

MEMORANDUM

TO: Conference Members
FROM: Executive Director
DATE: May 1, 2009
RE: Use of gender-specific references to a Higher Power in CAL

The WSO was asked at the 2006 WSC to send a copy of questions it receives from Conference members and our responses to all Conference members so that they can share leadership by responding to recurring questions in their Areas. The WSO believes that the following question and our response might be one of those topics.

Question: Why does our literature often refer to “God” using male pronouns, when for many in the program a Higher Power could never be a “he”?

Answer: Al-Anon is a worldwide fellowship with an extremely diverse membership. Our literature, based on the personal sharings of our members, expresses a wide array of concepts of a “Power greater than ourselves.” The words “as we understood” were included in the Steps so that all members could define for themselves the Power referred to in Step Two. In Al-Anon each of us is free to understand and identify this Power in our own way. Throughout our literature we are reminded of the tremendous freedom each member has to interpret “Higher Power” or “God” according to his or her own understanding. Pages 13 and 211 in *Courage to Change* (B-16), page 146 in *Hope for Today* (B-27), and page 49 of *How Al-Anon Works for Families & Friends of Alcoholics* (B-22) all reiterate this idea.

Our literature is comprised of two different elements that need to be considered when discussing changes to gender references to a Higher Power. One element included in most of our literature is our three Legacies--the Steps, Traditions, and Concepts of Service. Our Steps were adopted almost word for word from Alcoholics Anonymous. Over the years people have suggested changes to them, but despite this, to date no motion has come to the floor of the annual World Service Conference, Al-Anon’s largest group conscience. Because Al-Anon’s Three Legacies are considered the foundation of our program, they can only be changed by written agreement of three-quarters of all registered Al-Anon groups. Any decision to attempt such a change has to be begun by the Conference. If the Conference should decide to propose a change, a poll would have to be taken of all groups worldwide. The difficulty of this process is reflective of its importance.

The other element is the inclusion of personal stories from our members. Although stories are often edited for grammar or length, the Literature Committee has repeatedly stressed the need to retain the flavor and ideas expressed by each member. In writing to us, some members of our inclusive fellowship use the pronouns “Him” or “He,” while some use “Her” or “She.” Others do not assign a gender to their Higher Power, or use another term to describe their idea of a Power greater than ourselves. The Literature Committee has concurred in the past that when quoting these sharings, we respect the

intent of the members who wrote by preserving their personal interpretations without alteration, unless it advocates a specific religious tenet or philosophy. Specific religious discussions are advised against in the “Three Obstacles to Success in Al-Anon.”