

To: Lake County District 13

From: Mary Ellen R., DCMC

Date: 3/10/16

Re: PRAASA Report

I attended PRAASA in Spokane, WA, Mar 4-6, 2016. I flew up on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and returned on the 7<sup>th</sup>, staying at the Fairbridge Inn Express which was about 8 blocks (10 minute walk) from the Convention Center where PRAASA was held.

For the panels, generally each speaker presented for 7 minutes. Comments from the audience were limited to 2 minutes. Anything additional I have added is bracketed [ ].

I attended everything except the Saturday late night discussions, 10 – 12 pm:

- 1) Our Spiritual Way of Life – What Does it Mean?
- 2) Steps, Traditions, Concepts – Does Our Program Have Meaning To The Newcomer?

#### **Mar 4, 2016**

##### **Panel 1**

Orientation began at 11:30 on Friday 3/4, and this was followed by an introduction of the Pacific Region Delegates at 1:00 pm:

“Why Do We Need A Conference” was read from the Service Manual followed by the first year delegates introducing themselves and a bit about their respective areas. Things I learned:

- Alaska has 176 groups while Arizona has 2200 AA Meetings and a Navajo translation of the Big Book.
- Northern California Interior is the largest geographic area in CA and has 1000 groups
- Mid-Southern CA has 3473 groups
- Idaho has 239 groups
- Oregon 1000+
- Washington State East 450 groups

The second year delegates each spoke briefly on **“Practicing the Principles in All Our Service Responsibilities”**:

- Southern CA – Delegate mentioned “New Pair of Glasses” by Chuck C. He talked about separation as ego. He said conscious separation is the problem and conscious unity is the answer. “My spirituality is proportional to my level of humility.”
- Hawaii – They will host the NCCAA Pacific Regional Forum this year, 9/28 – 10/2. The principles (there are 36). We need all the voices to achieve unity. The triangle is unilateral [all sides are equal]
- Nevada – I’ve got “skin in the game”, an emotional connection. I’m not hearing you; I have to remember I am a servant leader. I need to see things as they actually are. I need to remain teachable.

- Western Washington – Listen. Place our common welfare first.
- BC/Yukon – HOW. Openmindedness – not having everything my way. Pride and ambition equals defects
- Central California – Stop having expectations and demands. Stop playing God >> lean on Him. It's not easy to practice "easy does it."

**Panel 2 -- 2:15 – Connection with the Newcomer: Reading 12+12 p23**

**1) All Inclusive – Never Exclusive**

Literature – pamphlets are good, open, e.g. Gay and Lesbian, AA for Non-Believers. Core literature not so bad. Always look for new ways to reach the still-suffering alcoholic. When not willing, nothing can be done.

**2) Are We Doing Enough To Help The Newcomer, Are We Going To Any Length?**

No we are not doing enough. Go to any length; renew our commitment to help others. There are 400+ central offices in the US; only 100 have 24-hour hotlines. Service keeps us sober. Complacency is our enemy. Challenge – Do a 4<sup>th</sup> step around reaching out to our groups/district.

**3) Home Group – Where it Begins**

Home group gives us opportunities to work on defects of character. How the home group relates to AA as a whole – if we (the group) don't participate we will wither and die. Group inventory. Concept 1 – group responsibility. Unity and service equals recovery.

**4) How Do We Involve The Newcomer In Service?**

If you do it all, there is nothing for the newcomer to do; willingness has to come from the newcomer.

**Comments from the audience:**

- No reason why someone should not feel welcome regardless of gender
- Are we doing enough? -- Not confident we're asking the right question – What is enough?
- Group inventories – lack of follow through
- AA works if you work it, but only 10% make it. Why? If our car started only 10% of the time, would that be enough?
- Sitting with the newcomer, connecting them with others, that's what needs to be done.
- I help the newcomer when they come up and help me.
- Plain language Big Book is for the newcomer. Those of us who know the Big Book – it's not for us.

**Panel 3 -- 3:45 – Connecting With Each Other**

**1) Singleness of Purpose – Staying Pertinent in a Changing World (Phil B, Lake County)**

Traditions 3 and 5. Denial. [He didn't address "Staying Pertinent in a Changing World.]"

**2) Informed Group Conscience – The Key to Unity**

See pages 28-29 of “AA Group” pamphlet. Listen to the minority opinion with an open mind. Unity is the state of being united.

**3) Be Involved, Be Inspired, Be of Service**

Participate in the functions. Inspired – life, energy of Source. Service – help and aid. Step 12 is our basic service.

**4) Sponsorship and the Changing Demographics**

[I heard nothing new or memorable from this speaker.]

**Comments from the audience:**

- It’s my job to carry the message regardless of the malady [i.e. drugs, etc.]
- YPAA [Young People AA] feel they don’t matter. Idea – YPAA service assembly
- Important that we allow the alcoholic to hear the message of AA [relative to singleness of purpose]
- My problem wasn’t alcohol – alcohol was my solution! BB page 17 -- Our common solution is our singleness of purpose.
- “Anda” – [as in “I am an alcoholic and a \_\_\_\_”] – If not pure alcoholic, maybe AA isn’t there for the alcoholic.
- You may qualify but can you identify?
- We don’t turn people away – e.g. men attending a women’s meeting, or drug addict to an AA meeting.
- “Good is the enemy of best.” [Tradition 2]

**Panel 4 –7:00 – Connecting With AA as a Whole**

**1) Participating in All of AA**

Recovery – doing service from the beginning. Carry the message of this event (PRAASA) back to the group.

Service – Participating in the general service structure. Utilize trusted servants; be informed by the literature.

**2) Understanding Self-Support**

Concept 9 (service manual p 39). Self-support is a shift in attitude.

**3) Reaching Out to the Next Generation of AAs**

Young person’s attitude, “I would rather be dead than boring”. Make sobriety attractive. Treat the next generation with respect. Primary purpose is to help the alcoholic who still suffers – don’t talk in a condescending way [e.g. you young people]. They earned their seat.

**4) Working With Other Entities Serving Alcoholics**

E.g. Cooperation with the Professional Community. We cooperate; we do not affiliate. We cooperate; we do not criticize.

### **Comments from the audience:**

- “Sober Swipe” – an internet “meeting” on facebook
- We need to meet alcoholics where they are, and today that’s on social media
- Three-legged stool – fellowship is going out with your fellow members, getting to know them.
- Self-support – it’s not just about money; it’s spiritual, taking care of yourself
- Not all groups participate in general service – how are they being informed about how this process works?

### **1<sup>st</sup> DCMC Roundtable notes:**

- What is the DCMC’s role regarding violence in meetings?
  - Groups are autonomous – call the police
  - DCMC supports the meeting secretary
  - GSO has a disruptive members policy (go to AA.org)
  - Solidarity – idea from the audience: when someone is acting out, everyone stand up; the person gets the message
  - Sponsor talks to sponsor
  - If disruptive (vs violent) – educate the person
- How to communicate information to groups when GSRs don’t communicate to their own group, and how to reach out to groups with no representation (i.e. no GSR)
  - Talk to secretary – get permission to talk to group members; invite group members to come to a district meeting
  - Anyone can attend a district meeting
  - Go to meetings and leave GSR information. Talk about how general service fires one up, enthusiasm
  - Create talking points – bullet point paragraph sent to the groups
  - Never use acronyms – keep it clear
- How to make it FUN!
  - Hold a workshop on Grapevine writing
  - Yellow Brick Road workshop (??)
  - We’re never going to get this done perfectly so let’s just get it done fun. Participate with each other
  - Schedule a “Take Your Sponsor To Dinner” with a dessert dash (??) and raffle/fundraiser
  - Service manual bingo = SMINGO
  - Jeopardy

**Mar 5, 2016**

### **Panel 5 – 8:00 am – Anonymity – The Spiritual Foundation**

#### **1) Are We Too Anonymous with our Fellow Members?**

Traditions 11 and 12 – Protects us from our egos. We have an obligation to our fellow AAs who we are and how to reach us. We should make our contact information available to our groups.

**2) Anonymity and Social Media: Is Your Home Group Picture Online?**

Speaker read what GSO says about social media. Don't disclose AA membership on Facebook.

**3) The Tradition of Anonymity – What Has History Shown Us?**

Traditions and Concepts are our "law". Has the time come to re-examine Traditions 11 and 12? Organizational anonymity is not the intent of Traditions 11 and 12. Promotion – re-visit in the digital age.

**4) Principles Before Personalities – How Do We Respond To Gossip? NO REPORT**

**Comments from the audience:**

- Facebook can be a gateway of one AA talking to another
- Searches on the internet produce negative results so you have to have your Area information online [so a search will come up with your Area information]
- "AA doesn't exist if you can't find it on the internet"
- [On anonymity] "AA Comes of Age", page 43, also page 264 (??)
- Hold a workshop on privacy setting on Facebook
- The current feasibility study – The business model we are operating under is archaic/isn't working. What is your home group willing to give up?
- How to find a home group member in the hospital if we don't know last name?
- Personal anonymity vs organizational anonymity – I cannot be so anonymous that AA will die.
- From an IT guy – Facebook isn't the social media network we want it to be for AA. We are a social network – we just haven't found it digitally yet.
- You have to be invited to private AA groups online
- Be free to show ourselves to a private group
- Look at AA guidelines for anonymity on the internet

**Panel 6 – 9:30 am – Attracting and Protecting Our Members**

**1) What Are We Doing For The Newcomer?**

Phone list and literature are given to newcomers. We don't go out and look for them; we wait for them to come to us. Willing to sponsor? Put up your hand. Two people take/invite the newcomer to coffee.

**2) Are Our Home Groups Safe and Welcoming?**

Introduce newcomers to others. Get their number. Is your meeting near public transportation? Develop Yellow Card for safety concerns

**3) Is There a Role for our Literature in Protecting our Members?**

Anonymity leads to trust and openness. Am I a healer ...or am I divisive. Safe for anyone who may enter. AA Group pamphlet – "About Those AA Group Problems..." (page 30)

#### 4) What is the Role of the General Service Office?

Page 5, “2015 GSC Report” – We have the responsibility, (not GSO). Page 42, “Language of the Heart” talks about the role of central office, etc. Aug 2009 Grapevine addresses unacceptable behavior. Just because someone has been in AA doesn’t mean they are practicing the 12 steps.

#### Comments from the audience:

- Language – How you present the program
- Hope – when AA changes we embrace the changes
- Even outside the meetings (before and after) we must pay attention to our actions
- Criminal – goes unchecked by GSO as evidenced by judicial system sending alcoholics to AA meetings
- Upside down triangle – it’s the groups, not GSB
- Surround the newcomer IF they want it
- Take action to show up!
- T-Rex [arms that don’t reach]
- Having regular workshops that focus on the newcomer
- “Best PRAASA I’ve ever been to” (7-8 PRAASAs)
- Lack of diversity in AA
- Does my group have “its” message? [Tradition 5]
- We are responsible for the face of this movement – safety, behavior – it’s the group’s responsibility
- “They said stick with us. I didn’t know how. They said we’ll stick with you.”
- Expanding our reach
- We are all greeters
- DCM/DCMC – my job is to know the groups.

#### Panel 7 – 11:00 am – Are We Going to any Length?

##### 1) How Will a Plain Language Version of the Big Book Help Carry The Message?

Intended audience. Remote communities, including language and culture. Is English to English a translation?

##### 2) Are We Relevant?

No....and yes. Providing we adapt – the ways we carry the message. Who is not at our meeting, and why not? It’s human to want to stay in our comfort zone. Communication is our purpose in general service. We think because we have pamphlets we have carried the message. We digest change slowly; but the pace of change is rapid around us. Sharing: we originated the idea.

##### 3) Why Aren’t We Translating All Conference Background Material?

Two reasons – cost and time. We can do bits at a time for \$45,000 per year. With the effort for accelerated deadlines, it takes time to translate 800-1000 pages.

#### 4) Revising Concept XI Comments on Women; Is There Other Literature We Should Address?

Yes. We can simultaneously hold a sane and insane thought.

##### Comments from the audience:

- Drop the notion of translating the Big Book; but create another version of the BB
- Concept XI minimalizes women
- Language such as “Frothy emotional appeal”, and “What an order! I can’t go through with it” – WHO SPEAKS LIKE THAT???
- New version of the Bible – KJV did not go away
- Idea that we work together to get background materials translated
- The BB as it is forces communication
- Overhaul all our literature to be consistent with our language today?
- Those incarcerated don’t have the luxury of working with a sponsor
- Are we relevant? Do we need a plain language BB? What are we afraid of? We lose people.....
- Plain language BB – jury is still out. “Gay chap”, Whoopie party”
- Literature – The Akron Pamphlets commissioned by Dr. Bob, available from the Akron Central Office. Dr. Bob said the BB is too hard to read.
- What is more important – translating the background material or translating the BB? We need conference material translated; we already have a Big Book
- Agenda topics – Consider, Discuss, Review, Explore – doing this [reading background material] is mandatory to take the agenda topics to our groups.
- BB translation – this agenda item might pique the interest of people who are not in general service.

##### 1:30 pm – Pacific Regional Trustee Report

What shape is your triangle? Recovery, Unity (it’s about the fellowship that we have with our AA friends at home), Service

The hand of AA – the unofficial theme of PRAASA. Take an interest in others; keep that interest.

Activities of the Boards – The GSB is made up of 21 trustees: 14 alcoholics (class B), and 7 non-alcoholics (class A, for amateur (derivative amore), they do it for the love of AA). They are connected to the fellowship through the General Service Conference. This year’s conference is substantial – there’s meat on the bones: Progress reports including expanding the gay and lesbian literature to encompass entire LGBT community

The Trustees have worked long and hard on the agenda topics, and then they release it to the conference – they just “let it go.”

Feasibility Study Report – if nothing changes we are going to start running deficits. The fellowship will rally providing AA stays positive

Grapevine initiative – carry the message campaign. Buy a subscription – give the application to our delegate to give away, There will be a subscription app this spring. “Grow Your Grapevine”. May issue – special section on service

## 2<sup>nd</sup> DCMC Roundtable notes:

- Facilitating the group conscience from the home group
  - Workshop with food
  - Mock sharing session that is real
- Keeping DCMs/DCMCs motivated
  - DCM dinners – networking among DCMs
  - Nevada has DCM trainer and GSR trainer
  - Visit the groups
  - Splitting the districts is against unity
- Helping with group inventory
  - The AA Group pamphlet – Group inventory questions page 29
  - Every other month GSR sharing session
  - Traditions check list can be used
  - The group came up with 50 questions – list was put on chairs and members were asked to review them and to come back with 5 questions for inventory
  - Do a district inventory so GSRs know/learn how it's done
  - What should we start doing/stop doing? For those who have stopped coming to the meeting ask them why don't you come back?
  - Someone outside the group takes notes, gives them to the GSR, set a follow up date to talk about what to do about the results of inventory. Be sure to write it down.
- How to reach out to the groups without a GSR and how to recruit
  - Area has a DCM school
  - General Service is FUN!!
  - DCMs pick up the unrepresented meetings – They are not alone, we are here to help. “What can we do for you?” Ask if there is anyone willing to be a point of contact for the meeting
  - Give GSR hugs
  - Have a dinner meeting for DCMs, DCMC so they can share information and ideas
  - Service culture – serve with joy!
  - DCMC for district with low participation does the DCM job.
  - Utah has DCM planning meetings
- Financial Guidelines
  - Ad hoc committee
    - Financial controls
    - Reimbursement sheet
    - Follow reimbursement for IRS standard mileage
  - Need structure and guidelines
  - Mileage – reimburse the actual cost
  - Budget – prioritize
  - District handbook
  - Segregation of duties
  - Fixed amount for DCM
  - Fixed amount for assemblies
  - All other expenses – approval of district before money is spent

- Three months fixed cost operating costs is the amount of prudent reserve
- Home stay for assemblies – put someone else up at home

## **Sunday Mar 6, 2016**

### **Panel 8 – 8:00 am – What’s on your mind?**

- “The language in which it was first written” – Why is that an impediment today if it wasn’t before?

### **Panel 9 – 9:15 am – Past Trustees Sharing Session: “If AA Could Only....”**

- I want AA to open the door just as it was opened to me
- Find a way to address our flat membership. Reach out to more isolated areas. Get out of comfort zone. Share the joy of recovery. Get message to our current members to be concerned about our finances.
- I have to walk through it and learn as I walk through it. AA security at meetings guarantee. Follow the steps, traditions, principles. They could be kissed by the magic of AA
- How we grow is by looking at the negative. She also cited page 81 “AA Come of Age”
- Remind us not to become more rigid as we grow older. Our book is meant to be suggestive only. All who suffer may come through (the gateway). Newcomers tens of thousands a year
- Tom Maguire shared his story
- Just keep coming back. God will find you.
- AA can and does – the problem is me. Moments of release when you stop thinking about self – reach outward.
- Newcomer packets. Hand them a Grapevine. No chanting. No helping the reader read (e.g. God could and would if he were sought.) No control?? “I control how the toilet paper is mounted.” As long as we are talking we’ll get to a solution. Know the principles.
- Go back to the way it was when I got sober (just kidding). We get smug, conservative, protective. Practice the program collectively to reverse the trend. Back to basics, but whose basics do you want to go back to? Diversity. Reaching out to newcomers is vital for us.

### **Panel 10 – 11:00 am – Delegate’s Ask It Basket**

Q: Does this imply that women’s meetings / gay meetings should allow anyone?

A: Be willing to be inclusive but give the participant direction.

Q: Should I only participate in one home group?

A: It is okay so long as the group is okay with it.

Q: What changes would delegates like to see in a changing world?

A: We need an all hands on deck conference. Not doing a good job of that. Be an ambassador of our spirited way of life. We are living on borrowed time. Service – do all you can.

Q: Now that GSC has taken its inventory, what should we do with it?

A: Take it seriously

Q: How do we engage groups as to why AAWS is relevant other than books and pamphlets?

A: Do we want books or services? Something's got to give.

Q: How have you dealt with inferiority complex, feeling less than?

A: May never leave me, keeps me humble. Solution for loneliness. Isolation is not a solution

Q: AAWS advertising. Presence on the internet. Violation of tradition?

A: I don't know.

Q: How to get H&I input on corrections

A: ----

Q: What is CCS?

A: Maintaining a mail relationship with an inmate. Inmate must be 2 regions away from you.

Q: How do we respond to gossip?

A: We say we don't want to hear it....

Q: How does AA go about selecting non-AA trustees?

A: They seek delegates help. GSO sends delegates list of open positions

Q: How to introduce new ideas to groups

A: Comes from being involved, being there, bring information

Q: What character defect flares up right about now (conference season); how do you deal with it?

A: ----

Q: How do you keep track of group consciences?

A: Groups bring consciences, we have panels. Process into a spreadsheet.

Q: Suggest a redeemable code for GV gift certificates.