

LITERATURE COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

Should the WSC give conceptual approval to remove the “Prayer for Today” from Conference Approved Literature?

One of the roles of the Literature Committee is to review suggestions that come from the fellowship regarding literature and possible changes. If a major decision is needed, it must come to the World Service Conference (WSC).

During its June 2015 meeting, the Literature Committee began discussing requests from two members in different Areas for changes to the “Prayer for Today.” This prayer is included in the *Just for Today* Wallet Card (M-10) and Bookmark (M-12). It also appears on page 101 of *How Al-Anon Works for Families & Friends of Alcoholics* (B-22, B-32), as well as on page 103 in editions printed prior to 2008. The first member felt that although it is beautiful, it is clearly a religious prayer, and should be revised or discontinued. The second member requested that the words “O, Divine Master” in the second paragraph of the prayer be changed to “God.” Because the prayer is included in the Newcomer Packet (K-10), she felt it could give many newcomers the idea that Al-Anon is a religious program.

The current wording of the “Prayer for Today” is as follows:

“Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light, and where there is sadness, joy.

“O, Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled, as to console; to be understood, as to understand; to be loved, as to love; for it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.”

Using the Knowledge-Based Decision-Making Process for an Informed Group Conscience (KBDM), discussion on this topic continued in October 2015. Prior to the October meeting, Committee members answered the five KBDM questions via the discussion board on e-Communities. At the meeting, the Committee had a thorough discussion of all aspects of the information from the KBDM document. It reached a unanimous consensus to recommend removal of the “Prayer for Today” from the *Just for Today* Bookmark and Wallet Card, as well as from *How Al-Anon Works*. The Committee also decided to have a discussion thread in its AFG Connects community to brainstorm ideas on what, if anything, it would recommend to replace the prayer where it is featured.

At the Literature Committee’s December 2015 meeting, it recommended that, if the Conference agreed to remove the “Prayer for Today,” the text on the Bookmark and Wallet Card could be enlarged without adding any other material, and that page 101 in *How Al-Anon Works* could end with a quotation from the last paragraph in *When I Got Busy, I Got Better* (P-78), so that it would read as follows:

“*When I Got Busy, I Got Better* offers invaluable information about this crucial area of recovery. Perhaps nowhere is the spirit of Al-Anon service more clearly articulated than in the last paragraph of this booklet:

“We have the opportunity to contribute not only what we can *do* but, more important, who we can *be*. By sharing our recovery, we strengthen its workings in our own lives. By seeking to allow a Higher Power to work in and through us, we come to feel, more fully, the presence of that Power.

“In giving, we receive.”

The Associate Director of Communications—Literature pointed out that no one on the Committee came with preconceived ideas and they looked at facts, talked, and reasoned things out. The question for the Conference is regarding the conclusion the Committee made, but it is important to note that nothing has been changed at this time, as it depends on where the Conference conversation goes. It is an important discussion for the Conference. Our Concepts say that the minority should be heard and that we listen with an open mind.

Upon opening the floor for discussion, the Conference Chairperson reminded Conference members that this is only a discussion. There is no motion at this time. That would depend on where the discussion goes.

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Trustee Liaison

Tom C.

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Conference members commented:

- I received a petition from three groups objecting strongly to removing the prayer. Lois W. said that it is not a matter of what prayer we close with, but that it be a spiritual moment. If our founders understood the value of prayer, why are we questioning it? I disagree with this process.
- Do all service structures use the same Conference Approved Literature (CAL)?
The World Service Office (WSO) is the only producer of CAL, so any CAL that is translated is from the English version.
- How many service structures use the bookmark?
If available, they generally translate it.
- How long has it been part of the fellowship?
Since 1959. It was a card from the start. The bookmark came later. In 1969, the Board looked at translating Just for Today into Spanish. It discussed whether to include the bookmark because it could be interpreted as religious. It was translated in full.
Is there historic value to be considered?
- I am a Literature Committee member. We considered this over many months and there were varied opinions. I listened and learned and respected the opinions reflected in the KBDM process. I was born into the religion this prayer comes from. Coming to Al-Anon at age 29, I noticed that Al-Anon is a spiritual program, not a religious one. I have not used the back of the bookmark, ever. My focus is always on the pieces that say, “Just for Today . . .” I fully support removing the prayer from the card.
- There were strong reactions in my Area to the thought of editing the prayer. They are against it. Members are on both sides in the Area, but no one is for editing. We have only used the prayer to console, etc. I have been physically abused and this prayer was preached to me as what I needed. I was against the prayer when my Sponsor asked me to use it. It helped me learn tolerance and acceptance. Having to learn to have a spiritual Higher Power has helped me to have acceptance and tolerance and the prayer speaks to me now.
- The part, “It is in dying . . .,” is a very specific religious belief—dying and eternal life. We are a fellowship trying to figure out how to correct the misperception that Al-Anon is religious. When I look at other religions, that phrase bothers me. It is a specific religious tenet. Consider removing the last line.
- My Area’s comments: We are trying to take God out of the program. “Take what you liked and leave the rest.” It provides spiritual instruction. The God of my understanding is my Higher Power. What’s the difference, it’s just a name. We are a fellowship of differences, there’s no way to please everybody. Leave as it is.
- There are quotes throughout *One Day at a Time in Al-Anon* (B-6) from spiritual references. If we are removing this prayer, remove references from all religions. Area consensus is they prefer to leave it as it is because we have a choice, just as we do with the closing prayer.
In the Literature Committee discussion, in terms of The Lord’s Prayer, the Conference has repeatedly said it is a group conscience decision. We are talking about literature with the CAL logo, and the Committee felt there was a difference. The CAL logo says this is what Al-Anon believes.
- The program was founded on Christian beliefs and medical expertise. The prayer was designed to bring emotional balance. It works.
- Reactions were all over the place in my Area. Continue the conversation, it will lead to more cohesiveness.
- Two members have invited us to a fight and Al-Anon says we don’t have to participate. Diversity allows us to keep what we have and add to it from different cultures. KBDM told us the prayer is the antitheses of Al-Anon.
- I grew up in this religion, and it is a religious prayer. This prayer is consistent with our level of comfort. It is attached to religious beliefs, and if we change it, will it be necessary to change what we are?

- Can we legally or morally substitute words? Could we drop the second part, instead of editing it?
- I read the entire KBDM before the discussion. There are strong opinions and emotions. I was struck by the process. I watched people with definite opinions, and as I listened as visibly began to change. Watching our minds open up to consider perspectives other than our own, I was encouraged and thought about how the fellowship might benefit. Let's open this up to the Areas and resume the discussion as a Conference later.
- If we are concerned about inclusion of a clearly religious prayer in our literature, use caution because the Serenity Prayer is religious in origin. That prayer is specific to a sermon given by its author. We should be extremely cautious if we are going down the path of using religious material that could give newcomers the idea that Al-Anon is a religious program. If a motion is ever made at the Conference, I would ask every member to read *One Day at a Time in Al-Anon*, page 310 before discussion and a vote.
- I have a personal attachment to it, but it is not appropriate to have a specific prayer in CAL. The rest of our literature is not under discussion—just this bookmark. The minority voice says it is religious. There are specific lines mentioned that are not in keeping with my spiritual tradition, so I am excluded from this conversation in this sense. I hope we would welcome any religious faith or none. It is hypocritical for Al-Anon to use this bookmark. We are not taking God out, but making God a lot bigger to include everyone who needs our program. It is a stumbling block that we can remove without compromising our program. I hope we would be willing to do that.
- Fifty percent of the members in my Area love the prayer. Five percent think we need to come up with our own generic prayers. Forty-five percent want to leave it as is. My concern: If we begin removing obstacles from people's paths to Al-Anon, there will be nothing left, as we all have different obstacles. When I am ready, nothing can keep me away. If I'm not ready, nothing can make me stay.
- How many were bothered, but never said so? Replace the first words with "just for today."
- Does it belong in CAL? No. Don't confuse faith with the program. Keep both separate and strong.
- Our "Suggested Preamble to the Twelve Steps" on page 12 of "Al-Anon and Alateen Groups at Work" in the *2014-2017 Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual* states, "Al-Anon is not allied with any sect, denomination, . . ."
- Face practicalities—create a new version of the bookmark using different prayers. Let's be more inclusive, not exclusive. If we can't solve this issue, we can't promote unity.
- I don't consider myself a Christian and I value quotes from Confucius even though I don't fall into that religion. Al-Anon is my religion as I develop my spiritual potential.
- As I consider other points of view, I need to keep an open mind to what is best for the fellowship, not for me. Continue to discuss this and remember it's for Al-Anon, not for my group, or me.
- How often has the Literature Committee considered changes based on two requests?

The Committee discusses suggested changes or suggestions for a new piece even if from only one person. The Literature Committee meets quarterly and discusses everything extensively so this is no longer only from one or two members.

The Literature Committee does a lot of processing in small groups. We do not want to give the impression this was a "fly by night" decision.

The Literature Committee is composed of ten Delegate members and five At Large members reflecting diverse perspectives, as well as a staff member and a Trustee liaison. The Trustee has voice, but not vote.

- The joy and strength of KBDM is that we can talk and talk until there is some sense of unanimity. Nothing has to come to a vote until there is a sense one way or the other. We can keep talking and keep the dialogue going and not be fearful something will happen right away. We can look to how long it took to build to a motion with Memorial Contributions. We can relax and know this is an ongoing conversation.
- The Literature Committee's intent was to bring this as a discussion, not expecting any decision. It is important to listen to everyone and keep an open mind, be loving and accepting of others.

We are all different, and the program has helped all of us in different ways. The more we share with each other, the closer we can get to what we want for our program; not just for today, but for our future.

The Conference Chairperson reminded Conference members that the Conference was only asked to have a discussion. With no clear consensus, Conference members were asked to share their thoughts regarding a way to move forward.

- I see the value of opening up the discussion with Area members in service in hopes that they will talk to one another in their groups. When members were respected and they were heard, I saw their minds opening up. This conversation was a powerful experience with a Higher Power present. I can take this back to my Area and discuss how we welcome people when what we say matches what we do. I would like to see an ongoing discussion in the Areas.
- There is such a passion about this bookmark. The prayer itself is bigger than this body. I don't think my Area will allow it to stop. I would like to see a question in *The Forum* asking, "What do you think about this?" Put it out on AFG Connects. Take the conversation out into the worldwide fellowship to discuss—they have a voice.
- I want an opportunity to give the Assembly time to talk it over because of the sensitive nature of the discussion.
- When we come to Conference, we start a conversation here because there is a wide body of knowledge and long recovery experience. I would like to start a conversation here before taking it to the Area because I come back more informed. As in Policy discussions, to arrive at answers that are consistent, loving, and helpful takes time and patience.
- Are we alienating members because of long-held religious beliefs in fellowship? I would like to see this discussion without the recommendation attached.
- Could we step back, continue the discussion and think about language and how our language in the program can evolve without losing the traditional spirit and wisdom from our founders? I don't want to us lose or erase it, but evolve the language in an inclusive way.
- I would like to continue the discussion. I would love to show the Task Force: Acceptance of Communities, Cultures, and Beliefs presentation first, then have this discussion. I have learned to take what I liked, but newcomers may be turned away because they don't know how.
- Where do we go from here? Consensus was clearly split. We need to make a decision regarding what we want to do today. We have to declare the discussion has ended for this WSC, but that doesn't preclude anyone from raising the issue again.
- I appreciate all for sharing their thoughts and feelings. The Literature Committee knew there would be passion. My hope is that we can separate ourselves from political and religious beliefs and focus on Al-Anon's spiritual principles. The Literature Committee is not asking to remove God or all prayers from the literature or to remove all excerpts from religious sources. The Literature recommendation is for this prayer because of its religious tenets.
- I see this as an opportunity to discuss this in my Area, based on spiritual principles, and to bring back their input next year.
- The discussion was more on acceptance of diversity, cultures, and beliefs. The spiritual principles in the prayer reflect ways to act and behave that are universal. It is not about removing prayer from the bookmark but accepting all the diversity we can bring. Alcoholism does not discriminate—everybody is welcome.
- When we name something, the energy dissipates. This is a difficult conversation that is okay to have. Let's name it and walk through it. There was no consensus. Don't hide it, but keep talking. Going forward means we need more conversation. This is a powerful discussion that might "trick" members into learning KBDM!
- This turned into an exercise in discovering the principles associated with and embedded in the prayer. Are we, as a fellowship, more exclusive if we keep the prayer? Are we more inclusive if it is taken out? It is an opportunity to practice the principles in all our affairs.

Following these thoughts, there was consensus to keep the conversation going, take it back to the Areas for discussion, and bring it back to the 2017 World Service Conference.