

AUSTRALIAN GENERAL SERVICE STRUCTURE SIMPLIFIED

WHY DO WE NEED A GENERAL SERVICE CONFERENCE?

The late Bernard B Smith, non-alcoholic, then Chairman of the North American Board of Trustees, and one of the architects of the Conference structure, answered that question completely in his opening talk at the 1954 meeting in New York:

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 to 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 AA that rebirth which brought us back to life.

We need it because we, more than all others, are conscious of the devastating effect of the human urge for power and prestige which we must ensure can never invade AA. We need it to protect AA against government while insulating it from anarchy; we need it to protect AA against disintegration yet prevent over-integration. We need it so that Alcoholics Anonymous, and Alcoholics Anonymous alone, is the ultimate repository of its Twelve Steps, its Twelve Traditions and all of its services.

We need it to ensure that changes within AA come only as a response to the needs and the wants of all AA, not of any few. We need it to ensure that the doors of the halls of AA never have locks on them, so that all people for all time who have an alcoholic problem may enter these halls unmasked and feel welcome. We need it to ensure that Alcoholics Anonymous never asks of anyone who needs us what his or her race is, what his or her creed is, what his or her social position is.

(Excerpt from "The "Australian AA Service Manual"", 5th Edition)

You want to have a say about what goes on in Australian AA nationally? OK, then here's how you can do it:

Firstly, we are not dogmatic about many things in AA, but on one point a little dogmatism is necessary. You, the members, are AA. You, the members, are the boss. You say what shall be done and what shall not be done. Alcoholics Anonymous is a truly democratic fellowship; consequently, you are entitled to your say in every single aspect. Now read on.

DOES YOUR GROUP HAVE A GENERAL SERVICE REPRESENTATIVE (GSR)?

The GSR is the member of your Group you elect to be the link between the Group and the Australian National Office, the Australian General Service Conference (GSC) and the General Service Board of Trustees (GSB) of AA in Australia. Sounds ominous? It's not.

WHAT DOES A GSR DO?

He or she is responsible for ensuring that Group members are aware of the needs of National Office and encouraging the Group to support their National Office, CSO and Area financially. More and more Groups are implementing the 60-30-10, 50-30-10-10 or other contribution ratio Plan, and sending proportions of their surplus funds to the local Central Service Office (CSO), to National Office, to their Areas and to District. (See the *"Group Donation Plans"* pamphlet for details).

The GSR receives all mail from National Office, such as *"AA Around Australia"*, our quarterly news bulletin, and is responsible for giving members the opportunity to read this and all communication from National Office.

The GSR also attends District Meetings and Area Assemblies, to be the Group's voice on AA matters, to listen to other Groups and carry their views back to his/her own Group.

WHAT IS A DISTRICT?

Experience has shown that an Area, especially in this vast country of ours, covers too much territory for consistent good communication. Consequently, Areas are divided up into 'geographically possible' Districts.

WHAT IS A DISTRICT MEETING?

This is a meeting of the GSRs in the District. The meeting is held to share experience, discuss public information, internal procedures, problems etc, so that Groups know what each other is doing. There is so much to be done in AA that we cannot afford duplication of effort, and neither can we afford Groups to go separate ways - unity is an essential feature of all our operations. It is therefore an important function of the GSR to report back to the Group all that takes place at the District meeting.

WHAT IS A DISTRICT COMMITTEE MEMBER (DCM)?

He/she is the member chosen to represent your District at the Area Committee Meeting and report back to you via your District Meeting.

WHAT IS AN AREA COMMITTEE MEETING?

The Area Committee Meeting comprises the DCMs, the Area Delegate and Alternate, to discuss activities, problems and progress in their respective Districts, exchange ideas and co-ordinate services.

WHAT IS AN AREA ASSEMBLY?

An Area Assembly comprises the GSRs of the Area, the Area Committee, the Area Delegate and Alternate. The Assembly is the mainspring of the Conference structure, the democratic voice of the Fellowship expressing its wishes. Assemblies are the responsibility of the Area Committee and are conducted by its Chairperson. Assemblies may be held as often as the Area wishes and it is here that the Delegate to the GSC is elected. Experience has shown that the Election Assembly should be held soon after Conference but no later than January; the outgoing Delegate can then use that Assembly to report on the business of Conference to his or her Area.

WHAT IS A CONFERENCE DELEGATE?

A Conference Delegate is the person elected by the Area Assembly to represent the Area at the annual GSC (i.e. the Area Delegate).

WHAT DOES A CONFERENCE DELEGATE DO?

A Delegate serves one three year term only and attends the GSC each November during that time. Once having served such a term, he/she is not eligible to serve as Delegate again. The Delegate raises any points as required by the Area, may speak for or against any motion, join in all discussion, and may vote on all issues. However, possibly one of the most important aspects of the job is to report back to you, the members, via the Area Assembly and the GSRs, and personally wherever possible.

Being a Conference Delegate is time-consuming, so when electing your Delegate, make sure he/she has the necessary time available. The Delegate should be prepared to attend all Area and Regional service meetings and assemblies, as well as week-end get-togethers held in the Area and, maybe, some held in adjacent Areas.

The Delegate needs to be well versed in service literature such as the "Australian AA Service Manual", the "Twelve Concepts for World Service" and, of course, the "Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions".