

WORLD SERVICE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

WSB Motion #3 will determine whether or not the WSC is willing to present the issue of eliminating gender specificity in NA's Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions directly to the NA groups. If the response to Motion #3 is no then we have resolved the immediate issue at hand. If the response to Motion #3 is yes, the next step would be to have the WSC assign a working group to assist the WSB in phrasing the actual wording for the proposed changes and submit the wording back to the WSC for approval by the end of the 1996 conference week. The approved wording becomes the actual proposal that would then be considered by the groups.

Regardless of how the WSC responds to Motion #3, it is our recommendation that the WSC should also address Motion #4. Our Second Concept reads, "The NA groups bear the final authority in all our fellowship's service affairs, and should be routinely consulted in all matters directly affecting them. For example, proposals to change NA's Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions, name, nature, or purpose should be approved directly by the groups." We currently have no process in place that allows us to bring an issue directly to our groups for their consideration. Motion #4 establishes such a process no matter if the need to put it in place is immediate or in the future.

If Motions #3 and #4 are both approved, we are prepared to offer a specific process with established dates and time frames for group consideration of Motion #3. The information preceding each motion is taken from our August 1995 report to WSC participants and is repeated here for your convenience.

WHAT ARE WE READY TO MAKE A DECISION ABOUT?

The discussions held throughout the fellowship over the last three years were important. Not only did we have an opportunity to explore removal of gender from the wording of the steps and traditions, but we also began to discuss the larger issue of whether the word "God" adequately allows for the individual interpretation of our Higher Power. Some suggestions were offered to replace the word "God" with "Higher Power" or to change "God" to "god." While this stimulated much discussion and controversy, no motion to propose changing the word "God" in the steps and traditions accordingly came forward. It appears that, at this time, the only question before the fellowship is whether to remove gender-specific language from our steps and traditions.

Some of the main arguments made by those who support the language change are that individuals' beliefs are excluded by the current wording of our steps and traditions; that the use of "Him" and "His" in reference to God implies specific religious beliefs, or shapes and defines one's understanding of a Higher Power. This is seen to be in conflict with our philosophy, which encourages us

to develop and establish a relationship with a Higher Power of our own understanding. Many of these members believe that this wording may lead newcomers or professionals, who might refer addicts to NA meetings, to perceive us as a religious, not spiritual, program. As a result, addicts may not feel attracted to NA or may feel out of place in our meetings; they may either not get to our program at all, or leave before the spiritual nature of the NA program is understood. In addition, supporters often believe that the current wording of the steps and traditions fails to reflect the multi-cultural, global nature of today's NA community. These members suggest that making such changes to the wording may help us better further our primary purpose. Some state that non-gender specific language has been used in the text of new literature (e.g. *It Works, Just for Today*) and should be changed in the wording of the steps and traditions for consistency.

Some of the major arguments made by those who oppose the change are that the steps have worked the way they are written for years; it is the individual who needs to change, not the wording. Many of these members state that they, too, had some difficulty with the wording at first, but that the literature and other members helped them to overcome their difficulties. Some argue that it is impossible to remove gender references and retain the meaning of those steps and traditions affected. Some state that removing gender-specific language is based on consideration of political correctness. There are others who state that they support the proposed changes in the wording of the steps and traditions in concept; however, they would not support actually changing the wording for fear of the effect on the fellowship. These members often point to the disunity which resulted from the changes made to the White Book or the Fourth Edition of the Basic Text. Many have offered the suggestion that there be a footnote or a separate page added to our literature explaining that Narcotics Anonymous espouses no specific beliefs about a Power greater than ourselves, and leaves this to the interpretation of the individual member.

Any change in gender specificity in our steps and traditions will primarily affect the English language. In most other languages, gender is already assigned to nouns and it is not possible to break that tie.

Motion 3: Should the NA groups consider a proposal to eliminate gender specificity in NA's Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions?

Intent: To have the WSC decide whether or not we take the next step and put this issue to the groups.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Any action as significant as changing the steps and traditions would, of course, require a significant percentage of our groups to participate in making the decision. Members must also have a strong voice in accepting and

implementing a decision-making process that directly includes our groups. At this time, we have no defined process in place to receive a direct conscience from each NA group.

Motion 4: To adopt the following as WSC policy:

Any WSC proposal or action to change NA's Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions, name, nature, or purpose should be approved directly by the groups through a group tally process, administered according to the following guidelines:

- **A sufficient registration period will be held to allow all groups who choose to participate to register for the tally with the WSO.**
- **At the close of the registration period, the WSO will announce the total number of registrations to all WSC participants.**
- **Numbered ballots requesting a yes, no, or abstention response will be mailed to each registered group with addressed envelopes. The groups will be provided sufficient time to return their ballots. The WSC may recommend the utilization of an outside resource to receive and count the ballots.**
- **In order for the tally to be valid, 75% of the groups who registered in the above named period must participate by responding.**
- **For each decision to pass, 75% of the groups who respond must vote in the affirmative.**
- **Ballot results will be reported to the fellowship.**
- **If the group tally affirms the decision(s), a motion will be placed in the next CAR for RSR affirmation per the FIPT.**

Intent: To establish a process to refer significant questions directly to the groups.

Pete Cole, Chairperson