

Below is a dialogue between Boise Secular Al-Anon and Al-Anon's World Service Organization. It began when BSA submitted an application to be listed in WSO's directory of meetings

WSO: Warm greetings from your World Service Office (WSO)! Part of the WSO registration process is verifying that the information provided for new group registration adheres to the Al-Anon/Alateen Policy as stated in the Policy Digest section of the *2018-2021 Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual* (P-24/27). Upon review it was determined that the submitted registration for the "Boise Secular Al-Anon" does not meet the criteria for registration. The concern is with the word "secular" as it is not in keeping with the "Choosing a Group's Name" policy that can be found in the "Membership and Group Meetings/Conventions" portion of the *Policy Digest* beginning on page 85. The definition of the word "secular" is: denoting attitudes, activities, or other things that have no religious or spiritual basis. This definition (and similar variations) are found in a variety of dictionaries and online searches. Since Al-Anon is a spiritual program, "secular" for use in the Al-Anon meeting name is not reflective of the policy.

Choosing a name for an Al-Anon group is Step Twelve in action. Members share that it helps to be reminded that the name is to be in keeping with Traditions One (unity), Three (membership), Four (autonomy) and Five (our primary purpose) so there is better understanding for the potential newcomer. The WSO invites the group to continue using its creativity in having a name that would be appealing to others, however, the group name needs to abide by the Al-Anon/Alateen policy. We understand that not being able to register with the proposed name is a disappointment to the group and hope that the group will continue its efforts in following the principles of the program and group conscience of Al-Anon as a whole as expressed in the **Policy Digest** section.

Please don't hesitate to contact the WSO if you have additional questions or concerns. Thanks for all you are doing for families and friends of alcoholics!

BSA: Thanks for your reply.

We are trying to reach family members who won't go to other Al-Anon meetings because of the religious references and practices, specifically: prayer and the use of "God." These scare away atheists, polytheists, and agnostics whose experiences with religion have convinced them to stay away.

We want to make what Al-Anon has to offer available to these people. How would you propose to do that?

WSO: Warm greetings from your World Service Office (WSO)! Valerie Stump was kind enough to forward your proposed group name and concern to my attention.

To briefly review, the role of the WSO is to comply with the policies established by the World Service Conference (WSC) that are stated in the *2018-2021 Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual* (P-24/27). It may be helpful to review the "Introduction," "Channel for Arriving at Policies," "The World Service Conference (WSC)," and "The World Service Office" portions of the Service Manual that appear on pages 83-84.

Al-Anon meetings are what Al-Anon members make them to be. Since each group is autonomous, your meeting topics can be confined to the discussions of your choice. While the use of Conference Approved Literature (CAL) is required in Al-Anon meetings, it will be the responsibility of the members to discern which pieces will best meet your needs. Reviewing the index on the various pieces of CAL offers a variety of options. All of our literature speaks to Al-Anon bring a spiritual program and not a religious one. While the terms God, Higher Power and prayer are found in our legacies and cannot be changed, Al-Anon principles found in the Traditions state that our common welfare comes first, that the group conscience is the authority, and that when we gather together, we share in the experience, strength and hope that the Al-Anon program offers. None of that is religious in nature.

Since the term “secular” is defined as not having a religious or spiritual basis, we cannot accept that as the name for an Al-Anon group in order to adhere to the policy on “Choosing a Group’s Name” found on page 85 of the *2018-2021 Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual* (P-24/27). Al-Anon does offer help and hope to families and friends of alcoholics by sharing our experiences and abiding by the spiritual principles found in the Steps, Traditions and Concepts. Group names can be a slogan (i.e. Easy Does It AFG) or after a piece of CAL (i.e. Discovering Choices AFG) or the name of a town (i.e. Boise Morning AFG).

I hope this information is helpful. Feel free to respond to AFG Records with an agreed upon name and don’t hesitate to contact me if you have additional questions or concerns. Thanks for all you are doing for families and friends of alcoholics in Idaho!

BSA: Thanks for getting back to me.

It sounds like WSO and the Conference have no plans for making Al-Anon more accessible to atheists, agnostics and polytheists. I had no such plans either until I started meeting people who want recovery from the family disease of alcoholism but simply will not come to a meeting where they are advised to talk to God.

Given how many of these I have met since I started reaching out, and how small my personal circle of contacts is, I have to believe that the overall number is huge. And given that "none" is the fastest-growing religion in the US (according to the check boxes on forms), it promises to become more and more of those we are pledged to help.

Of course, one doesn't meet these folks in Al-Anon meetings, so neither you nor I had any way of knowing about a whole neglected population. But now you and I both know. As we move into the future, I hope that you and other policy-makers will find a way to assist. When the non-believer reaches out, I want the hand of Al-Anon to be there. I'm happy to let it begin with me, but I hope it will soon include all those who serve the families of alcoholics.