

## Practicing AA's Spiritual Principles in a Changing World: Where Money and Spirituality Mix During a Pandemic

Good morning, My name is Cindy and I'm an alcoholic. I am currently serving as Washington State East Area 92 Alt. Treasurer. I would like to thank the PNC Committee for asking me to share today.

My share today is on Practicing AA's Spiritual Principles in a Changing World: Where Money and Spirituality Mix During a Pandemic....

Coming into my first position with the Area as the Alternate Treasurer in January 2020, I was both excited and extremely nervous. Never in my wildest dreams was I prepared for what was going to happen just a couple months later. I would love nothing more than to paint a rosy picture of what took place in my Area, but like with any good sobriety story, it's more like "what it was like, what happened and what it is like now". As with many Area's I'm sure, this experience came with a lot of bumps and bruises along the way but ultimately is ending with some really cool experiences, a lot of changes we never imagined and friendships that never would have occurred otherwise. I think that word is "Unity".

At one of our recent Assemblies, in discussion at the Finance Committee meeting about a Finance Committee motion that was being presented to send a Contribution to the General Service Board monies that were in excess of what we were needing at this time, I was really taken aback by a member making the statement that their District felt we were "bailing out" the General Service Office and that they should manage their money better. There was a brief educational discussion that followed, but after that I started feeling guilty, like I wasn't doing the job I was elected to do. Was I not keeping the Area informed on what was happening, was it my job to do so? This brought me to doing a little research and reaching out to other Area Treasurers and Alt-Treasurers and asking what they were doing to keep their Districts and Groups informed. Do we pass the information to the DCM's and let them pass it to their Groups as I have done or thought was the proper system? The responses I got back were wonderful and I thank those who took the time to respond. Some Area's had slide presentations that they prepared and passed along to their members. I was amazed at that. They were so good. Some Area's really struggled with communication and some Area's were doing pretty much exactly what our Area was doing.

I also went on to AA.org and signed up for Box 459 our Quarterly newsletter, which has everything financial you want to know along with everything else that is happening in A.A. I felt silly that I hadn't done so previously and I was relying solely on the information that was passed on to me from our Delegate. When reading the General Service Board Annual Report, where Chair, Michele Grinberg reported "Mitigating the scope of the lost revenue was the wonderful, continuing support of the Fellowship through its Seventh Tradition contributions. Once the word went out that the office had a growing deficit and cash crunch as a result of lost sales and event cancellations, groups and individuals stepped up their contributions. We had a record year! And we reversed the long-standing percentages between self-support and revenue support, with a greater percentage of services paid for by Seventh Tradition contributions and a smaller percentage from literature sales. We will continue to honor the Fellowship's support by providing the services and publications in a variety of formats that you need to carry the message. As you share your reports with your groups/areas/regions, please express our continuing gratitude for this encouragement and support." I thought maybe the information was getting passed along after all and I was just letting my old friends "inadequacy and doubt in myself" creep back in for a peek. Thank God for this program and the phrase "progress not perfection". I am one alcoholic that will forever be learning and I am so grateful I am teachable. Our Delegate has also prepared a super informative "report back" from the General Service Conference that has tons of information on the finances. If I had the space and time I could provide everything you need or would want to know. It is information that is available to every member in our Area and I'm sure all of the Delegates have done this for their Areas as well.

Now on to some literature...

I think one our best tools on the "money" issue and probably the most under utilized, in my opinion, is the pamphlet Self-Support: Where Money & Spirituality Mix. It starts with the long form of Tradition Seven and goes on with being self supporting and why we need to do this. Under the section "Who's job is it?" Bill states "The paradox of A.A. is that financial independence and the support of our Fellowship by alcoholics and alcoholics alone, not only enhances A.A.'s importance to each of us, but stimulates our engagement in our own recovery... A.A. is "our thing" from our group's

treasury to the balance sheets at the General Service Office". It further explains that A.A.'s financial affairs are open for all to see and summaries are published quarterly with full accounting printed yearly in the Final Conference Report. I think my favorite is in the section "The Bottom Line" where the next quote from Bill W. says "Now that we are sober in A. A., the word "support" has to do with sharing, people, self-respect, gratitude and what we are privileged to give --- not take --- in material terms". To me these are all things I've gained in the fellowship and the program of Alcoholics Anonymous. I had the privilege of learning the importance of being self supporting from my Sponsor who is very much involved inservice work. But now for me being in service, starting with my homegroup, moving to the District level and now Area level, I see so many groups and members balk at the mention of money. By reading a lot of Bill W's Grapevine writings in Language of the Heart, it seems as though this has been an ongoing touchy subject for many many years. We can find even more in depth information in the Concepts. Looking at Concept XI, under The Finance and Budgetary Committee, I am amazed at how relevant this became in the Covid shut down. I could read this whole section and it fits perfectly with what our General Service Office and staff did in this last year to keep us going, and as stated to you in the General Service Board Annual report I spoke of earlier. Another paragraph in Concept XI, that gave me goosebumps when I read it, is "This committee, in good times, will insist that we continue to set aside substantial sums to our Reserve Fund. It will pursue an investment policy in that fund which will guarantee the immediate availability of at least two-thirds of it at any time, with-out loss, thereby enabling us to meet hard times or even a calamity". Well I would say Covid was a calamity!! How did they know to prepare us for such a thing. I can only imagine that some of it came from that generation living through a financial calamity and did not want anyone to have to go through that again. Little did they know what a blessing these Concepts would become.

On the flip side of that, I think that the shut down due to Covid, was for the most part a blessing in the fellowship of A.A. I saw tremendous unity, with a couple bumps in the road here and there. We as a fellowship world-wide came together and figured out how to communicate, operate and continue with meetings via zoom. That opened so many doors for people to attend meetings around the world and share what we were all experiencing. This was not even really considered much or practiced before. The Committee service work in our Area and communication became a monthly thing (sometimes more) and so much service work was being accomplished. In most groups, they figured out how to continue with the 7<sup>th</sup> Tradition and continue with contributions. This probably was the hardest transition for groups to incorporate and where I received the most questions. I think the primary issue was what to do with the contributions. Who is in need and how do we figure that out? It was challenging as I'm sure it was for everyone. Here we were, not really knowing what was going to happen and just working through it day by day. In the beginning I was primarily focused on the Area finances and didn't really think about the GSO and expenses that were continuing to go out. Area 92 has an amazing Finance Committee that kept up with looking at what we were going through and the events that were going on via zoom and adjusting the budget to reflect these changes. Once we were given the information by our Delegate on the GSO situation, we took a hard look at where we were sitting as an Area. Our groups and districts were so generous and we had a big flux in individual contributions as well. At a certain point, we knew that all of our Area events were going to be virtual and that we would not need our normal contributions for the time being and groups started directing a bigger percent of their splits to GSO to help build the reserve back up. The pie chart dispute became silent and it was about each group being autonomous in their decision to split where the needs were and not by a traditional recommendation. I think this will open the door for more communication and group discussions about the 7<sup>th</sup> Tradition on "who needs us the most this month" instead of the old cliché "this is the way we've always done it".

In conclusion, I believe we all have done the very best that we could in a time that is unprecedented . I have found that my job is to help educate my Area in where they can find the information they are seeking. If it is in Area finances, I can help by giving the information if they don't have it. If it is AA as a whole, I can direct them to AA.org and other information on contributions such as our pamphlets and literature. Most importantly, I don't have to reinvent the wheel. Our founders remarkably had the foresight to pretty much answer any question anyone might have with our Traditions, Concepts and pamphlets. We just need to read them and pass it on.

Thank you again for the privilege to share.  
Cindy H.