

How The AA Preamble Was Changed

Earlier this year, we conducted multiple Pre Conference Workshops on Zoom to inform all members about agenda items that would be discussed at the 71st General Service Conference. All DCMs were notified of these workshops and were asked to notify their GSRs and other members in their districts. An agenda item to change the Preamble appeared under Grapevine items, since the Preamble is from the Grapevine, not from the Big Book. It was item E.

E. "Review suggested gender-neutral language options for changes to the AA Preamble."

This item was not acted on by the Grapevine committee, since they felt they needed more direction regarding wording. However, a couple of Floor Actions at the end of the Conference did address a change to the Preamble. For those wondering how the voting went on them, this document provides "blow by blow" details, including actual vote counts. But I'd like to preface all the voting tallies with some background information regarding how the Area expresses their Group's voice to the Delegate, as well as how the Conference operates.

Area 14

In Area 14, we do Pre Conference Workshops prior to the Assembly. This year, they were all done virtually, on Zoom, due to Covid. Each DCM was notified and asked what dates would work for their district. Whether or not we received a reply after several emails, we grouped districts together for the virtual events and notified each DCM of those districts two more times to be sure they were informed. We also published the dates of all of the workshops and posted flyers on the Area website, in case all of our multiple emails slipped through the cracks and DCM didn't inform their district—or if GSRs didn't look at the website over the two months between the Conference and the Area Assembly. We made many efforts to assure that GSRs were informed to take the Agenda items back to their groups to get their group's vote.

At the April Area Assembly, at 4:30, we met to get a sense of the Assembly regarding how I should vote as your Delegate. A sense of the Assembly is not a binding vote. It was just to let me know how the Groups felt about each item. We had 1.5 hours scheduled for this, but there were many people who didn't attend a Pre Conference workshop, resulting in a lot of discussion. As a result, we did run out of time. But this item was discussed. There was a simple majority against the item—not substantial unanimity as is typically sought at the Area. However, we also received multiple emails, texts and phone calls with GSRs giving me their Group's votes/voice on a lot of the Agenda items. When all were tallied, Area 14 did express that they were against this change. Again, it was a simple majority, with the majority only having 8 more votes than the minority—far from the substantial unanimity that we sought, but enough to give me an idea of how the Groups in the Area felt. So I went to the Conference with a sense of the Assembly.

General Service Conference

The Conference is composed of 93 delegates--one from each of the Areas in the US and Canada-- as well as some of the General Service Office Staff and all of the Trustees. The Conference has 135 total voting members, so the delegates will always have more than 2/3s of the vote, representing substantial unanimity for the Groups they represent. So, per the 2nd Concept, the Conference is viewed as "the actual voice and the effective conscience for our whole Society".

Consequently, if/when a Group claims that they are autonomous and don't have to follow the Advisory Actions of the GSC, they are refusing to follow the Group Conscience of AA North America—thereby affecting AA as a whole, which is totally contrary to our Traditions:

- Tradition 1—Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon AA unity.
 - Without unity, AA dies. "Realization dawns that he is but a small part of a great whole; that no personal sacrifice is too great for preservation of the Fellowship. He learns that the clamor of desires and ambitions within him must be silenced whenever these could damage the group. It becomes plain that the group must survive or the individual will not". *Twelve and Twelve p 130*
- Tradition 2—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.
 - Sole authority in AA is a loving God as He may express himself in the Group Conscience. "So spoke the Group Conscience. The group was right and I was wrong; the voice on the subway was not the voice of God. Here was the true voice, welling up out of my friends. I listened, and—thank God—I obeyed." *Twelve and Twelve page 138*

- Tradition 4—Each group should be autonomous, except in matters affecting other groups or AA as a whole.
 - Every group manages it's affairs as it pleases, except when AA as a whole is threatened. "Autonomy is a 10-dollar word. But in relation to us it means very simply that every AA group can manage it's affairs as it pleases, except when AA as a whole is threatened. *Twelve and Twelve page 146*

At Conference, the Agenda Items are sorted between the various committees to discuss and to either make recommendations to the overall Conference, to make suggestions to the Board or to take no action. All committee recommendations (what we in Area 14 call motions) are voted on and need substantial unanimity (2/3 majority) to pass and become Advisory Actions. However, we never voted on the actual Agenda item for changing the Preamble. It didn't come out of the Grapevine committee. They actually took no action on the proposal at all, since they felt that they didn't have enough direction regarding what language the Groups would like to see used. Consequently, it died in committee. In the Grapevine report to the Conference, they requested that the Grapevine Board gather additional shared experience from the Fellowship related to the topic of gender-neutral language options for the A.A. Preamble and bring back the results to the 2022 Conference Committee on Grapevine and La Viña.

The Advisory Action changing the Preamble was actually the result of 3 separate Floor Actions which occurred the final night of the conference. With Floor Actions, the first move the Conference Chair makes is to ask if there is a motion to Decline to Consider the Floor Action. If so, that motion is voted on first, with debate on the Floor Action following if it fails. If the motion to Decline to Consider passes, the Floor Action is not ever debated or voted on. So in this case, here's what happened.

Floor Action #2

"It is recommended that: The A.A. Preamble be changed:

FROM: *"Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism..."*

TO: *"In Alcoholics Anonymous we share our experience, strength and hope with each other that we may solve our common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism..."*

Here's how the vote went:

1. Motion to Decline To Consider made and seconded: 130 total votes, 2/3 majority would have been 87. 61 voted in favor of declining, 69 voted against declining to consider, so discussion began.
2. Motion to Table was made: 126 total votes cast, 48 voted yes, 78 voted no, so motion to table failed.
3. Vote on Floor Action: 122 total votes, 2/3 majority would have been 81. There were 93 votes in favor, 29 against the motion, so the motion passed.
4. Minority Opinion was heard.
5. There was a motion and a second to reconsider: 126 total votes cast. 2/3 majority would be 83. 58 voted in favor of reconsidering, 68 voted against reconsidering, so the original vote stood and we had a new Preamble!

I voted against this Floor Action for 2 reasons. First, because the voice of Area 14 was against changing the Preamble. Since it was only a simple majority rather than being substantially unanimous, that wasn't the deciding factor. 2nd, I took into account the fact that the background material distributed to all in Area 14 didn't include this version of the Preamble. Since no one in North America had ever been exposed to this version, I felt that there was no way we should even consider it. However, it didn't end there. There were 2 more Floor Actions to follow regarding the Preamble.

Floor Action #3

It is recommended that: The A.A. Preamble be changed:

FROM: *Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of **men and women** who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism.*

TO: *Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of **people** who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism.*

Here's how the vote went on this one:

1. Motion to Decline To Consider made and seconded: 127 total votes, 2/3 Majority would have been 85. There were 82 Yes votes to decline and 45 No Votes to decline, so the motion to decline to consider failed and discussion began.
2. Vote on Floor Action: 128 total votes, 2/3 majority would have been 85. There were 90 votes in favor, 38 against the motion, so the motion passed.
3. Minority Opinion was heard.
4. There was a motion and a second to reconsider: 128 total votes cast. 2/3 majority would be 85. 38 voted in favor of reconsidering, 90 voted against reconsidering, so the original vote stood and we had another new Preamble!

I did exercise the Right of Decision granted to all trusted servants in Concept 3 and voted in favor of this change based on the following information that was presented during discussion.

- In 1986 the Conference passed an Advisory Action stating the following: "That the AAWS Editorial Staff continue to degenderize AA Literature, with the exception of Bill's writings, as the items are reprinted."
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- Delegates from both the west coast and the east coast spoke of the fact that many of the young people they are seeing coming into the rooms are more gender fluid than previous generations and that our "rigidity" in sticking to the term "men and women" was driving them out of the rooms—and many of them don't ever make it back.
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- Another Delegate spoke to the fact that many very young people are entering the rooms and don't see themselves as men and women, rather viewing themselves as teenagers or kids—not adults.
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- The Communication Audit performed by an outside entity a couple of years ago looked at many things, including our literature, and stated "many of these pamphlets are dated with language and references that are falling further and further behind the times, presenting an overall perception of AA as an organization obsessed with it's own history and perhaps out of touch with today's population.
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- Area 14 was not substantially unanimous on the concept of changing the Preamble.
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So now we had two new versions of the Preamble. That led to yet another Floor Action:

Floor Action #5

It is recommended that:

"The Preamble revision described in the 3rd Floor Action of the 71st GSC as the new revised A.A. Preamble be presented to the GSB for approval. " Here's how the voting went on that one:

1. Motion to decline to consider made and 2nd. 129 total votes, 2/3rds would have been 86. There were 59 in favor of declining and 70 against, so motion to decline failed.
2. Vote on floor action (after discussion/debate) 128 total votes, 2/3s would have been 86, but only 85 voted in favor of motion, 43 against, so motion failed by 1 voted.
3. Minority Opinion resulted in a Motion to Reconsider. 128 voted with 77 voting in favor of reconsidering and 51 against so discussion started again.
4. Question was called– 115 voted in total, with 98 in favor of calling the question and 17 against it.
5. Vote on motion– 130 total votes, 2/3s would be 87. There were 90 in favor and 40 against so motion passed.

This was one of the final items voted on this year. Normally, the Board would have met that evening to certify all of the Advisory Actions resulting from the Conference, but since it was after 2am when we wrapped up, that meeting wasn't held till the following weekend. At the Post Conference Saturday Board meeting they determined they could not ignore the first floor action regarding the Preamble as

an approved advisory action of the GSC and that both versions were to be submitted to the Grapevine Board in order for them to make a final determination. The Grapevine Board subsequently sent out this announcement on Friday, 5/28.

"The June issue of Grapevine was on press when the Conference requested the change, so this is the first opportunity to make the adjustment in the magazines. After June 15, as new Grapevine, La Viña and A.A.W.S. literature or reprints go to press, and as web pages are updated, the language will change wherever the A.A. Preamble appears. The topic was actively discussed in groups across the United States and Canada for two years over both the 70th and 71st General Service conference panels. As a result of those conversations the Delegates of the General Service Conference passed a series of votes, in a sequence of events that culminated with the final advisory action to change "men and women" to "people".

As a postscript, I recently attended a meeting of all Southeast Region Delegates. The Director of the Grapevine Board was present. When he was questioned about the Preamble change, he said that they were all surprised at the pushback due to the 1986 Advisory Action stating ""That the AAWS Editorial Staff continue to degenderize AA Literature, with the exception of Bill's writings, as the items are reprinted." When the Proposed Agenda Items relating to the Preamble started coming in a few years ago, they were initially going to just make the change, per that Advisory Action. However, they decided to let the Fellowship's voice be heard and to allow the Groups to vote, via their Delegates. His point of view is that we will be seeing more of our literature, (other than the Big Book and other of Bill's writings) updated to be non-gender specific as time goes on. He doesn't expect each piece to go before the Conference, unless someone proposes to update anything written by Bill.

Please feel free to reach out with any further questions you have.

Finally, we must always keep in mind our Declaration of Unity when we don't agree with the group conscience:

Declaration Of Unity

This we owe to A.A.'s future:
To place our common welfare first:
To keep our Fellowship united.
For on A.A. unity depend our lives,
And the lives of those to come.

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