a sense of duty and gratitude. When one looks at it in this way, the need to be completely informed takes on new meaning. The wonderful thing is that it works! Not only that, but it has a profound effect on all I have witnessed in service. The group conscience is essential to unity; without unity A.A. could not survive."

*How does it work?* "The group conscience is relied upon at all levels of service—the group, district, area and General Service Conference, as well as service committees. A decision must meet two principal criteria in order to qualify as a group conscience: First, the decision must be made only after complete knowledge and thorough discussion of the question at hand; and, second, any decision made must meet the requirement of 'substantial unanimity'—defined by the Conference as a two-thirds vote, but in practice usually much greater."

*When should it be used?* "Just which matters demand a group conscience are dictated by the gravity of the question before the group. Generally speaking, any matter of policy or financial consideration meets the requirement of a group conscience. Lesser matters, such as determining the time of a meeting or that most important matter concerning the brand of coffee to be used, would require only a simple majority vote. Obviously, anything affecting A.A. as a whole, or any other group in particular, would require a formal group consideration."

*What if it turns out to be wrong?* "This can and does happen," Charlie acknowledges, "when we're too hasty in our decisions or, Lord forbid, make a mistake. But most of the mistakes we've made in the past have been quickly rectified either through a process of trial and error or A.A.'s built-in right of minority appeal. We are so fortunate to be a part of a fellowship that is free of dogma and despotic leadership. We have prospered with the principles of the Three Legacies of Recovery, Unity and Service where lesser fellowships would surely have failed. It has been my experience that this can occur only in a movement that is secure enough to allow each of its members to define their own God; and focused enough not to try being all things to all people, but to rely instead on the single purpose of carrying the message to alcoholics who still suffer."

## No Hooks Group Is Gone but Not Forgotten

"It is with regret and acceptance that we of the No Hooks Group must announce that we have abandoned and shut down our group."

Writing from Victorville, in Southern California, Jim L. continues: "We have heard from our local central office that attendance is down throughout the Victor Valley area [near Los Angeles]. Our own group essentially ceased to exist last summer when attendance went down from 15-20 per meeting to fewer than six people most weeks. A group that had been self-supporting from its first week back in 1990 suddenly was left with about four members with about 80 years' collective recovery as the sole support. None minded when the rent for the meeting room was only \$20 a month; but we did mind when the governing board of the church where we met elected to double the rent to \$40 a month in January."

Jim says that after "much soul searching and prayer," the No Hooks Group made the decision to close. "At our last meeting," he relates, "we had four visitors—three from Nevada and a temporary railroad worker from Nebraska—as well as us four core members. The gentleman from Nebraska said that in all his 17 years in our Fellowship, this was the first time he had gone to 'a last meeting on my first visit to a meeting.'"

The closing meeting, Jim quickly adds, "was not somber by any stretch of the imagination. One of the Nevada visitors was a young woman who encouraged expression of our experience, strength and hope. She had just come out of a treatment center and was still shaky about meetings outside of those friendly confines. Like all newcomers she received a lot of attention from us and probably won't ever forget that special No Hooks meeting. We talked about two of our members who passed on to the Big Meeting in the Sky last year—George R. and Betty G., sober 22 and 37 years respectively. Also remembered was the young woman who had picked up a drink after three years in A.A. and was dead from alcohol poisoning less than two weeks later. Then there was talk about Dave, whose family had left him, and how he came to our group and made another beginning. His family heard of his new attempt at living but still did not want anything to do with him. Dave left us, got drunk and moved to Texas—that was the last we heard of him. But on an up note, one of our founding members, Tom F., secured a position at a nationally recognized treatment center and has headed it for more than five years now."

Over the life of the No Hooks Group, Jim reports,

"there were many who came to a meeting for the first time through court mandates for DWIs. A fellow named Rick, now comfortably sober in A.A., is teaching DWI classes in court sponsored programs. Another was an ex-con who sobered up in A.A.; he sought and received permission to join me and others on an H&I [Hospitals and Institutions] Committee panel that was carrying the message into a local prison. And there's Bill P., who came to A.A., stayed, and is currently secretary of the Umbrella Group, one of the larger groups in this area."

In conclusion, Jim notes that "there are some members who, upon learning of our decision, have said that the meeting 'was apparently not successful and therefore not meant to continue.' But we core members look at it differently: We believe the No Hooks Group was successful, and now we are called to go through another door that is opening even as this door is being closed. God bless all of you at G.S.O. for your support. And God bless all of us drunks."

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## Group of One Grows to Several

Who says it takes at least two to hold a meeting? Certainly not Californian Pete C. "I am in the meeting hall, on time for the meeting and, as usual, a cast of one," he wrote last October. "Occasionally a visitor passes through, but for the most part I'm the only A.A. member here in Death Valley, which I believe is the lowest meeting place in the world (on dry land), 214 feet below sea level. But though I'm by myself I'm not alone."

Pete, who celebrated four years of sobriety last September, explained that in such situations "I reach out through letters instead of getting on my pity pot and whining. I know how important my sobriety is, so I show up here at the firehouse where the meetings are held at 7 p.m. Wednesdays and Sundays—an open Step meeting on Wednesdays and an open speaker meeting Sundays. At first it was discouraging to drive 60 miles for a meeting where I was the only one on hand, but my sponsor, Jim, always reminds me to try to find a positive in every situation. So here I sit writing this letter to you at the General Service Office, knowing that, if nothing else, it is helping me stay sober."

"As I've said, I'm not alone. I am blessed with a number of things, including a very strong group right over the border in Beatty, Nevada. The members are very supportive and see that the meeting hall here is open when I can't make it—to make sure the hand of A.A. is there in case someone shows up. There's a unity among A.A.s here that I believe stems from an emphasis on service. This is rural

A.A., something I've never experienced before. At first I resisted and rejected these people, but with time I've come to love them all. I'm just developing deeper understanding of the willingness, openmindedness and honesty it takes to remain sober. I've heard before that you get back much more from sobriety in A.A. than you put into it—that's definitely the case with me."

Since writing that letter, Pete's life—and the group's—have turned around. "In the last few months we've gained three other members," he reports happily. "They have good sobriety and are pretty steady. At some meetings now we have as many as 14 people, quite a difference from the way things were just a short time ago." Pete's other good news is that he has moved and drives five miles to the meeting, not 60 as he used to. "I guess it shows that if you just hang in there," he says with a smile, "it does get better. A lot better!"

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## Quebec Group Includes The 'Three Twelves'

What's happening in Quebec's Opinions and Sharing (*Opinions et Partages*) Group these days—an exciting, all-round creative meeting format "based on the A.A. way of life," according to member Claude S.—is not just an anomaly. It is happening in pockets around the U.S. and Canada, from British Columbia to Eastern Massachusetts (*Box 4-5-9, Feb./Mar. 1997*).

"In Quebec," writes Claude, "we practice a system of rotation each month that allows us to integrate A.A.'s Legacies of Recovery, Unity and Service. The first week is devoted to the Step of the month (Recovery); the second, to the Tradition of the month (Unity); and the third, to the Concept of the month (Service). At these meetings, everyone shares their opinions and, together, we understand and talk about how to put the A.A. way of life into practice in our daily lives."

During the first three weeks of the month the meetings are closed, Claude says, "so that the people there can feel free to share in the company of fellow alcoholics only. The last week of the month, however, the meeting is open. Members are invited to bring along their relatives and friends—it is a time to celebrate one's sobriety. If there are five weeks in a particular month, we also hold a discussion meeting, with topics and questions pulled from a suggestion box. In other words, we talk about us!"

In the first part of each meeting, Claude notes, "the format is traditional, with the usual readings and information. During the second part, the chairperson reads the Step, Tradition or Concept of the month, naming the titles of A.A. pamphlets, books or audiovisual material that might be pertinent and helpful. Each member may

talk in turn in a first round; we have a second go-round if time permits. Over time, this formula gives members the chance to become thoroughly familiar with the A.A. way of life. As co-founder Bill W. said, "The spiritual life is not a theory. *We have to live it*" (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, p. 83). In order to live it, we must first know it."

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## Sobriety Brings The Gift of Loving

Bill E. of Sonoma, California has been sober 47 years, and is still overwhelmed by what he calls "the beautiful rewards of sobriety."

Recently, Bill shares, "I was awakened in the dead of night by the incessant barking of my little dog, reminding me that I had not taken him on his nightly walk. As I ventured out at 3:00 a.m., I was overcome by an acute awareness of the beauty of being sober and not having to suffer the extreme discomfort of a hangover. The stillness of a moonlit night casting its magic shadows was a sight to behold.

"Although I haven't had a drink since 1950, the novelty of enjoying such a sight took me on a trip to the never-never land. I reflected on the days and nights when such a sight would create misery instead of pleasure. I had reached a point in my drinking where there was little or no pleasure in living. It was a miserable existence, and the beauty of nature was beyond my appreciation.

"Remembering back to the days when I was totally preoccupied with the thought of escaping the pains of reality, I experienced immediate gratification in knowing that I no longer had to pursue this course. There was a time when loving a little dog was out of the question. Self-pity would not permit me to allow the thoughts of others to invade my mind. Preoccupation with the thought of procuring more alcohol to drown the feelings of rejection was a full time chore."

As he looks back on his past, Bill says, "gratitude is a constant emotional sensation. Alcohol is no longer important in my life; it does not control me anymore. I do not have to ingest it to cope with the problems created by either my defective thinking or the thinking and reactions of others. I am free of the bondage forced by addiction. There is the restoration of harmony within my mind. And, yes, I can love my dog and all human beings, regardless of their philosophy. It is essential that I practice not being selfish, intolerant and deceitful. I have been given a rare gift: the gift of working with other alcoholics in their quest for sobriety and, in the case of some, of having been able to play a small part in their recovery. For this I shall be eternally grateful."



## Treatment Facilities

### How to Cope With an Influx Of Newcomers

Many groups have written to the General Service Office asking how best to cope with a sudden plethora of newcomers referred to A.A. by treatment facilities. In response, the G.S.O. staff has put together a service piece that reflects the collective experience of the Fellowship over the years. Here are some of the suggestions and comments that have proved helpful:

- "We cannot discriminate against any prospective A.A. members, even if they come to us under pressure from a court, an employer or any other agency.... Although the strength of our program lies in the voluntary nature of membership in A.A., many of us first attended meetings because we were forced to, either by someone else or by our inner discomfort. But continual exposure to A.A. educated us to the true nature of our illness . . . Who made the referral to A.A. is not what the Fellowship is interested in. It is the problem drinker who is our concern.... We cannot predict who will recover, nor have we the authority to decide how recovery should be sought by any other alcoholic." (pamphlet "How A.A. Members Cooperate with Other Community Efforts to Help Alcoholics," p. 7)

- "For many newcomers [fresh out of treatment centers], sponsorship needs to begin at a different point in their recovery. Much but not all of the beginning work has been done. The person who comes to A.A. sober, feeling fairly well physically, knowing something about his illness and having had an introduction to A.A.... A person with such a start needs a sponsor who can meet him 'where he's at.' Certainly the sponsor should not run down the treatment center program . . . but should help the newcomer make the transition into A.A.—for example, get involved in group life, understand the program, work the Steps and grow in the A.A. way of life." (Speaker, 1975 General Service Conference)

In some areas of the U.S./Canada, the intergroup/central offices are trying to cope with the influx of new people from treatment by encouraging the formation of new meetings. On another tack, certain groups form special sections of their meetings, intended for the new people. And a number of the treatment centers try to line up sponsors for patients before they are discharged; some will not even agree to release unless the person has a sponsor.

A number of the facilities have an A.A. sponsor list; a week before the alcoholic is to leave, the assigned sponsor makes a Twelfth Step call. Importantly for the A.A. volunteer, as the Big Book states (p. 89), "Practical experience shows that nothing will so much insure immunity from drinking as intensive work with other alcoholics. It works when other activities fail."

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## C.P.C.

### Committees Work Hard to Get the Message Out

"Here in New Mexico we are blessed with a long history toward our common purpose of helping the alcoholic who still suffers." Explains Dennis C., chairman of the Area (46) Committee on Cooperation With the Professional Community "The interaction between districts, area and the Albuquerque Central Office is excellent. Central office receives many of the calls from professionals seeking information and frequently refers them to the appropriate area committee. It also has service committees of its own, fills many requests for speakers for non-A.A. groups and organizations, and handles numerous Public Information inquiries." In all instances, Dennis says, "we keep each other informed and work together. We are grateful for a good working relationship." Dennis adds that "Albuquerque would like to hear what other C.P.C. committees around the country are up to—so please share your experience, strength and hope!"

He is not alone. Brent S. of Ft. Wayne, Indiana, writes the General Service Office, "I am currently alternate chairman for C.P.C. in Area 22. I read through the C.P.C. Workbook and have numerous questions. There are many knowledgeable people I can converse with in my area, but I'd appreciate any input you may have."

Theresa L., of Prince Edward Island, Canada, has just completed her first year as Area 81's C.P.C. chair and writes to tell us of her many interesting experiences: "We hosted an open house for clergy at our local intergroup office where we gave a presentation and provided all with packets of A.A. information for the various churches represented. Packets of information were also provided," Theresa continues "to social workers and all employees at our local social services department." Similar programs were held for meetings of the local medical agency and mental health association, and the committee delivers A.A. literature, on a regular basis, to hospitals, medical centers, jails and detoxes.

But the committee's biggest accomplishment, Theresa feels, was the display they provided for the

local teachers two-day conference, which included the showing of Conference-approved videos. "We were very well received, with many comments like, 'it's about time you were here,' We are a very small island," Theresa concludes, "but about 1,500 teachers passed through our display. We are working hard to carry the A.A. message."

In Area 25, Stephen R., C.P.C. chair of Quinte East District 34, in Belleville, Ontario, reports, "We presently have 15 C.P.C. committee members representing 16 districts, and there is plenty of action. Our committee members are a dedicated lot." Stephen notes that he "was raised in A.A. to live out the principle of 'give it away or pass it on to keep it.' I feel blessed that the Fellowship offers so many opportunities to take action on this principle—C.P.C. work is just one of a multitude of ways to do so." Stephen says that he also feels "grateful to have a host of personal friends in A.A. who share with me and others the great joys that have come out of this service work. They talk of the emotional balance and unity of purpose that have simplified their lives and allowed them to be productive members of their families and communities. I'm especially grateful to an A.A. member who told me she did not believe one could 'store up spirituality. . . . You have to tend to grass to keep it green.'"

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## P.I.

### How Does A.A. Respond to Anonymity Breaks?

A famous film star speaks glowingly on TV of "the new life I've found in A.A." . . . A local politician caught with his hand in the town till tells his metropolitan newspaper that "alcohol and drugs did it to me, but now I'm going to A.A. meetings". . . . Or a flamboyant writer publishes the details of his "cure in Alcoholics Anonymous" and says he's coming out with his story "to help others like me." Six months later, the tale of his "relapse" is duly noted in the media.

What does the Fellowship do about such anonymity breaks and the hundreds of others that occur yearly? As mail sent to the General Service Office reveals, A.A. members have expressed continuing concern about such breaks of the Anonymity Tradition, which co-founder Bill W. called "the key to our spiritual survival."

Each year, the trustees' Public Information Committee mails out a letter explaining A.A.'s tradition

of anonymity at the public level to national radio and TV stations, wire services and to daily and weekly newspapers. This letter is sent out to English, French and Spanish publications, and is also distributed to publications directed to the black community. In many areas, local P.I. committees reprint the message on their own stationery and send it to their local media as well.

Headed "Anonymity," the letter states "Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of our Fellowship and assures our members that their recovery will be private. Often, the active alcoholic will avoid any source of help which might reveal his or her identity."

"We seek your continued support" the letter continues, "by presenting A.A. members only by first name, and using no recognizable picture."

"Throughout the world," the memo concludes "favorable media coverage has been a principal means of bringing alcoholics into our Fellowship. You have helped make this possible, and for that we thank you."

When a specific anonymity break occurs, A.A. members frequently ask G.S.O. to send a letter to the publication or broadcast station involved. But it has long been the consensus of the A.A. General Service Board and the A.A. General Service Conference that responsibility for protecting our Traditions at the public level rests with individual A.A. members.

The P.I. desk writes to the delegate of the area in which the A.A. member who has broken their anonymity lives. In the case of a press break, for instance, the delegate receives a copy of the article in question, along with the suggestion that he or she send the person a gentle reminder of our Anonymity Tradition. Only if the delegate so requests does G.S.O. write the letter.

In an era of sensationalistic journalism, P.I. committees have been very successful in keeping A.A. out of public controversy. Because A.A. has given so many suffering alcoholics their very lives back, a few members question our adherence to anonymity. Also, because the print and electronic media can be used to reach and educate so many people up close and with great impact, they wonder if perhaps our Anonymity Tradition puts us out of touch with reality and thus keeps us from connecting with the alcoholic in pain.

However, many others, who accept the wisdom of our Traditions, point out that individual recovery in A.A. comes first; and that, for each A.A. member, the Anonymity Traditions are designed to keep our ego deflated, to give us a way of tempering our drive for power and prestige—in short, to keep us sober. They further note that, despite our anonymity—and, more because of it—over 2,000,000 alcoholics have found their way to the Fellowship, with many more to come.

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## Calendar of Events

Events listed here are presented solely as a service to readers, not as an endorsement by the General Service Office. For any additional information, please use the addresses provided.

### April

- 4-6—*Redding, California*. Hospital & Institution Conf. Write: Box 852, Red Bluff, CA 96080
- 4-6—*Fort Wayne, Indiana*. 17th Northeast Indiana Conv. & 54th Banquet. Write: Ch., Box 15874, Fort Wayne, IN 46885
- 4-6—*Wichita, Kansas*. 22nd Annual Spring Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 1814, Wichita, KS 67202
- 4-6—*Lockport, New York*. 1997 GSA Spring Convention. Write: Ch., 200 Lakewood Pkwy., Snyder, NY 14226
- 4-6—*Tarrytown, New York*. 33rd Annual SENY Conv. Write: Box 1688, Madison Square Sta., New York, NY 10159
- 4-6—*Akron, Ohio*. 22nd Mini-Conference. Write: Ch., 3378 Washington Blvd., Cleveland Heights, OH 44118
- 4-6—*Longview, Texas*. 28th Annual East Texas Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 2082, Longview, TX 75606
- 4-6—*Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada*. Southern Alberta Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 212, Lethbridge, AB, T1J 3Y5
- 11-13—*Kailua-Kona, Hawaii*. Ninth Annual Big Island Bash. Write: Ch., Box 390727, Kailua-Kona, HI 96739
- 11-13—*Grand Forks, North Dakota*. Northern Spring Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 14121, Grand Forks, ND 58208-4121
- 18-20—*Banff, Alberta, Canada*. 1997 Banff Roundup. Write: Ch., 128 Riverglen Dr., S.E., Calgary, AB T2C 4G2
- 18-20—*Sacramento, California*. 17th Northern California Woman to Woman Conf. Write: Ch., 5752 Muldrow Rd., Sacramento, CA 95841
- 18-20—*Superior, Wisconsin*. 52nd Annual Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 996, Superior, WI 54880
- 18-21—*Syria, Virginia*. Heaven on Earth Day V. Write: Ch., Box 31, Bowie, MD 20719
- 25-27—*Nelson, British Columbia, Canada*. Nelson's 26th Roundup. Write: Ch., 211 West Beasley St., Nelson, BC V1 3K4
- 25-27—*Ridgecrest, California*. IYW "Frontier of Hope" 10th Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 6157, Ridgecrest, CA 93556
- 25-27—*Chipley, Florida*. Country Roundup '97. Write: Ch., 2374 Suggs Rd., Chipley, FL 32428

- 25-27—*Lincoln, Nebraska*. Spring Fling. Write: Ch., Box 30785, Lincoln, NE 68503
- 25-27—*Canandaigua, New York*. 12th Annual Conf. of the Lakes. Write: Ch., Box 25261, Farmington, NY 14425
- 25-27—*Brattleboro, Vermont*. Vermont Conv. Write: Ch., Box 1997, Wallingford, VT 05773
- 26-27—*St. Joseph, Missouri*. St. Joseph 54th Anniv. Write: Ch., 3106 County Line Rd., St. Joseph, MO 64506
- 27-28—*Norfolk, Nebraska*. NE Nebraska 12th Annual Spring Classic. Write: Ch., 818 S. 7th St., Norfolk, NE 68701

### May

- 2-4—*San Angelo, Texas*. Concho Valley Conf. Write: Ch., Box 1341, San Angelo, TX 76904
- 2-4—*Long Beach, California*. 16th Annual Southern California H & I Conf. Write: Ch., Box 807, Parkersfield, CA 93362-0807
- 2-4—*Maui, Hawaii*. Eighth Annual Maui Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 550, Kihei, Hawaii 96753
- 2-4—*Laughlin, Nevada*. 13th Annual Tri-State Round-Up. Write: Ch., Box 35378, Las Vegas, NV 89133
- 2-4—*Oliver, British Columbia, Canada*. 13th Annual South Okanagan Round-Up. Write: Ch., Box 392, Oliver, BC, V0H 1T0
- 2-4—*Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada*. N.W.O. Area 85 Round-Up. Write: Ch., Box 73, Thunder Bay, ON, P7C 4V5
- 2-4—*Grand Rapids, Minnesota*. 27th Annual Iron Range Get-Together. Write: Ch., Box 469, Grand Rapids, MN 55744
- 2-4—*Janesville, Wisconsin*. 46th Annual Southern Wisconsin Spring Conf. Write: Ch., Box 8092, Janesville, WI 53547-8092
- 9-11—*Mosney, County Meath, Ireland*. 40th All-Ireland Conv. Write: G.S.O., 109 South Circular Road, Dublin 8, Ireland

## Closed Meeting Topics From the Grapevine

For more detailed suggestions, see the pages noted.

April (page 26): Running a marathon.  
May (page 60): Easy to forget.

- 9-11—*Ketchikan, Juneau, Anchorage and Fairbanks, Alaska*. Special Regional Forum. Write: Forum Coordinator, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10164
- 9-11—*Cortland, New York*. 46th Annual Central NY Area Conv. Write: Ch., Box 414, Cortland, NY 13045
- 9-11—*Greensburg, Pennsylvania*. 47th Laurel Highlands Conf. Write: Ch., 60 Greenbrier Rd., Pittsburgh, PA 15220
- 16-17—*San Jose, California*. Sober & Free 1997 (hosted by gay & lesbian members). Write: Ch., Box 4707, San Jose, CA 95150-4707
- 16-17—*Rehoboth Beach, Delaware*. 37th Annual Delaware Conv. Write: Ch., Box 7452, Wilmington, DE 19803-7452
- 16-18—*Clearwater, Florida*. Sobriety in Action Conv. Write: Ch., Box 2571, Pinellas Park, FL 33780-2571
- 16-18—*Boise, Idaho*. Idaho Area Spring Assembly & Conv. Write: Area Spring Assembly, Box 7904, Boise, ID 83707-1904
- 16-18—*Oklahoma City, Oklahoma*. State Conf. Write: Ch., Box 18811, Oklahoma, OK 73154
- 16-18—*Fort Worth, Texas*. Second Annual NE Texas Area Correctional Facility Conf. Write: Ch., Box 121742, Arlington, TX 76012
- 16-18—*Eau Claire, Wisconsin*. 48th Annual Spring Conf. Write: Ch., Box 261, Eau Claire, WI 54702-0261

## Planning a Future Event?

Please send your information on June, July or August events, two days or more, in time to reach G.S.O. by April 10, the calendar deadline for the June-July issue of Box 4-5-9.

For your convenience and ours — please type or print the information to be listed on the Bulletin Board page, and mail to us:

Date of event: from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_, 19 \_\_\_\_\_

Name of event: \_\_\_\_\_

Place (city, state or prov.): \_\_\_\_\_

For information, write: (exact mailing address) \_\_\_\_\_

Contact phone # (for office use only): \_\_\_\_\_

Flip up this end of page - for events on reverse side

- 17-19—*Courtenay, British Columbia, Canada.* 46th Annual Comox Valley Rally. Write: Ch., RR#3, Site 336, C43, Courtenay, BC V9N 5M8
- 22-25—*Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, Canada.* Gateway Roundup. Write: Ch., 1301 Central Ave., Prince Albert SK S6V 4W1
- 22-25—*Daytona Beach, Florida.* Seventh Annual Daytona Spring Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 4911, South Daytona, FL 32121
- 22-25—*Waycross, Georgia.* Okefenokee Round-up. Write: Ch., Box 403, Waycross, GA 31502
- 22-25—*Dallas, Texas.* "Gathering of Eagles" Oldtimers Meeting. Write: Ch., Box 35865, Dallas, TX 75235
- 23-25—*Palm Springs, California.* 10th Annual Conv. Write: Ch., 67290 Medano Rd., Cathedral City, CA 92234
- 23-25—*Columbus, Mississippi.* First Annual Memorial Day Unity Conv. Write: Ch., Box 385, Louisville, MS 39339
- 23-25—*Pickney, Michigan.* Agape Weekend. Write: Ch., 4745 Chovin, Dearborn, MI 48126
- 23-25—*Bloomington, Minnesota.* Gopher State Roundup XXIV. Write: Ch., Box 65295, St. Paul, MN 55165
- 23-25—*Casper, Wyoming.* 1997 Spring Conf. Write: Ch., Box 1736, Evansville, WY 82636
- 23-25—*Beito, Norway.* Norwegian Golden Jubilee Conv. Write: Ch., Box 188, N-2901, Fagernes, Norway
- 23-26—*Boston, Massachusetts.* 21st Boston Roundup (hosted by gay and lesbian members). Write: Ch., B.G.L.R.U., Box 1009 GMF, Boston, MA 02205

- 30-June 1—*Boca Raton, Florida.* Sponsorship Weekend VI. Write: Comm. Secy., Box 902, Boca Raton, FL 33429
- 30-June 1—*Moline, Illinois.* East Central Regional Forum. Write: Forum Coordinator, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163
- 30-June 1—*Covington, Louisiana.* Spring Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 733, Ponchartroula, LA 70454

## June

- 6-8—*Deming, New Mexico.* 40th Annual State Conv. Write: Ch., Box 5062, Silver City, NM 88062
- 6-8—*Akron, Ohio.* Founders Days. Write: Ch., Box 12, Akron, OH 44309
- 13-14—*North Bay, Ontario, Canada.* 50th Anniversary. Write: Ch., Box 1165, North Bay, ON P1B 8K4
- 13-15—*Calgary, Alberta, Canada.* Gratitude Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 954, Station M, Calgary, AB T2P 2K4
- 13-15—*Cache Creek, British Columbia, Canada.* Cache Creek/Ashcroft 22nd Annual Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 558, Cache Creek, BC V0K 1H0
- 13-15—*Blackpool, England.* Great Britain 50th Anniv. Conv. Write: Registrar, Box 32, South Shore, Blackpool FY4 2UA England
- 20-22—*Tarrytown, New York.* Northeast Regional Forum. Write: Forum Coordinator, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163

## July

- 3-6—*Columbus, Ohio.* Ohio Young People's Conf. Write: Ch., 7911 Solitude Dr., Westerville, OH 43081
- 4-6—*Toronto, Ontario, Canada.* Toronto Young People's Conf. Write: Ch., TYPC, 234 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 202, Toronto, ON M4P 1K5,
- 4-6—*Lakeland, Florida.* SFCYPAA. Write: Ch., Box 91052, Lakeland, FL 33804-1052
- 4-6—*Portland, Oregon.* Pacific Northwest Conf. Write: Ch., Box 1595, Beaverton, OR 97075
- 17-20—*Winston-Salem, North Carolina.* 50th State Conv. Write: Ch., Box 11401, Winston-Salem, NC 27116-1401
- 17-20—*Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.* PENNSCYPAA IX. Write: Ch., Box 8336, Philadelphia, PA 19104
- 18-20—*Chilliwack, British Columbia, Canada.* Chilliwack Roundup. Write: Ch., 6219 Parsons Rd., Chilliwack, BC V4Z 1Z4
- 18-20—*Camden, Arkansas.* Arkansas Roundup of Young People. Write: Ch., 431 E. North, Magnolia, AR 71753
- 18-20—*Albany, New York.* 30th Annual NYS Conv. Write: Ch., Box 6042, Albany, NY 12206
- 25-27—*Birmingham, England.* The Tenth Heart of England Conv. Write: Ch., Box 119, Birmingham, B1 1AA, England