

**1994**

**Source: Board January 22, 1994 [Attachment cover page]**

**STUDY OF PROPERTY OWNERSHIP**

**January 22, 1994**

**Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc.  
1372 Broadway  
New York, New York 10018**

## STUDY OF PROPERTY OWNERSHIP

### BACKGROUND

The Policy Committee and the Board of Trustees have studied property ownership by Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc. based on Motion 34 passed by the 1991 World Service Conference.

**Motion 34:** In regard to the relocation study, World Service Conference believes ownership of property by AFG, Inc. is consistent with our Traditions.  
(73 yes, 21 no, 8 abstentions)

Motion 34 was questioned by the minority at the 1992 World Service Conference. Because of this, and in acknowledgement of the letters and telephone calls received at the World Service Office expressing opposition to property ownership and concern of some Policy Committee and Board members, the Policy Committee and the Board of Trustees researched and studied the points that seem consistent with the Traditions and points that seem inconsistent. Concept Five was our guide in this respect.

*CONCEPT FIVE - The Rights of Appeal and Petition Protect Minorities and Assure that They Be Heard.*

"...Our respect for the minority position, plus a desire for unity and certainty, often prompt the World Service Conference to debate important questions of policy even in cases where a majority could easily be obtained. Such a voluntary practice is evidence of real prudence and courteous deference to the view of all..."  
*(Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual 1992-1993, Concept Five, p.146.)*

Therefore, thoughts, discussions and interpretations pertinent to both are presented here. In addition to the Twelve Traditions, the Twelve Concepts of Service are referenced.

It is important to say that no action regarding property ownership will be taken without authorization of the 1994 World Service Conference. The site choice of Norfolk, Virginia for relocation of the World Service Office in 1996 was based on leasing figures only.

### HISTORY OF CONSIDERATION OF PROPERTY OWNERSHIP

Because of escalating costs and a disproportionate amount spent to house the World Service Office, the Board of Trustees and the Long Range Study Panel, (a subcommittee of the Board of Trustees), began to consider relocation of the World Service Office, including the possibility of buying, as early as 1980. They reported and held discussions at the 1982 and 1983 World Service Conferences. The 1984 World Service Conference expressed the opinion by consensus vote only, not formal motion, that it was against the spirit of the Traditions to own property for the World Service Office.

However, the 1991 World Service Conference gave permission in Motion 34 to study ownership as consistent with the Traditions in conjunction with relocation of the World Service Office in 1996. The discussion made it clear at the time that the World Service Conference did not authorize purchase of property, only that the possibility be considered. The Board of Trustees presented annual reports on relocation at the 1990, 1991 and 1992 World Service Conferences.

### MINORITY OPINIONS THAT TRADITIONS AND CONCEPTS ARE NOT CONSISTENT WITH PROPERTY OWNERSHIP

It is understandable that the fellowship is concerned about consideration to purchase property to house the World Service Office.

*TRADITION SIX - Our Al-Anon Family Groups ought never endorse, finance or lend our name to any outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary spiritual aim. Although a separate entity, we should always cooperate with Alcoholics Anonymous.*

#### • DEFINITION OF PROPERTY

Some interpret property mentioned in the Sixth Tradition specifically as real estate only. Therefore, ownership of real property does not seem to be consistent with Tradition Six.

#### • SETTING THE WORLD SERVICE OFFICE APART

Our Al-Anon Family Groups refers to all groups and service arms, including the World Service Office.

Owning a building would set Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc. apart from the groups and could exempt it from adherence to Tradition Six.

There is concern that some groups' interpretation of the spiritual nature of Tradition Six is that purchase of real property is a violation. It is possible that purchase could impact upon the unity of Al-Anon as a whole.

• **DIVERSION FROM OUR PRIMARY SPIRITUAL AIM**

Some assert that in order to protect our investment in real estate, the World Service Office would need to become involved in community affairs, thus diverting us from our primary spiritual aim and involving us in outside issues.

*TRADITION ONE – Our common welfare should come first; personal progress for the greatest number depends upon unity.*

• **UNITY**

The idea of ownership of property by the World Service Office, has created some disagreement within the fellowship; "Particularly today, when society everywhere is in such a state of fission, this possibility must be considered. The best attitude in such a circumstance might be complete nonresistance—certainly no anger, no attack. Al-Anon has no doctrine that has to be maintained. There is no authority that has to be supported; no prestige, power or pride that has to be satisfied. *And we have no property or money that is worth quarreling about.*" (Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual 1992-1993, Concept Twelve, p.182.) [Emphasis Added]

Ownership of property could lead to squabbling or arguments over the value of property and whether or not to sell if the price was favorable. The Board of Trustees perhaps could be influenced to sell real estate owned by Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc. for profit. Some fear this could lead to "the seat of perilous wealth or power" which Concept Twelve cautions against. (Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual 1992-1993, Concept Twelve p.173.)

• **INCREASED FINANCIAL BURDEN**

Ownership, maintenance and the operation of our own building might constitute a heavier financial dependence on additional sales of literature and contributions than anticipated.

Groups might elect to withhold funds from the World Service Office as a protest against property ownership causing financial hardship on the fellowship as a whole.

The Introduction to the Concepts speaks of the principles of the Concepts: "...These general principles can, of course, be used to good effect throughout our entire structure locally, nationally, and internationally..." (Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual 1992-1993, Concept One, p.135.)

• **WORLD SERVICE OFFICE LEADS BY POWER OF EXAMPLE**

The World Service Office is an Al-Anon service arm as well as business entity and spiritually leads by example.

So we can look at ownership of property by the World Service Office as affecting the fellowship locally, nationally, and internationally. If the World Service Conference voted to approve the ownership of property by the World Service Office, it would be conveying to other service entities of the fellowship, such as Information Services and General Service Offices around the world, they too could own property and perhaps that this is a worthwhile goal. These service offices do look to the World Service Office for leadership. "They (Al-Anon Servants) do not rule by mandate, they lead by example." (Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual 1992-1993, Concept Twelve, p.174.)

**MAJORITY OPINIONS THAT TRADITIONS AND CONCEPTS ARE CONSISTENT WITH PROPERTY OWNERSHIP**

*TRADITION SIX – Our Al-Anon Family Groups ought never endorse, finance or lend our name to any outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary spiritual aim. Although a separate entity, we should always cooperate with Alcoholics Anonymous.*

• **DEFINITION OF PROPERTY**

Tradition Six is the only Tradition that mentions the word "property." The meaning as used in this Tradition seems to be one of the issues. Tradition Six does not mention real estate, a specific definition of property. It seems rather to refer to a broader meaning as ownership of a possession, possessions as a whole, something tangible or intangible to which its owner holds legal title. By this definition our lease at 1372 Broadway is an ownership of property that can be bought and sold. Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc. also owns computers, office furnishings and inventories of literature. Owning a building and land to house the World Service Office could be an extension of its service operations.

• **OUR PRIMARY SPIRITUAL AIM**

Money is cited in addition to property as a possible problem that could divert us from our primary spiritual aim. Exorbitant rents that have risen beyond our means and frequent search for office space have already created diversions for our staff and the fellowship. A landlord's business decisions, fees and taxes are outside pressures that have caused us additional fiscal turmoil. Therefore, being tied to an "outside enterprise" through leasing has often diverted our spiritual focus.

*TRADITION EIGHT - Al-Anon Twelfth Step work should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.*

*TRADITION NINE - Our groups, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.*

• **DISTINCTION BETWEEN GROUPS, SERVICE BOARDS OR COMMITTEES**

Traditions Eight and Nine distinguish functions between Al-Anon groups and service boards or committees which may be created to serve the groups. The purpose of the groups is to help members recover from the effects of alcoholism and require only minimal structure. The purpose of service arms is to serve the groups in this effort and they must be sufficiently organized to work effectively. The distinction between groups and service arms is expanded further in the Twelve Concepts. They provide guidelines for worldwide service, for service above the group level.

Thus, Tradition Nine sets Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc. apart from the groups in structure and purpose. The groups as such, are not to be organized. Their purpose is to help families of alcoholics. On the other hand, the World Service Office is organized, employs special workers and is responsible for assisting the groups in their primary purpose. In so large and extensive a fellowship as ours, some business organization is required to assure orderly procedures and maximum production. Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc. is not the equivalent of a group, it is a service center; the clearinghouse of the fellowship's activities.

• **CHANGE MAY BE NECESSARY**

In **The Concepts**, the founders made provision for changes that may be necessary in the original methods of operation and structure.

"Each new generation of world servants quite rightly will be eager to make operational improvements. Unforeseen flaws in the present structure will perhaps show up in time. New service needs and problems will arise that may make structural changes necessary. These contingencies should be squarely met and suitable alterations effected.

"When structural change does seem advisable, its advocates need only present a strong case for such a change to both the trustees and the World Service Conference for consideration. This is no more than would be required for the transaction and passage of any other piece of Al-Anon business." (*Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual 1992-1993, Concepts, Introduction, p.134.*)

"However satisfactory and right our present arrangements are, the future may require changes that we do not yet envision. New conditions may require refinements or even considerable alterations." (*Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual 1992-1993, Concept Six, p.147.*)

*CONCEPT SIX - The Conference Acknowledges the Primary Administrative Responsibility of the Trustees.*

• **RESPONSIBILITY OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

Concept Six makes clear that the Board of Trustees has great responsibility for Al-Anon world services in the absence of the World Service Conference.

"The Trustees have ultimate responsibility for the preservation and prudent management of all Al-Anon's financial assets. They are accountable for the internal controls of funds received and the investment thereof." (*Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual 1992-1993, Concept Six, p.148.*)

It is irresponsible to waste group donations. Prudent stewardship of Al-Anon's money allows for increased services to families and friends of alcoholics.

• **A SEPARATE CORPORATION COULD OWN PROPERTY**

In referring to "corporations that may be needed in the future," in Concept Six our founders acknowledged again the possible need for change. (*Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual 1992-1993, Concept Six, p.147.*)

A separate corporation could be formed. The World Service Office would lease from the newly-formed corporation, which would own the building.

Thus, Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc. would be leasing from the other corporation. Monies from the Reserve Fund could be used for the initial acquisition cost. The newly-formed corporation would use lease payments to pay the mortgaged amount. Many nonprofit corporations use this model for business purposes so that one structure does not get involved in the day-to-day management of the other. The new corporation would have a separate Board and be accountable to the Board of Trustees.

• CHANGE COULD BE EXPERIMENTAL

By suggesting that "any far reaching structural change be labeled experimental" our founders recognized that mistakes could happen. (Introduction to the Concepts, p.134.) Ownership could be viewed as a pilot project for a specific period of time with continual reviews to assess and report to the World Service Conference the impact of ownership on the fellowship. If at any time property ownership proved to be a mistake, Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc. could sell the property and return to leasing space for the World Service Office.

*CONCEPT NINE - Good Personal Leadership at All Service Levels Is a Necessity - In the field of World Service, the Board of Trustees Assumes the Primary Leadership*

• THE BOARD AS LEADERS

In its leadership role of Al-Anon world services the Board of Trustees must "...originate plans and policies for the improvement of our fellowship. In new and important matters (it) nevertheless consults widely before making decisions..." The Board is consulting widely by listening to opinions from the fellowship at large and from the World Service Delegates in particular. (*Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual 1992-1993, Concept Nine, p.154.*)

Again, no action regarding property ownership will be taken without authorization of the 1994 World Service Conference.

In considering ownership the Board could also be using "the all-important attribute of vision...the ability to make good estimates, both for the immediate and for the more distant future. Some might feel this to be heresy. But the valuable principle of one day at a time really refers to our mental and emotional lives and means that we are not to repine over the past nor daydream about the future.

"As individuals and as a fellowship, we shall surely suffer if we cast the job of planning for tomorrow onto a fatuous idea of Providence. God has endowed human beings with considerable capability for foresight and evidently expects us to use it. Therefore, we must distinguish between wishful fantasy and thoughtful estimate. This can spell the difference between future progress and unforeseen woe." (*Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual 1992-1993, Concept Nine, p.155.*)

*TRADITION ONE - Our common welfare should come first; personal progress for the greatest number depends upon unity.*

• UNITY

Our common welfare and unity depend on our willingness to agree with what is best for Al-Anon as a whole. The hope is that ownership would strengthen our unity by providing a sense of home and stability for the fellowship.

IN CONCLUSION

"We believe our fellowship is a spiritual society characterized by enough enlightenment, responsibility and love for God and man to ensure that our democracy of world service will work under all conditions. We rely confidently on Tradition Two, our group conscience and our trusted servants. Hence, it is with a sense of great security that we old-timers now are assured that Al-Anon's World Service Conference will use its vested authority for giving shape to the destiny that God is holding in store for us all." (*Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual 1992-1993, Concept Two, pp.138-139.*)

1994

Source: Board January 22, 1994 [Attachment Bibliography]

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### WORLD SERVICE CONFERENCE SUMMARIES AND HANDOUTS:

1983, Long-Range Study Panel Update, p. 34 Summary  
1983, Long-Range Study Panel Handout in Brochure  
1984, Policy Session, p. 39, Summary  
1984, Board Matters, unfinished business, p. 45, Summary  
1988, Long-Range Study Panel, WSO Relocation, p. 46, Summary  
1990, Board of Trustees Relocation Report Handout in Brochure  
1991, Board Session, p. 27, Summary  
1991, Board of Trustees Relocation Report Handout in Brochure  
1992, Board of Trustees Relocation Report handout in Brochure  
1992, Relocation, p. 20, Summary  
1992, Fact Sheet on Property Ownership, Handout from Board of Trustees  
1993, Fact Sheet on Property Ownership, Handout from Board of Trustees  
1993, Purchasing Property, p. 16, Summary  
1993, Study of Ownership Vs: Leasing Handout, Handout from Board of Trustees

### MINUTES OF:

Longe Range Study Panel: 09/82, 02/83, 03/83, 04/84, 06/90, 10/90  
Board of Trustees: 10/90, 01/91, 04/93  
Policy: 03/84 and Addenda Recap of Letters to WSO re: Owning Vs. Renting

### AL-ANON LITERATURE

Al-Anon Family Groups, p.74  
References to Tradition Six in indexed literature  
Al-Anon's Twelve Steps and Traditions Book, pp.86, 93, 95, 103, 109, 111-112, 123, 124.  
Al-Anon's Twelve Steps and Traditions pamphlet  
Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual 1992-1993, Concepts of Service  
Living with an Alcoholic, 1966 edition, p.59.

### AA LITERATURE

AA's Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions  
AA Big Book, p.565  
AA Comes of Age, p.107-114  
AA Service Manual Combined with Twelve Concepts of World Service, 1989-1990, p.20.  
Language of the Heart, Bill W.'s Grapevine Writings, "Incorporations Their Use and Misuse,"  
November, 1947; "Tradition Six," May, 1948.

### TELEPHONE CONVERSATIONS WITH:

AA Services Manager  
AA Archivist  
AA International Administrator

### LETTER FROM:

AA General Service Office in Argentina

---

Note: Copies of pages of Summaries, handouts and minutes listed above will be available for review in the Hospitality Room at the 1994 World Service Conference.