

# Gender Neutral Task Force Area 59

## Proposed Motion

**Proposed Motion:** WA Area delegate will bring a motion to the World Service Conference (WSC) to replace male pronouns with gender neutral language in the Al-Anon Legacies

**Vision:** Everyone, with any religious belief or of none, feels welcome in Al-Anon

### How would the Legacies be affected?

- **The proposed change would affect Steps 3,7,11 and Tradition 2, replacing the six male pronouns with gender neutral language**
  - **Step 3:** *Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood **God***
  - **Step 7:** *Humbly asked **God** to remove our shortcomings*
  - **Step 11:** *Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understood **God**, praying only for knowledge of **God's** will for us and the power to carry that out*
  - **Tradition 2:** *For our group purpose there is but one authority — a loving God **as expressed** in our group conscious. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern*

### History and Background

- Over the past 25+ years, the issue of using male pronouns in our Legacies has been discussed many times
  - The 1993 WSC had two motions brought to the floor (*WSC 1993 Summary*, p. 41)
  - Reports by World Service Office (WSO) committees such as: Fellowship Communication and Literature, Ask it Basket questions by Delegates, and the Policy Committee
  - 2006 WSO shared members' questions regarding gendered language in Conference Approved Literature (CAL) at the 2006 WSC
  - 2008 WSO Executive Director responded (noted in Gender Neutral Thought Force report) to questions on making changes to the Legacies
  - 2013-2014 Gender Neutral Thought Force of North California conducted a member survey
  - 2014 WSC Summary included a Process for Change to the Legacies
  - 2016 WA Area AWSC and Pre Con discussion item

### Knowledge Based Decision Making (KBDM) Questions

#### 1. What do we know about our members' (and prospective members') needs, wants, and preferences that relate to this issue?

- Using "He" and "Him" to refer to a Higher Power can imply that Al-Anon is a religious fellowship. This inconsistency with our Al-Anon principles may turn away newcomers, as well as alienate current members
- At times, members change the male pronouns to gender neutral language while reading the Legacies in meetings. This can affect group unity and Al-Anon as a whole
- WA Area member comments at 2016 AWSC/Pre Con 2016 and Responses from task force (see Appendixes B and C)

## 2. What do we know about our resources and the strategic position of our fellowship that is relevant to this discussion?

- Processes for changing the Legacies and translating literature exist (see Appendix C, #9 & #10)

## 3a. What do we know about the current realities (membership, culture, etc.) that is relevant to this discussion?

- Academic research into the effects of using gender-specific pronouns (he or him) tell us this language can make a significant difference in individuals' assumptions and responses. These studies tell us that using "he" or "him" to refer to God leads inevitably to thinking about God as a man (see Appendix A for more details)
  - 1980 study at UCLA, as well as a 1990 study at the University of Wisconsin concluded that using 'he' to mean 'he or she' doesn't work and influences the way people think and behave
  - 2001 study at Central Michigan University found that women and men respond differently to the concept of God depending on whether God is portrayed as a man or a woman
- There are many examples of our society changing to gender neutral language:
  - Other 12 Step Programs (Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous, Food Addicts Anonymous, Workaholics Anonymous) use gender neutral language in their Legacies with the permission of Alcoholics Anonymous
  - WA state Governor signed a bill to rewrite state laws using gender neutral vocabulary (April 2013)
  - Boy Scouts of America has changed its name to "Scouts of America" in an effort to be more inclusive (May 2018)

## 3b. What do we know about our fellowship's environment (technology, spiritual principles, our Legacies & CAL) that is relevant to this discussion?

- Current electronic communications and editing technology make this change relatively easy and cost efficient
  - Change would only be required in any newly printed CAL
  - Web sites are easily updated
  - Ballots for voting on this proposal can be sent out electronically
- **Tradition 5 states: "Each AFG has but one purpose: to help families of alcoholics. We do this by practicing the Twelve Steps of AA ourselves, by encouraging and understanding our alcoholic relatives, and by welcoming and giving comfort to families of alcoholics."** We want to be a welcoming place for anyone who wants help in dealing with how alcohol has affected their lives, no matter what their gender or religious beliefs may be. Having gender neutral wording would help to keep the focus on our single purpose.
- **"...Our Twelve Steps speak of a Power greater than ourselves and a God of our understanding. We do not impose a particular image or definition of that God or Higher Power...we leave it up to individual members to define these terms for themselves...The God of our understanding may be male or female, an inanimate object, disembodied spirit, or force of nature."** How Al-Anon Works, p.49.

- ***“Al-Anon is not allied with any sect or denomination. It is a spiritual program, based on no particular form of religion. Everyone is welcome; no matter what affiliation or none.” Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual 2018-2021, p.22.***

#### **4. What are the ethical implications of our choices (How will our choices affect others)?**

- A barrier would be removed, making Al-Anon more accessible for present and future generations

#### **5. What do we wish we knew, but don't?**

- How does the current language impact Al-Anon and Alateen members, newcomers and diverse members?
- How many other Areas have discussed this issue?
- How many times has WSO been contacted about this topic?

#### **Summary:**

- On Al-Anon's 25th anniversary, Lois W. wrote to the 1976 WSC: *“It's always forward that we have to look, and let our gratitude be for those to come...”*. This sentiment is echoed in this year's 2018 WSC theme, *“There is No Standing Still”*. Our vision is that everyone, with any religious belief or of none, feels welcome in Al-Anon. The proposed motion will more closely align us with the principles of the Al-Anon program. We believe using gender neutral language in the Al-Anon Legacies is an important way to become more open and inviting to everyone who needs the recovery and healing of our program.

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Gender Neutral Task Force WA Area 59 Committee members:

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