



**International Convention  
Alcoholics Anonymous**

**Toronto June 30-July 3, 2005**

**"I AM RESPONSIBLE"**

May 10, 2004

Alvin L. Cooper, Jr.  
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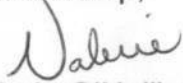
Dear Alvin:

As promised in my letter to you on December 10, 2003, I am enclosing the report given by Elaine McDowell, Ph.D., Chair of the General Service Board to the General Service Conference on April 19, 2004. I'm also enclosing two supplemental reports to her General Service Board Report regarding litigation in Germany.

If you have any questions about this information, I would be delighted to hear from you. Although I might not have the background or expertise to answer questions about litigation, I would try to find the appropriate resources to respond to any questions you may have.

As always, all here join me in sending our sincerest gratitude to you for your interest in this challenging legal situation.

In fellowship,

  
Valerie O'Neill, Assistant Secretary  
General Service Board

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Enclosures:

- April 2004 General Service Board Report from Elaine McDowell, Ph.D.
- April 2004 Supplement to General Service Board Report
- April 2004 Chronology – Addendum to Supplemental General Service Board Report

April 2004

54<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the General Service Conference

Supplement to General Service Board Report

### ***Alcoholics Anonymous: Our Name and Our Message***

A.A. is a Fellowship based on spiritual principles expressed in the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. Around the world, A.A. groups have but one purpose, to carry our message to the alcoholic who still suffers. A.A.'s message was first published in the book *Alcoholics Anonymous* (1939), and currently translated in more than 50 languages. Each translation reflects the original, English text that first described how A.A. works so that alcoholics can achieve and maintain sobriety.

Our early members, including co-founders Dr. Bob and Bill W., recognized that A.A. must adhere to one purpose, and avoid distractions or multi-purpose activities. Our founders decided to publish a book describing the A.A. program; thus, the First Edition of *Alcoholics Anonymous* was published in 1939. Bill W. wrote A.A.'s first Big Book, incorporating ideas and suggestions solicited from other early members. Our Fellowship gained its name from the book's title, *Alcoholics Anonymous*.

Bill W. copyrighted the First Edition of our Big Book in 1939, and initiated the practice of copyrighting translations in other languages<sup>1</sup>. Had Bill not copyrighted the first English Big Book, and subsequent books he authored, our basic text and message could have been changed to reflect individual interpretations or views, ideas not fully considered by a representative group conscience.

The First Edition of our Big Book was published by Works Publishing, Inc. As early as 1938, Bill and other stockholders in Works Publishing began to see that the book *Alcoholics Anonymous* should become the property of A.A. as a whole. Subsequently, Bill and other shareholders passed on their rights to A.A.'s book and namesake to our first service board, The Alcoholic Foundation, Inc.

The Alcoholic Foundation established A.A. Publishing, Inc. to produce and distribute A.A. Conference-approved literature, which is copyrighted for the same reasons that Bill applied when he registered the First Edition Big Book. In 1957, The Alcoholic Foundation became The General Service Board of A.A., Inc.<sup>2</sup>, whose Bylaws state "... the Board has but one purpose, that of serving the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous." The General Service Board fulfills its purpose through two operating corporations, A.A. Grapevine, Inc. and A.A. World Services, Inc. (A.A.W.S.)<sup>3</sup>

The General Service Board's responsibilities include a firm moral and spiritual obligation to continue policies that began with Bill W., when he urged that everyone in all corners of the world have a chance to read the real Big Book. Bill made it clear that our Board, A.A. World Services, Inc. (A.A.W.S.), was the owner of literature that he wrote and copyrighted, and that translations should be made or approved by us, and copyrighted.

<sup>1</sup> Bill W. copyrighted the Norwegian translation of *Alcoholics Anonymous*.

<sup>2</sup> Affirmed by the 7<sup>th</sup> General Service Conference (1957).

<sup>3</sup> A.A. Publishing, Inc. became A.A. World Services, Inc. on September 3, 1959.

On behalf of A.A. as a whole, we have been protecting copyrights from challenge for more than thirty-five years. When we learn that one or more of A.A.'s copyrights has been abridged, we communicate to encourage the person or publisher to cease using our name and/or adaptations of Conference-approved books or pamphlets. Over the years, the great majority of instances when A.A.'s copyrights have been misused or infringed have been resolved through communication. A few times, when simple negotiations did not lead to cessation of unauthorized publications, we had to engage legal counsel to explain the validity of A.A.'s rights. Rarely have we found it necessary to seek protection through the courts.

A.A. groups in Canada and the U.S. have supported and encouraged A.A. World Services and the General Service Office (G.S.O.) so that services and literature can reach small groups of A.A.'s in countries where the Fellowship takes root. Group contributions have been fundamental to A.A.'s spread in more than 150 countries around the world.

Translations of *Alcoholics Anonymous*, other A.A. books and literature are considered based on an expressed need for the A.A. message in languages that can be read by alcoholics in other countries. Each translation is carefully reviewed by professionals to assure that the conversion adheres to the original, English version. An approved translation may first be published by A.A.W.S. and shipped overseas for distribution by the local service office.

When it's determined that an A.A. service board or publishing committee in another country is able to publish and distribute one or more translations, A.A.W.S., on behalf of the General Service Board and General Service Conference, grants that A.A. entity a license applicable to one or more titles. Thus, the service board or publishing committee is granted the sole right to publish one or more titles of A.A. Conference-approved, copyrighted literature.<sup>4</sup>

The General Service Board (U.S./Canada), A.A.W.S. and/or the A.A. Grapevine gain nothing financially from protecting foreign copyrights. We receive no payments or financial benefits from any A.A. literature published by other boards or service structures. Protecting copyrights is a service we perform to help carry the message. We believe protecting copyrights is of great benefit to A.A. worldwide because it assures the integrity of our message in A.A. literature, and because it helps other boards and offices to serve their groups. It is also our legal duty as Trustees.

World Service Meetings<sup>5</sup> have discussed A.A.'s copyrights and the policy of licensing one board per country to publish and distribute A.A. literature. Over the years, Delegates to the World Service Meeting have concluded that we must protect the integrity of the A.A. message as it is presented in our literature, and, that having a common literature is important to maintaining unity in their countries.

<sup>4</sup> The Current Conference Charter (United States and Canada) states: "In countries where a General Service Structure exists, the United States/Canada Conference will delegate sole right to publish our Conference-approved literature to the General Service Board of that structure."

<sup>5</sup> Biennial meeting originated in 1969 to share experience, strength and hope—country to country—so that the A.A. message is carried to the alcoholic who stumbles in the dark, regardless of language or origin.



A number of times, the General Service Conference, U.S./Canada, has discussed the principles involved in protecting the integrity of A.A.'s message, the importance of upholding copyrights, and permissions granted to boards in other lands licensed to publish our literature, including through approved translations. At no time has the Conference demonstrated an inclination to alter or diminish those policies based on established principles.

Since 1993, we have addressed a serious challenge to copyrights on A.A. literature, granted to Bill W., and later assigned by Bill to A.A.W.S. on behalf of the Fellowship as a whole.

Most of you are aware that the operator of a mail order book business in Germany published and distributed several Conference-approved books and pamphlets, first in Germany and subsequently, in other countries. Our first contact with the individual occurred in 1993. For more than four years, we and the General Service Board of A.A. in Germany used every possible means of communication to reason with the individual. Each contact was a sincere effort to persuade the man that his publications in the name of A.A. ignored principles established by Bill W. and reflected in the Current Conference Charter.<sup>6</sup>

When all avenues and efforts to reason with the individual had been exhausted, we learned that he was printing and distributing unauthorized Big Books in Finnish, Hebrew, Russian, and Spanish, as well as German. We faced our responsibilities to A.A. as a whole in 1997 when A.A.W.S., publisher of Conference-approved, copyrighted literature, requested that a German Court grant an order that the defendant cease and desist all "A.A." publications in any language. Prior to our action of last resort, the General Service Board of A.A. in Germany initiated proceedings in the German Court to prevent the defendant from continuing to publish and distribute A.A. literature in German.

In May 1999, the German Court of Common Pleas ruled for the plaintiffs, the German Board and A.A.W.S. The following month, June 1999, the defendant appealed the ruling, thus continuing a process that absorbed energy and resources over four more years.

In October 2003, the Court of Appeals in Frankfurt decided the matters in favor of A.A., represented by the German General Service Board and A.A.W.S. The defendant's claims were not allowed, and the Court required that he cease producing/distributing Conference-approved books and pamphlets in any language. The Court affirmed the validity of copyrights held in trust by A.A.W.S., and recognized Bill W. as author of *Alcoholics Anonymous*, A.A.'s Basic Text.

The German Court decreed that the defendant must reimburse A.A.W.S. and A.A. in Germany for legal expenses, including attorney fees. Early in 2004, we and the German General Service Board offered the defendant an opportunity to forgo reimbursement of legal costs and fees provided the defendant does not publish or distribute Conference-approved literature in any language or country, now or in the future, and accepts all other stipulations in the Court's order.

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<sup>6</sup> See footnote 4.

The defendant has not responded to our offer. Therefore, we have asked that remedies stipulated in the Court's final order of October 2003 be fulfilled by the defendant.

While these matters were before the Court, we were constrained from discussing relevant details. We promised past and present members of the General Service Conference that we would report more fully when the matter was concluded. Legal fees and related expenses over the seven year period, 1998-2004, totaled \$227,707.

Trustees, A.A.W.S. and Grapevine Directors have no sense of victory or accomplishment. Throughout, we have applied ourselves to the principles handed down to you and to us. We recognized and faced our responsibilities, and the supreme importance of protecting the integrity and simplicity of Conference-approved literature, as well as the message handed down by Dr. Bob, Bill W. and A.A.'s early members.

Attached is a chronology with additional details on this matter. The attempt to erode or alter A.A.'s message, including our basic text, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, was not successful. We pray that the distortions of fact and harmful rumors will cease, and that each of us will continue to affirm our responsibility to share experience, strength and hope with the alcoholic who still suffers.

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Enclosure: Challenge to A.A. Unity and Legacy,  
A supplement to "Alcoholics Anonymous: Our Name and Our Message"