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AA's Tradition of Self-Support

by Bill

*AA's co-founder discusses the reasons why AA groups
do not seek charity and why they support
AA central services*

AA's far-flung Twelfth Step activities, carrying the message to the next sufferer, are the very lifeblood of our AA adventure. Without this vital activity, we would soon become anemic; we would literally wither and die.

Now where do AA's services — world-wide, area, local — fit into our scheme of things? Why should we provide these functions with money? The answer is simple enough. *Every single AA service is designed to make more and better Twelfth Step work possible, whether it be a group meeting place, a Central or Intergroup Office to arrange hospitalization and sponsorship, or the World Service Headquarters to maintain unity and effectiveness all over the globe.*

Though not costly, these service agencies are absolutely essential to our continued expansion — to our survival as a fellowship. Their costs are a collective obligation that rests squarely upon all of us. Our support of services actually amounts to a recognition on our part that AA must everywhere function in full strength — and that, under our Tradition of self-support, *we are all going to foot the bill.*

We have long known that Alcoholics Anonymous has no need for charitable contributions from any source. Our Fellowship is

self-supporting. Neither do AA groups try to meet the rehabilitation expenses of thousands of newcomers. Long ago we learned that that was impractical.

Instead, AA offers to the new person a spiritual way of life that can eliminate the alcohol problem. With this accomplished, the new person, in the company of his fellow sufferers, can then begin the solution of his personal problems — including the financial one.

So AA groups themselves accept no charitable funds — and give none away. At first glance, this attitude may seem to be hard-nosed, even callous. An immense experience tells us otherwise. Money gifts — as a prerequisite of getting sober — are usually worthless when made a function of an AA group.

Of course, we see AA's primary charity in the Twelfth Step activities of tens of thousands of us as we daily carry the AA message to newcomers. We travel millions of miles; we absent ourselves from business and home. In the aggregate, we lay out very large sums. As individuals, we do not hesitate to give temporary financial aid to the newcomer, if and when he seems to want sobriety first. Here, then, is money charity aplenty, always given on a very personal, face-to-face basis. And perhaps even this cannot be called wholly charitable, since every Twelfth Step effort means more certain sobriety and added spiritual growth for the sponsor.

Both these principles we understand: that AA wants no charity; that we support our own services. We understand — but we sometimes forget.

