

Fellowships Report
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RESPONDING TO ILLEGAL PUBLICATION
A report from the WSO Board of Directors,
Saturday, October 20, 1990

In the last eight years, Narcotics Anonymous has established a system for approving, publishing, and distributing N.A. literature that is legally, practically, and spiritually sound. This year, some individual N.A. members have taken it upon themselves to print and distribute a version of N.A.'s Basic Text which they have altered to suit their own tastes. Their actions are legally, practically, and spiritually unsound. This report looks at the process our fellowship has developed for approving, publishing, and distributing its literature, contrasting that process with the extraordinary actions of the individuals who have pirated our Basic Text. Finally, this report asks for your direction. How should we respond to those who have illegally altered and published your literature? What responsibility does the WSO Board of Directors have to protect the integrity of the fellowship's printed message?

LEGALLY SOUND?

According to the general understanding of our members, new literary items, or revised versions of existing pieces of literature, must be approved by N.A.'s representative assembly, the World Service Conference, in order to be considered "N.A. literature." New literature not yet approved by the conference, or literature revised in contradiction to the directions of the conference, is not considered "N.A. literature." Once approved by the conference, N.A. literature is copyrighted, published, and distributed by the World Service Office. The copyright gives Narcotics Anonymous the ability to protect its literature from alteration or publication by parties other than those designated by the World Service Conference.

The copyrights to our literature, and the responsibility to publish and distribute that literature, is given to the World Service Office in trust as the *fiduciary* of the World Service Conference--that is, the World Service Office is legally bound to publish N.A. literature, for the benefit of the N.A. Fellowship, in accordance with the directions of the World Service Conference. In addition to the WSO's responsibility to publish N.A. literature, the World Service Office is also legally

responsible to protect N.A. literature from abuse, on behalf of the entire fellowship. These responsibilities are spelled out both in World Service Office corporate by-laws and in U.S. legal codes.

Those who have altered our Basic Text, calling it "N.A. literature" and publishing it without the fellowship's permission, are thieves. They have stolen our name, Narcotics Anonymous, and have used it for their own purposes, not the fellowship's. They have stolen our literature, our printed message, without our permission. What they stole has been mutilated, altered to suit their own tastes, without any authorization from the fellowship. These are crimes, and the law protects us from those who are abusing the fellowship's rights to its literature.

The N.A. Fellowship has given its literature in trust to the World Service Office corporation, to be published in accordance with the direction of the fellowship's World Service Conference. The individuals who have taken it upon themselves to change N.A. literature to suit their own ideas, and to publish that altered material, have broken trust with the N.A. Fellowship, both ethically and legally. And, according to American trust law, the World Service Office is bound, one way or another, to protect the literature given it in trust from those who have chosen to abuse the trust's "property."

PRACTICALLY SOUND?

The system Narcotics Anonymous has established for publishing and distributing its literature is both reliable and accountable. Literature publishing is a complex affair, requiring attention to a great many details, and a considerable degree of expertise, even for relatively simple publishing projects. Even though every group, area, and region needs N.A. literature, it's not necessary for every group, area, and region to set up its own publishing operation. That job is already done by the World Service Office, on behalf of the entire fellowship.

Those individuals illegally publishing the Basic Text have provided inconsistent, unreliable, irresponsible service to the groups they have contacted. Each individual do-it-yourself "publisher" has to either typeset the book himself, make printing plates from second-hand layouts of already-published copies of the Basic Text, or simply photocopy an existing book. Then, they have to buy their own paper, choose a local printer, and find a bindery, all with little or no background in these matters. The methods used to illegally publish the book to date have produced copies of consistently low quality, with fuzzy, hard-to-read type, cheap paper, and poor binding.

Within the N.A. Fellowship, the Basic Text is sold through the established service structure. The World Service Office sells the book to regional service offices, who sell it to area committees, who sell it to groups, who make it available on literature tables at N.A. meetings. When N.A. members want a book, they know where to find it, and they know they *will* find it.

The service structure has established a pattern of consistent, reliable service in the area of literature distribution. If it does not distribute literature in a reliable fashion, it can be held accountable by the fellowship. If the World Service Office does not deliver reliable service, the World Service Conference will call it to account. And if a regional or area committee cannot consistently supply N.A. literature to the groups it serves, it will be held accountable by those groups.

Supplies of the illegal book have been spotty, and suppliers have been difficult to find. Because distribution of the book is illegal, sales have been conducted secretly. Limited funds have meant limited publishing runs, meaning limited supplies. All in all, illegal publishing has meant anything *but* a reliable supply of N.A. literature to those who have chosen to use the illegal text. And, because the illegal text is published by individuals outside the service structure, they cannot be held accountable for the quality of the service they render.

The Basic Text is produced by the World Service Office for about \$2.00 U.S., and is sold by the office to its customers at an overall average price of \$6.00. The American retail price of the book is \$8.00. Book sales produce extra income both at the world and local levels of service, income which is used to support other services. At the world level, that income is spent according to the directions of the World Service Conference; at the local level, according to the wishes of the region, the area, or the group. At the world level, literature sales pay for support services to World Service Conference boards and committees, information and starter kits to new N.A. groups, fellowship communications, services to new N.A. communities in many countries, translation of N.A. literature, and a number of other services.

Sales of the Basic Text through the normal service structure lends to ready accountability for all funds involved. Each year, the World Service Office presents a complete financial report to the World Service Conference, covering both the costs for producing the Basic Text and other literature, and what was done with proceeds from N.A. literature sales. Receipts are provided to regions, areas, and groups who buy N.A. literature, so that their treasurers can fully account for literature purchases to those they serve, as required by our traditions.

The individuals who have illegally altered and published your Basic Text pay about 60 American cents to print their version, then turn around and sell it to groups for about \$1.25. They are not responsible, through N.A.'s service structure, to spend the proceeds from sales of their book on other authorized N.A. services. In fact, because they have consistently refused to make a financial accounting of their activity, no one knows exactly *what* they use the proceeds for. They make their sales on a cash basis only, so as not to leave any kind of incriminating paper trail, and offer no receipts to group treasurers, who are subsequently unable to account for their literature purchases.

SPIRITUALLY SOUND?

The established N.A. literature approval, publication, and distribution system is spiritually sound, especially for a fellowship like ours. Narcotics Anonymous is a very loosely organized fellowship, placing a high premium on the independence of its individual groups: "Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or N.A. as a whole." Each group is free to believe and act as it wishes, so long as its actions do not impact nearby groups or the worldwide fellowship.

The identity of our fellowship as a fellowship is based on the common message of its groups, as represented in N.A. literature. If each group had a slightly different message, and slightly different literature, the variations would quickly compound themselves to the point where we would cease to be a recognizable fellowship at all. For this reason, Narcotics Anonymous has established that N.A. literature can only be approved or altered by an assembly that is representative of the entire fellowship: the World Service Conference. Each group is free to carry out its own activities as it sees fit; but in matters affecting all the groups, they use the established service structure to come to a common decision, effective fellowshipwide. Thus, the needs and rights of *each* group, and the needs and rights of *all* the groups, are equally respected.

Those engaged in the unauthorized alteration, publication, and distribution of N.A.'s Basic Text have gone far, far down the road of self-will, and far, far away from the principles of recovery. They have taken upon themselves the authority the N.A. Fellowship has given its World Service Conference: the authority to determine the nature of N.A.'s printed message. They've said to us all, in effect, "Dissolve the World Service Conference, and give our gang its authority. *Trust us.*"