

Background and Traditions of the Girl Talk Michigan Conference

The original Girl Talk conference began in 1988 in Dallas, Texas. Vannoy S, Suzy J, and Kaye G decided that the Dallas and Fort Worth area could benefit from a woman's Al-Anon and AA conference. They chose a place outside of Dallas, which is called Lake Levon. In 2001, the Dallas conference was moved to Hawkins, Texas, due to some scheduling conflicts.

Fast forward to 2004 when Dannielle H-T was a speaker at the 2004 Michigan Al-Anon Convention. One of our founding board members, Steffi K, befriended her and later attended the Dallas Girl Talk Conference in October of the same year. At that conference, Vannoy S suggested that a Girl Talk conference be started in Michigan with seed money from the Dallas group (this money is not to be paid back but paid forward so that other Girl Talk groups can be started). With that inspiration, upon returning home, excited with the unique quality discovered in Dallas, Steffi enlisted Kathy W who started researching the possibilities & helped gather a full Board of Directors. Planning continued in 2005, and our first conference was held in January 2006, at Colombiere Conference Center in Clarkston, Michigan.

This conference started like most women's conferences – out of a need. Women of AA and Al-Anon can come together to get away for a weekend free from all the worries and cares of home and work. A place to come and share with other women what recovery has meant to them, from both sides. A place where women can share feelings and ideas on a deeper level than what could be shared in a regular hour-long meeting. Even the speakers that have been asked to come can share on certain situations that they might not share in a regular conference because there is no taping and no men.

There are many bonuses that come out of these weekends. AA and Al-Anon women find out that they are not so different. Whether the medication be people, places or things like alcohol we find that fears are fears and pain is pain. Due to low self-esteem and low self-worth, some of us women have forgotten or maybe never even had the chance to learn how to be women. From actions to appearances, these things can be learned at conferences such as these. Let us not forget the fun and the laughter, from playing games, from staying up too late, getting up too early and the skits and games that the board members and trustees dare to put on.

Some of the ways this is accomplished is by setting the tone of the conference in as safe and lovely a manner as possible. This is the primary objective of all board members and trustees. Out of this have come traditions such as following the Twelve Traditions of AA and Al-Anon. These traditions have been tried over the years and found to work best for this conference and are not to be changed. Maintaining these traditions also helps to keep the operating of the conference simple.

Have a great conference!

Frequently Asked Questions.....

1. How is this conference different than others held in our area?
 - ❖ This conference started like most women's conferences – out of a need. It is a weekend where women can share feelings and ideas on a deeper level than what could be shared in a regular hour-long meeting. Even the speakers who have been asked to come can share on certain situations that they might not share during a normal conference because there is no taping and no men. We also strive to keep AA & Al-Anon on an equal level.
2. Can participants come for Saturday only?
 - ❖ NO. The Girl Talk conference is structured differently and is carefully planned as a weekend experience. Participants are strongly encouraged to attend the whole weekend to benefit the most from the entire program. It would also disrupt the “intimate setting” we are trying to maintain throughout the weekend.
3. Why don't we accommodate “Day-Visitors” or “Drop-In's”?
 - ❖ There would be a considerable “drop-in” cost charged by Colombiere for day commuters (more than \$60, not including the GTMI registration fees we would need to pass along also). Day Visitors would also create additional interruptions to the meetings as people would be arriving ‘whenever’. Also, we would need to miss the conference ourselves to register people as they choose to arrive.
 - ❖ Furthermore, we close registration at dinnertime on Friday or we would have to miss parts of the conference ourselves. We would also like to emphasize ***please do not compare Girl Talk of Michigan to a state or county convention*** where hundreds of people are attending, and teams can take short shifts to handle registration through Saturday night.
4. Why is there a NON-REFUNDABLE DEPOSIT ?
 - ❖ We are non-profit organization and a self-funded event. The non-refundable registration fee covers the cost of overhead expenses, including lodging, meals, snacks, publications, postage, registration materials, room and equipment rentals. Event fees are kept to a minimum and the weekend is designed to be self-supporting.
 - ❖ GTMI has a responsibility to honor our contract to Colombiere, and we cannot do this if we refund money we do not have. While your ***payments*** are non-refundable, you ***may choose*** to transfer them to another individual.
5. Why is there an Early Registration date of October 15?
 - ❖ We ask for early registrations so that we can have funds available for the required finances needed to secure deposits and items related to planning our conference (deposit for a conference center, gift items, planning, etc.).
 - ❖ We also use this date so that we have time to review and confirm our commitment to Colombiere, without overextending ourselves. We need to provide a contractual agreement with Colombiere before the end of October, and early registration numbers help us determine a more accurate count for attendance.

6. Why do we ask attendees to be on-time for all workshops/speakers?
 - ❖ Courtesy for everyone.
 - ❖ Less distraction to speakers, workshop leaders, and other attendees.
7. Why do we have an auction and souvenirs available?
 - ❖ Fundraising through the auction and purchasing souvenirs is strictly optional, and proceeds will be used to fund the Scholarship fund as well as to create a seed fund for future Girl Talk groups (this was a requirement upon receipt of our seed money from Girl Talk Dallas).
 - ❖ We also hope to create two additional funds – one to pay for our main speakers and possibly cover some or all of their travel expenses; the other would be to build a prudent reserve for GTMI.
8. Why do we ask for donations of auction items ahead of time?
 - ❖ Having all auction items ahead of time allows us to set all items up for viewing beforehand. We would have to miss programs and create more table space to add additional items to the auction table if they are brought directly to the conference.
9. Why C.A.L. Literature?
 - ❖ Everyone is encouraged to use/refer to only Conference Approved Literature (CAL) from Al-Anon and AA during the conference weekend. (The only exception possible is during the main speakers' open talks, as this may be considered part of their personal story).
10. Why are there other people milling about throughout the weekend (specifically males)?
 - ❖ Colombiere Conference Center is available to many different groups, as well as being a long-term residence for the Jesuit Community. While we will be sharing the dining hall with other groups, please be assured that GTMI attendees will always have separate and private meeting, workshop, hospitality, and sleeping rooms so that our conference will remain “safe and intimate”.
11. Have other locations/venues even been considered?

Other venues have been reviewed and visited. Several factors were taken into consideration such as:

 - ❖ Cost – we realize everyone is struggling these days financially, so we try to keep our costs as low as possible while creating a fantastic and spiritual weekend for all.
 - ❖ Convenience - we wanted a space that was convenient, yet far enough to feel as if we are truly getting “away” for the weekend.
 - ❖ Setting – we are trying to stay in a smaller setting so that we can keep the “tone” of the conference more intimate and purposely leaving out other distractions (such as television, telephones, pool/spa access, etc.).
 - ❖ Size – the facility must have one (1) large meeting room spacious enough to hold all of us at once, as well as a minimum of two (2) meeting rooms to accommodate half our group for breakout meetings.

- ❖ Timing - there are several outdoor conference facilities we looked at; however, since the weather in Michigan during January is not always predictable, we chose not to have to traipse outdoors and/or between buildings for dining and/or restroom facilities.
- ❖ Food – the facility must be flexible with food choices and allow us to bring in and set up our own snacks instead of requiring us to purchase from them directly. Colombiere accommodates for diabetics, vegetarian, vegan, etc. while also allowing us to refrigerate items and use microwave ovens when needed.

The Board Members and Trustees truly value the GTMI Conference Evaluation comments and feedback that is received each year. This is in fact how we grow and learn, allowing for improvements to make each year a little better than the last. Something is obviously working as we are celebrating our 18th year !

While not all comments and suggestions are implemented, they are all taken into consideration with each conference board in the planning process, allowing us to maintain the FOCUS of this weekend conference as our own RECOVERY PROGRAM(s) – whether that is AA, Al-Anon, or both.

Thank you for your input and support of Girl Talk Michigan. This is for us ALL !