

Dear Fellowship,

August 2020

First and foremost, we hope you are all doing well and staying healthy in light of this COVID-19. Remember the wisdom, "this too shall pass" and "one day at a time."

While these times are not easy to navigate, we are pleased to share that the Alano Club of Kent County remains a place for refuge and will stay open for those who desire to meet in person, while practicing safety at the same time. The Club staff and volunteers alike, are routinely deep cleaning and sanitizing. Safety is everyone's responsibility – stay safe, stay sober!

As many of you know, the Alano Club of Kent County is a 501(c)3 non-profit, a registered public charity, and governed by a Board of Directors. Being that we are a public non-profit and we are open to the public, those affected by life-threatening addiction are welcome here, regardless of race, sex, religion, creed, and so forth.

As overseers of the Club, we desire to be transparent in our actions and to keep our membership informed. You may have heard some of the rumors floating around and we want to address those immediately and head on. We have heard that some members believe the Board of Directors were seeking to change the Alano Club of Kent County from a membership-based non-profit to a directorship non-profit without discussing this with the membership as a whole or without a vote. Not only is this not true, such a change would not be legal without a majority vote from the membership. While this was discussed during a Board of Directors meeting at one point, it was decided that membership was not on board and that it would not even be worth bringing it to a vote. You may have also heard that a certain recovery group was attempting to take over the Board of Directors and the Alano Club of Kent County. This is also not true. Our Board of Directors is filled with club members from ALL recovery programs currently available at the club (AA, NA, Al-anon, SMART).

Finally, we are still attempting to determine the validity of the final rumor you might have heard that a certain group of members are trying to remove any recovery group at the club that is not "12 steps" (this would include groups like SMART and Recovery Yoga). We have heard life-altering testimonies from each of the programs that we host, and thus we can't fathom the idea of getting rid of any one program or turning our back on anyone seeking recovery. We believe the majority of our members feel the same way but we understand there are some individuals who feel that the Alano Club of Kent County should adhere to the most recent Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws which would only allow AA, NA, Al-Anon, and Alateen meetings. Let us give you a quick synopsis of how we got to where we are currently at!

Before the Club, the founders relied on other locations employees of other establishments, such as janitors of church's, to let us in and have meetings. Thanks to a generous Doctor, the home of 1020 College was donated to help solve the meeting location predicament. The Alano Club of Kent County was created to be a **"permanent meeting place"** for those in Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) to meet and gather vs. depend on other places to host us. Around the same time, Alano Clubs popped up all around the country using the same logic in mind to support AA. Our roots of supporting people in AA is in our name – Al-An-O (alcoholics anonymous organization). **However, Alano Clubs around the country are still an outside entity from the program of Alcoholics Anonymous, and both are separate 501(c)3 organizations. Generally speaking, Alano Clubs and AA are a distinction without a difference – we are both in the business of people and serving and supporting these people in their recovery journey!**

**Nevertheless, Clubs are as an "outside issue" to members of AA, and AA occurs the moment the door closes, no different than when the door closes at an AA meeting at a Church. AA**

**does not interfere with Church operations or wherever they meet.** AA is self-supporting and only pays room rent, as do all programs hosted at the Alano Club of Kent County, to the Club (or wherever it's being hosted like a church). This room rent helps support the operations of the Club and the amenities of the Club (elevator, air conditioning, café, electricity, cleanliness, and so forth). After rent for their meeting is paid, typically AA groups contribute to local district, the area committee, central office and the General Service Office of AA.

We are grateful for the people of AA and the positive impact that the people of AA have made on our Club. Many of the club's financial needs have been met over the years solely by their contributions. The library of congress ranks the Big Book as one of the top 100 books to shape America, and we have a deep reverence for the program. AA meetings make up the majority of the meetings as well as membership and we will always welcome AA here.

Like other clubs, we started by hosting AA and AA only here in the early beginnings of the Club. In the 1970s, the Club welcomed the program of "Al-Anon," family, and friends of alcoholics. However, believe it or not, the program of Al-Anon was a contentious wrestle to be allowed here at the Club! Thankfully, Al-Anon won that wrestle, and this change in our Club also occurred at other Clubs across our nation.

Consequently, we have many great testimonies from our family and friends from Al-Anon! Similarly in the 1980's, it was a wrestle to allow Narcotics Anonymous to exist on our Club schedule! It was a wrestle because a lot of people make a mistake to say this is a AA Club and only an AA Club only, and not any other program, such as Al-Anon or NA at the time. However, these programs share some amazing testimonies of saving marriages, families, and even lives! Can you imagine if the Club did not expand to support those affected by the disease of addiction? By adding these programs, we are able to help more people who are affected by the disease and supply more tools for success.

In Grand Rapids, the Opioid Task Force reports there is a fatal overdose every couple of days! In the 1950s, the drug of choice was alcohol. Today, in 2020, the drug is still alcohol, among other drugs, in our culture. As a Club, we have evolved in our programming by adding more programs to support those in recovery. Across the country, some Alano Clubs are staying laser-focused on just AA, while others are evolving to allow NA and other programs. **For us, knowing that people are dying out there from the disease of addiction to other drugs, we are open to hosting other programs if they seek to rehabilitate those suffering from life threatening addictions.** We have heard countless testimonies that access to multiple programs and the approach of multiple pathways in recovery has helped many! We are grateful that our Club can be a helping hand by hosting diverse programs and offer more tools to help combat the ugly disease of addiction. The more tools, the more opportunity to troubleshoot the problem! We are grateful for other recovery organizations like Guiding Light, who hosts Recovery Yoga! While Recovery Yoga alone may not be the answer, it might be an excellent supplement and opportunity to slow down the busy alcoholic/addict mind and be still.

Additionally, we have many people in our Fellowship who practice multiple pathways. Some people in AA have started Eating Orders Anonymous; sometimes, one addiction is replaced with another addiction. The Fellowship has brought these programs, and we have welcomed them as they make a difference in the community in which we serve and support! The best program that is going to work - is the program that you work! Knowing that there is no cure for alcoholism or addiction, we are open to any program that helps promote sobriety and wellness, whether it be AA, NA, Al-Anon, SMART, Al-Alateen.

As a Board of Directors, staff, and most members of our Club, we resonate with Bill W., one of the founders of Alcoholics Anonymous, [as] said in the September 1944 Grapevine, "**The roads to recovery are many.**" Additionally, "**In all probability, we shall never be able to touch more than a fair fraction of the alcohol problem in all its ramifications. Upon therapy for the alcoholic himself, we surely have no monopoly (Alcoholics Anonymous, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1955, p. ix).**" In 1952, it was just the Alano Club of Kent County. In 2020, we now have recovery meetings and recovery organizations all over Grand Rapids, and there are still opportunities to serve and support the person in recovery. Today, some people find the Club after a stay in rehab or detox. Others find the Club through the Drug Courts. These are just a few examples to express the roads to recovery are many!

If AA (or a different 12 step program) is not someone's particular path to recovery, do we believe that they should be prohibited from holding such meetings, SMART for example, at the Alano Club of Kent County? The Board of Directors in the recent past and the current Board of Directors thinks not. We continue to be open to practice love and tolerance, and try to be the helping hand. If you don't understand someone's program, we encourage you to investigate it. Ask why people claim that it saved their life? Listen to their recovery story. After learning the positive impact, I am sure you will gain Bill W.'s perspective that the roads to recovery are many!

In the very near future, with your help, we will attempt to amend the Articles of Incorporation, which currently state that the purpose of the Club is "To provide meeting space for AA, Alanon, and other 12 step substance recovery groups, provide a fellowship center, and to provide educational outreach and prevention on alcoholism." We would like to amend this to be more consistent with our Mission Statement, which states: "Serving those affected by life-threatening addiction by providing a welcoming place to support meetings and fellowship." A change to the Articles of Incorporation would **require a majority vote at the annual membership meeting**, currently scheduled for October 17<sup>th</sup> at 1:30pm. Given the current circumstances, we are planning to make it possible for every member to participate and vote remotely to ensure as much participation as possible so that we are capturing the consensus of the membership as a whole. Changing this would also mean a couple changes to the Bylaws only so they would match the Articles of Incorporation and allow meetings that aren't specifically "12 steps".

What's more important is hearing from you! We have scheduled a townhall meeting on Tuesday, September 15<sup>th</sup> at 7:00pm to specifically discuss this change, the voting process, and any other concerns you might have. We understand many are still uncomfortable attending meetings in person and as a club we are still abiding by current state restrictions on gathering sizes. We are diligently working to plan a meeting that any and ALL members can attend or at the very least ZOOM into.

It is our hopes that all of our members will participate at the Townhall meeting to discuss any future changes and at the Annual Membership Meeting to vote on these changes.

You can see where we have had growing pains over the years (adding more programs) but we hope you will focus on how we overcame these growing pains, and how it benefits the person in recovery or those (Alateen, Al-Anon, SMART Family & Friends) affected by the disease of addiction.

Rather than create division, let us focus on unity. Let us avoid undermining each other and instead celebrate our different paths to recovery. We are striving to do the next right thing, in hopes that together we can do great things. To those living in the solution, help us create an environment where others can achieve that same way of life. We are stronger together than we could ever be apart!

With gratitude,  
Board of Directors  
Alano Club of Kent County

