Friday morning

The Serenity Prayer is said twice each morning, once in the non-English language of a delegate, and then in English. Today were heard it twice, in Ukrainian and in Russian. We’ve also heard Greek and Farsi.

In the OA meeting this morning, attending were delegates from Brazil (2), Spain, Italy, and Colombia. It was profound to hear a couple of them, talking about what it’s like to be attending a conference in a second language. “I have no room for any other thought!” she said. Another spoke of how tired she was at the end of the day yesterday, from listening and translating before she could even think about what was being communicated.

First business this morning was voting for trustees. There was a 10-point direction for how the process would go, and still, someone came to the microphone and asked how many candidates could be voted for (as many as you want) and how the ballot could be marked. “With an x,” was the answer. The process is quite formalized. We were asked to clear the table in front of us of everything but a writing implement. The doors were closed and wouldn’t be opened until balloting had completed. We were directed not to mark the ballot until told to do so. We were told how to hold the ballot up for collection. Etc.

One task of the center-mike monitor is to distribute the forms for proposed amendments, which have three carbons so copies can go to various places. He announced this morning that he is already out of forms! A few more are being dredged up, but after that, prospective amenders will have to write out their proposals four times. We are a very particular bunch! [Full disclosure: I did offer an amendment during last year’s conference.]

As in any group, some of us are far more likely to get up to the center mike to comment or question. A friend here called it center mike bingo. IMO, Region 6 has members more prone to this game than others, to the point where I wonder if they wish we had stayed home! [Full disclosure: I got up to speak against an amendment this morning.]

The votes are in: I, and my friends on either side of me decided to handicap the vote, and each of them got 4 of 6 correct. I got 3 of 6. Although, the spread of votes was narrow. The first-place finisher received 159 votes (out of 174 eligible voters present), and the sixth-place finisher received 149. All three of us got the first and last place finishers correct, so I guess those were pretty obvious.

The acronym amendment, after more discussion, passed by a wide margin.

This old, white male thinks that the broadening of OA to truly include people who speak other languages and who have lifestyles, religions, skin tones, and other attributes different from mine has been a dominant theme of the last year’s and this year’s conferences. We’re presently discussing a change in our Unity With Diversity Policy that would replace “his or her” with “their.” I was a copy editor professionally for 30 years and ensuring number and tense agreement was a recurring task, and this change grates on my old ears. HOWEVER, I also know that language is supple and ever changing, and in a landscape far broader than OA, this is how talkers have decided to address this question of gender being broader than only “his” or “her.” And, I think this fight, in this room, is between those who understand and need this change, and those who don’t understand that it’s needed.

Once again, even this small-in-volume change was nicked, if not to death, then to the reference subcommittee, from which it may never return. … And now, the subsequent amendment received a third amendment, and it, too, was withdrawn for referral. This three-strikes-and-you’re-out rule is becoming, perhaps not intentionally,  a way to make sure we get things done very slowly, if at all. In the case of the former, the action led to one delegate’s slumping into a sobbing heap in the hallway afterward. Though I too am appalled by this ridiculous occurrence, that struck me as histrionic. I’m pretty sure that’s because it doesn’t strike me as deeply emotionally as it does for others.

Oh, I forgot to mention: That change would have been to the fellowship’s Unity With Diversity policy.