

REQUEST FOR FELLOWSHIP SHARING ON SELF SUPPORT

October, 2008

By Terence M. Bedient, Class A trustee, Chair of the trustees' Finance and Budgetary Committee;

At the 2008 General Service Conference, the following Advisory Action was adopted:

That the trustees' Finance and Budgetary Committee gather input from the Fellowship on the benefits and liabilities, both spiritual and practical, of fully funding G.S.O. Services to the Fellowship (G.S.O. Functional expenses) by the voluntary contributions of A.A. members and groups and that this information be forwarded to the 2009 Conference Committee on Finance.

In order to stimulate discussion and to provide background on this topic, the trustees' Finance and Budgetary Committee has prepared the following background. The following is not intended to be exhaustive. Much has been written on the subject of self support in the annual General Service Conference Reports, which also include the annual audited financial statements of the General Service Board and its operating affiliates, A.A. World Services, Inc. and AA Grapevine, Inc.; in Conference approved books and pamphlets; in service material prepared by the G.S.O; and in many Grapevine articles.

This background should help you in organizing informed discussions of the topic. Collected sharing received in the Office by January 30, 2009 will be included in the Conference Finance Committee's background material for the 2009 General Service Conference.

Spiritual Aspects of Self Support

Suggested reading:

"Tradition Seven" from Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, published by Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. Pages 110 and 111 (beginning with "Let us now talk about money..." and ending with "It is the chief safeguard of our future") in AA Comes of Age, published by Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc.

The following excerpts from 3 AA Grapevine articles written by Bill Wilson:

1. June 1946 "Policy on Gifts Funds" (Copyright © (June, 1946) AA Grapevine, Inc. Reprinted with permission). This article appears in full in The Language of the Heart, published by AA Grapevine, Inc., beginning on page 28.

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Now what about donations or payments to A.A. from outside sources? There was a time some years ago, when we desperately needed a little outside aid. This we received. And we shall never cease being grateful to those devoted friends whose contributions made possible the Alcoholic Foundation, the book Alcoholics Anonymous and our Central Office. Heaven has surely reserved a special place for every one of them. They met a great need, for in those days we A.A.s were very few and very insolvent!

But times have changed. Alcoholics Anonymous now has more than 24,000 members whose combined earnings this year ought to be many millions. Hence a very powerful feeling is spreading among us that A.A. ought to be self-supporting. Since most members feel they owe their very lives to the movement they think we A.A.s ought to pay its very modest expenses. And isn't it, they ask, high time that we commenced to revise the prevalent idea that an alcoholic is always a person who must be helped--usually with money. Let us A.A.s, they say, be no longer takers from society. Instead, let us be givers. We are not helpless now. Neither are we penniless any more. Were it possible to publish tomorrow that every A.A. group had become fully self-supporting, it is probable that nothing could create more good will for us than such a declaration. Let our generous public devote its funds to alcohol research, hospitalization or education. Those fields really need money. But we do not. We are no longer poor. We can, and we should, pay our own way.

Of course, it can hardly be counted an exception to the principle of self support if a non-alcoholic friend comes to a meeting and drops a dollar in the hat. It is doubtful, too, if we should refuse the relative who sends in his \$5 mite; a token of appreciation for the recovery of someone close. Perhaps we would be ungracious to refuse his gift.

But it is not these small tokens of regard which concern us. It is the large contributions, especially those that may carry future obligations, which should give us pause. Then too, there is evidence that wealthy people are setting aside sums for A.A. in their wills under the impression we could use a great deal of money if we had it. Shouldn't we discourage them? And already there have been a few alarming attempts at the public solicitation of money in the name of Alcoholics Anonymous. Few A.A.s will fail to imagine where such a course could lead us. Every now and then we are offered money from so called "wet" or "dry" sources. Obviously dangerous, this. For we must stay out of

that ill-starred controversy. Now and then the parents of an alcoholic, out of sheer gratitude, wish to donate heavily. Is this wise? Would it be good for the alcoholic himself? Perhaps a wealthy A.A. wishes to make a large gift. Would it be good for him, or for us, if he did so? Might we not feel in his debt and might he not, especially if a newcomer, begin to think he had bought a ticket to that happy destination, sobriety?

In no case have we ever been able to question the true generosity of these givers. But is it wise to take their gifts? Though there may be rare exceptions, I share the opinion of most older A.A.s that acceptance of large donations from any source is very questionable--almost always a hazardous policy. The struggling club may badly need a friendly gift or loan. Even so, it might be better in the long run to pay as we go. We must never let any immediate advantage, however attractive, blind us to the possibility that we may be creating a disastrous precedent for the future. Strife over money and property has too often wrecked better people than us temperamental alcoholics! ...

2. November 1957 "Respecting Money" (Copyright © (November, 1957) AA Grapevine, Inc. Reprinted with permission). This article appears in full in *The Language of the Heart*, beginning on page 218.

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To conclude: Our spiritual way of life is safe for future generations if, as a society, we resist the temptation to receive money from the outside world. But this leaves us with a responsibility--one that every member ought to understand. We cannot skimp when the treasurer of our group passes the hat. Our groups, our areas, and AA as a whole, will not function unless our services are sufficient and their bills are paid.

When we meet and defeat the temptation to take large gifts, we are only being prudent. But when we are generous with the hat we give a token that we are grateful for our blessings and evidence that we are eager to share what we have found with all those who still suffer.

3. October 1967 "AA' s Tradition of Self-Support" (Copyright © (October, 1967) AA Grapevine, Inc. Reprinted with permission). This article, reprinted below in full, also appears in *The Language of the Heart*, beginning on page 349.

AA.' s far-flung Twelfth Step activities, carrying the message to the next sufferer, are the very lifeblood of our AA adventure. Without this vital activity, we would soon become anemic; we would literally wither and die.

Now where do AA' s services--world-wide, area, local--fit into our scheme of things? Why should we provide these functions with money? The answer is simple enough. Every single AA service is designed to make more and better Twelfth Step work possible, whether it be a group meeting place, a Central or Intergroup Office to arrange hospitalization and sponsorship, or the World Service Headquarters to maintain unity and effectiveness all over the globe.

Though not costly, these service agencies are absolutely essential to our continued expansion--to our survival as a fellowship. Their costs are a collective obligation that rests squarely upon all of us. Our support of services actually amounts to a recognition on our part that AA must everywhere function in full strength--and that, under our Tradition of self-support, we are all going to foot the bill.

We have long known that Alcoholics Anonymous has no need for charitable contributions from any source. Our Fellowship is self-supporting. Neither do AA groups try to meet the rehabilitation expenses of thousands of newcomers. Long ago we learned that that was impractical.

Instead, AA offers to the new person a spiritual way of life that can eliminate the alcohol problem. With this accomplished, the new person, in the company of his fellow sufferers, can then begin the solution of his personal problems--including the financial one.

So AA groups themselves accept no charitable funds--and give none away. At first glance, this attitude may seem to be hard-nosed, even callous. An immense experience tells us otherwise. Money gifts--as a prerequisite of getting sober--are usually worthless when made a function of an AA group.

Of course, we see AA' s primary charity in the Twelfth Step activities of tens of thousands of us as we daily carry the AA message to newcomers. We travel millions of miles; we absent ourselves from business and home. In the aggregate, we lay out very large sums. As individuals, we do not hesitate to give temporary financial aid to the newcomer, if and when he seems to want sobriety first. Here, then, is money charity aplenty, always given on a very personal, face-to-face basis. And perhaps even this cannot be called wholly charitable, since

every Twelfth Step effort means more certain sobriety and added spiritual growth for the sponsor.

Both these principles we understand: that AA wants no charity; that we support our own services. We understand--but we sometimes forget.