



Dollars and Sense: A look at group finances

"We have no dues or fees but we do pass the basket." As members, most of us are so accustomed to this statement; we automatically reach into our wallets the moment the collection basket is placed on the table. We know what to do and we drop in whatever we can. No one is forced to contribute. Members are not pressured or judged by the amount they give.

Passing the basket at the group level, however, is only the beginning. In a real sense, once the contributions are counted and turned over to the group Treasurer, Al-Anon's service structure goes into action. The purpose of having a treasury is not to stockpile money. It is to apply our own contributions towards group expenses and to carry the message of Al-Anon as a whole. In keeping with the principle of autonomy, groups establish their own financial priorities. To welcome newcomers and to keep our meeting room doors open, we depend on contributions to purchase supplies, literature, and to do Twelfth Step work.

Al-Anon relies upon its own members and groups to support the fellowship at all levels. Due to our spiritual nature and the Seventh Tradition of self-support, we do not accept outside contributions. We can only look to ourselves to meet our financial responsibilities. Some groups meet only their own expenses, others reach beyond their immediate group by supporting districts, information services, area service arms, and our World Service Office (WSO).

Although an outline of a basic financial philosophy appears in our *Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual* (P-24/25), here are a few frequently asked questions and answers which may assist members, trusted servants, and groups with the routine management of money in Al-Anon:

FOR MEMBERS

Q. Is there a specified amount of money to be given at each meeting or throughout the year to the group(s) I attend?

A. No, Al-Anon has no dues or fees for its members, all contributions are voluntary. We are not required to "pledge" or "tithe." We give whatever and whenever we are able.

Q. Am I responsible for supporting the WSO? If so, how much can I give and when is the best time to donate?

A. The Seventh Tradition defines our personal responsibility, since Al-Anon is a fellowship of self-support. As members, we share in supporting Al-Anon worldwide by donating to its headquarters. Contributions

to the WSO are welcomed at any time. Members may wish to respond to the Seventh Tradition appeal letters sent in February, May, August, and November. The suggested contribution is \$5.00, \$10.00, or an amount that reflects each member's gratitude at each appeal. Other suggestions for donations are the Birthday Plan; Memorial contributions; bequests; or direct individual donations. In any calendar year, an Al-Anon member may contribute to the WSO up to one percent of the total revenue of the WSO General Fund as identified in the previous year's audit. The WSO will accept a one-time legacy from an Al-Anon member in any amount up to ten percent of the total revenue of the WSO General Fund as identified in the previous year's audit.

FOR TREASURERS

Q. How can I find out about my specific responsibilities?

A. The immediate past Treasurer or another member familiar with the group can provide necessary background information. (See the *Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual*.)

Q. If I am the Treasurer of one group, may I serve in the same or another capacity for my district, information service, or area?

A. While this is a matter of autonomy, multiple office holding can deny other members the opportunity to serve. The handling of money is a sensitive matter. Rotation of members helps to assure financial integrity and harmony.

FOR GROUPS

Q. How can the group's money be protected from misuse or theft?

A. Asking another member to help count and record the collection prior to deposit is helpful. A record of all receipts and expenditures should be kept. A financial statement should be submitted to the group at regular intervals. Having two signatures for checks is another helpful suggestion. When a system of accountability is established, members feel more comfortable making a commitment to serve as Treasurer.

Q. As a group, what are our financial priorities?

A. The immediate expenses for the group's operation such as rent, literature, insurance, supplies, post office box rental, Group Representative and Information Service Representative's travel expenses should be met first. Remaining monies may be divided among the Al-Anon service arms, beginning with local and area structures. Another portion may be set aside for support of the WSO.

Q. Can group funds be used for personal gifts or to assist less fortunate members? An agency which helps alcoholics or their families? Babysitters?

A. Group funds are to be used for group purposes. Gifts or assistance to members in need may be done on a personal basis. Contributions to an outside agency, activity, or program should not be made from group funds as this implies endorsement and affiliation. A special collection or group funds may be used to pay for a group babysitter.

Q. Our group has several fund-raising events each year in order to meet its expenses and for service projects. Does this violate the Traditions?

A. No, as long as fund-raising activities are conducted within the fellowship, the spirit of our Traditions is maintained. If an event is open to the public, the Al-Anon/Alateen names should not be used. Outside contributions and commercialism should be avoided.

Q. If each group is autonomous, why do Al-Anon/Alateen groups contribute to local, state or provincial, and national service arms?

A. Al-Anon's Sixth and Seventh Traditions state that our groups accept no contributions outside of the fellowship; therefore, the funding which makes it possible for Al-Anon to exist must come from our own resources. Contributions to enhance service arms outside of the group keep Al-Anon available to our present members as well as those yet to come.

Q. When our group contributes money to the district, information service, and area, doesn't part of it automatically go to the WSO?

A. No, because each Al-Anon service arm (group, district, information service, area, and the WSO) is a separate entity and provides specific services. Each service arm controls its own finances.

Q. After meeting our group's expenses, we have very little money left over. Does our WSO accept small donations?

A. Yes, the willingness of each group to contribute whatever it can is far more important than the actual monetary amount. The WSO utilizes and appreciates all financial support.

Q. If our group has a checking account and we are asked to furnish an "I.D. Number," or Social Security number, can we use the WSO's tax-exempt numbers?

A. No, because the WSO is not a central organization with control of its chapters; Al-Anon's Headquarters has no knowledge of groups, information service, area, or convention funds.

Q. The owner of the building where we meet has asked our group to provide our own liability insurance. Can we be covered by the WSO's insurance?

A. No, because the WSO's incorporation is not set up to provide blanket coverage to groups and service arms.

Groups can investigate the cost of such a policy or ask their district, information service, or area if it is possible to obtain a policy with inclusive coverage of groups in a specific geographic area. State and Provincial laws need to be checked.

Q. Is it our group's responsibility to reimburse its trusted servants for group-related travel and expenses?

A. Yes, most Al-Anon members agree that no one should be excluded from service because their personal resources are limited. It is ideal if the group is not dependent upon a member's willingness to assume costs related to the group's participation in the service structure. Travel expenses for trusted servants are the responsibility of the group.

Q. What is an "ample reserve" and how much money should a group keep in savings?

A. The phrase, "ample reserve", is taken from the Twelve Concepts of Service and is addressed in Warranty One which describes the spiritual philosophy behind having a limited financial reserve. This Warranty applies to groups as well as the WSO. A reserve or emergency operating fund is desirable in the event of a decline in income. Each group is free to establish the amount it can or would like to set aside. Warranty One also emphasizes that we avoid hoarding huge quantities of money. A group or service arm retains only what it needs to operate for a short-term period.

Q. How can our group find out where to send donations?

A. Mailing addresses of service arms can be obtained from trusted servants such as the Group Representative (GR), Information Service Representative (ISR), District Representative (DR), or information service. The GR usually has the addresses of the information service/intergroup and DR as well as for the area and the WSO. All Al-Anon Conference Approved Literature has the WSO's address and telephone number. Checks to the WSO should be made payable to AFG, Inc. and sent to the WSO as follows: 1600 Corporate Landing Parkway, Virginia Beach, VA 23454-5617.

These are only a few frequently asked questions related to Al-Anon groups and their financial policies. When the collection basket is passed around the room, Al-Anon as a whole is affected. Part of our growth is the recognition of the need for group support of Al-Anon's essential services. A sense of commitment and understanding of the value of Al-Anon's local, area, and national service arms is an educational process and part of our recovery. Each time the basket circles the room, our financial principles have yet another opportunity to guide our fellowship spiritually and keep our Al-Anon doors open worldwide. There is more in one group's basket than meets the eye.