The Northern Triangle

Volume 16 **MN North Area AFG Newsletter** **May 2026**

Our mission is to provide information and inspiration and to encourage service by keeping us connected to each other between assemblies.

Welcome to this issue of The Northern Triangle Newsletter for panel 65.
Concept 4 - Participation is the key to harmony.
We need your feedback and invite any Al-Anon member to contribute. The next issue will be August 1. **Remainder** of 2026 is November 1.

Connie B. Newsletter Coordinator
Assisted by Barb D.

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SAVE THE DATE

FALL AWSC MEETING AUGUST 26, 2026

FALL 2026 ASSEMBLY October 3rd and 4th at the RiverPlace in Warroad.

LINKS OF SERVICE

Member + Member = Group
Group + Group = District
District + District = Assembly
Assembly + Assembly = Conference
(Al-Anon Guidelines G-15 Revised 2021)

IMPORTANT LINKS

World Service Office: **https://al-anon.org/for-members**

MN North Al-Anon*: https://minnesotanorth-al-anon.org

*This is a public site with limited information for the viewing public.
*To access member info, you must set up a profile including a username and password and be approved to access all other content. As a member, you will be able to log-in to access as allowed, such as: Assembly info, Newsletters, District Reports, Delegate Reports and much, much more.
*If you want more information on any article, please look under the MN North Al-Anon link and then assembly.
*The WSO has updated some of the Area Guidelines on their website. The WSO website can be located at Al-Anon Family Groups and in the search bar on the upper right enter 2 Manuals and Guidelines. When the various results are shown click on the Guidelines and find the whole list of guidelines currently available.

*Other places to find information on service positions: The Service Manual and the MNA Service Manual on the MN North Area Website.

Delegate Report for MN North Area AFG Newsletter May 2026

I am writing this after returning home from the 2026 World Service Conference only 4 ½ days ago. My heart is still so full and if I am not careful, I find myself wanting to burst into tears. Please know that they are both tears of joy and tears of sadness. The energy, support, endless hugs, and spiritual presence that you feel from close to one hundred in attendance each day at conference is almost indescribable.

As I reflect on the 2026 World Service Conference Theme "75 Years, One Purpose" there continues to be a huge amount of gratitude that I have not only to our co-founders "Lois W. and Anne B.", but to everyone in Minnesota North and Minnesota South who have tirelessly served to keep Al-Anon alive and well in our state so it was available when I walked through the doors many years ago.

We were blessed at Conference to have Sarah S., Director of Programs at the World Service Office, as our opening speaker and to quote a portion of her message: "For 75 years this fellowship has been having a spiritual conversation about hope, healing, unity, humility, and truth. We did not start it, and we are not going to finish it, but we get to carry it in this moment. I am grateful for the trust we placed together in a higher power who has guided us for 75 years and will continue guiding us long after we are gone".

In Service and Gratitude,

Marcy F., Delegate, MN North Area 29, P65, "Keeping Our Legacies Alive"

WSC Theme for 2026 - 75 Years, One Purpose

DISTRICT REPORTS

DISTRICT 001-002 2026 SPRING REPORT

May 1st, 2026

Fall 2026 Assembly will be hosted by our District on October 3rd and 4th at the RiverPlace in Warroad. The Hampton Inn is next door (walking distance) to RiverPlace, At Warroad Hampton Inn rooms are two queen beds for $173.00 plus tax. You can book online anytime, and the Hampton has made it so convenient for the booking process. Book now through September 2nd to get this rate. If you call Hampton Inn 218-386-4900 the code is Al-Anon Assembly and the direct booking online use, https://group.hamptoninn.com/cibic8 that is a direct link to our block of rooms for the rate.

The Patch Hotel has double bed rooms with two beds available for $155.00 plus tax. To book with the Patch call 218-386-2723. Ask for the room rate for Al-Anon Assembly.

A block of 33 out of 36 rooms is still available at Hampton Inn and a block of 10 at available at The Patch. Both hotels provide free coffee.

There will also be coffee, snacks, and water available at RiverPlace. The meal is catered by Hugos for $30.00 each, tax and tipping included. The buffet style meal will be chicken, meatballs with your choice of gravy or BBQ sauce, mashed potatoes, fresh green beans, house salad, ciabatta bread and butter, chicken wild rice soup, and Hawaiian fruit salad.

Coffee and water will be provided throughout the Assembly. A light assortment of breakfast items will be available at RiverPlace compliments of District 1&2.

We are excited to announce a special speaker from Canada; Deb P. will be sharing Saturday evening.

Our theme is named “Harvesting Serenity,” and we have not produced workshop questions yet.

Registration is $30.00 for in-person and virtual. We are so excited to be hosting and looking forward to seeing you this Fall in Warroad, Minnesota.

We will be sending the flyers for registration mid-to end of July 2026.

There will be a Sunday morning Al-Anon meeting.

District 001-002 has 3 groups, all of which have Group Representative's. Thief River Falls has 5-6 solid members, and 2 occasionally. Lake of the Woods Serenity from Williams are reaching out to the public to try to get more members. They have 3 solid members and 2 occasional members. They meet at the Community Center on Wednesday nights. In Williams Minnesota. Warroad Friday Night has 5 regular members. The group meets with AA on the last Friday of the month. The group meet at 7pm at St. Mary's Catholic Church. In Warroad.

Next District meeting will be held on June 20th, 2026, at the Thief River Falls Public Library.

Respectfully Submitted,

Laurie S. / District Representative 29-001-00

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District 29/003

District 29/003 has committed to the YMCA Retreat Center (Camp) in Lake Park, MN, for Fall 2027 Assembly.

I am happy to say that we had 8 members from our district at the Spring 2026 Assembly. A big thank you District 6; it was a great event!

We sent Love Gifts with our Delegate, Marcy to conference.

District 3 is also working on distributing Alateen information from Al-Anon.org to area schools.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary H. District Representative 29/003

April 17, 2026

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Greetings to my Al-Anon family,

We in District 006 are currently recovering after hosting the Assembly. We had a wonderful time, and I hope the feeling is the same across the Area.

I want to take this opportunity to thank our wonderful team in District 006 from the committees that helped plan the event, fed us, decorated for us, and did every other job to make this Assembly a success. I also want to thank our volunteers who came early and set up tables and helped with anything and everything that needed to be done.

After our Assembly I asked our District 3 questions, and I would like to pose them also to everyone that receives the newsletter. Please respond to Connie or I as we are in the Task Force to review and suggest edits to the Assembly Activity Guidelines. The questions are:

1. What did you enjoy most about the Assembly?

2. What could be done differently?

3. What pointers can we pass on to the other host districts?

Doris K. District Representative 29-006

COORDINATOR REPORTS

Minnesota North Area Al-Anon Assembly

April 7, 2026, Alateen Report

Alateen Coordinator/Area Alateen Process Person, Leslie W

The Minnesota North Area (MNA) Alateen certification continues to await the outcome of the Minnesota South Area (MSA) Alateen recertification process. We have learned that the MSA is still in the process of finalizing its Alateen Behavioral and Safety Requirements (ASBR) which will then be submitted to the World Service Office (WSO) for approval. Once approval is obtained, we will replicate MSA's ASBR as much as is feasible for MNA and eventually submit it for approval to the WSO. Once we receive WSO approval, we can begin work to establish MNA Alateen groups.

While we are not yet able to hold in-person or electronic Alateen meetings in the MNA, we are actively distributing flyers which promote the Al-Anon Family Groups (AFG) mobile app electronic Alateen meetings. The flyer contains a QR code with directions for logging into the electronic meetings as well as information about the meetings. These are 5 weekly meetings which teens anywhere in the world can attend. I'm hearing from my counterparts in other states and Canada that the meetings are quite popular and effective.

In early March 2026, the flyers along with a distribution sheet were forwarded to all DRs and GRs in the MNA with a request to copy the flyers and distribute them widely in your district. I have also made many copies of the flyer and will bring them to the Spring 2026 Assembly meeting for distribution.

We are not able to upload the flyers on the MNA website due to direction from the WSO, pertaining to MNA's lack of certification. Please refer to MNA Secretary Julie A's 3/5/26 email attaching the flyer and distribution sheet or contact me to obtain a copy of the flyer.

Remember, teens are also able to attend our own Al-Anon meetings!

In service, Leslie W

Newsletter

I need to apologize that this is so late. I have had it ready for some time. Left it to look at the next day and then life got busy.

I want to thank everyone who sent in a contribution. It is appreciated. The next issue will be August 1, 2026.

Connie B.

April Spring Assembly Report

Apri1 11/12 Brainard Mn.

Another great assembly by Dist. 6 to cap off the first half of this panel.

How time flies. It's always great to see everyone and a shoutout to the Zoomies. Thanks for your participation and comments on the motions we voted on. Great job by our tech. Crew. The voting went off without a hitch.

The facilities and the food were top-notch. I really enjoyed the taco in the bag lunch on Saturday. Great job from the hospitality crew. The decorating committee was not to be outdone. Those little tools and toolboxes were so cool. They were snatched up by the drawing winners like pronto. And carefully guarded, I might add.

A really big thanks to everyone who attended. Your service work is greatly appreciated, and your groups benefit greatly. Seeing you participate will only bring out the importance of service.

Get your winter clothes and fishing gear out for the fall Warroad Assembly. District 1 and 2 have got some good stuff coming your way. Don't forget AWSC on August 29 in Walker Mn. This is the tipoff for the fall assembly. Come there and help the Area folks plan and listen to the plans for Assembly.

Once again: A GOOD time was had by all.

Ed D. Area Assembly Coordinator.

SHARINGS

It may answer some questions as to why we end our meetings with The Lord's Prayer Hugs Johni

In a December 1963 Forum there is an article called "The Lord's Prayer" which contains many of the 12 Steps. This is also contained in a book called Forum Favorites #2 on page 215.

"The Lord's Prayer

It's a good thing Al-Anon and AA don't have to choose between the two prayers most closely associated with them--the Lord's Prayer and the Serenity Prayer. Each contains fundamentals of the program.

Just as we close each meeting with the Lord's Prayer, it seems very appropriate that we close the FORUM year with a consideration of how it fits into our program.

AA took its program in bits and pieces from here, there and everywhere. Al-Anon, in turn, took its program from AA, unashamedly borrowing, adapting where necessary which was not often, and went forward from there.

The unity of Al-Anon is well expressed where we all acknowledge a common Father. The concept of His power is indicated when we place Him in heaven, well above our mortal effort. Our goal of being restored to sanity is in the words "Thy kingdom come" because the mess we once made of our lives was surely not to His liking.

We express the Third Step in almost the same words when we say "'Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven." And asking for our daily bread--not food for a whole lifetime, not for next year nor next month, but for our daily bread--couldn't be closer to the 24 hour program, Then we can hardly ask forgiveness for trespasses we don't acknowledge as wrongs, so the moral inventory is implied here.

Finally, the Eleventh Step is certainly close to our petition that we not be led into temptation but delivered from evil, because we know His will for us could not be that of continued wrongdoing.

In one way or another, a tremendous part of our program is contained in the Lord's Prayer. One can hear and feel a special pea when it is said together in meetings. Any prayer is a good prayer but this one, peculiarly adapted to our needs, is our best one."

There is no name as to the author. This does explain as to how The Lord's Prayer fits our program.

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Good afternoon, MNA,

First off, I want to thank whomever it was that asked the question about crosstalk. This just came up recently at one of the meetings that I attend.

I remembered when we had this as a topic on our district meeting agenda (District 003), for discussion back on 9-12-2020. We had invited Fred H., who was delegate at the time, to visit our district.

Fred presented some information that he had put together and later forwarded it to us. I did receive his permission to share with all of you. Since this was just brought up at assembly, I wanted to pass it along. Also, there is one page from 1992 World Service Conference summary that I shared with our District at that time too. I'm pretty sure there are a lot of other references in other conference summaries as well.

District Representatives, please share this information as you are able.

Thanks for a wonderful assembly this past weekend!

In Service and Gratitude,

Marcy F., Delegate, MN North Area 29, P65, "Keeping Our Legacies Alive"

WSC Theme for 2026 - 75 Years, One Purpose

CROSSTALK

There are many definitions regarding "crosstalk. I have included postings that were on the D.R. Community of AFG Connects to show various ways that Groups define crosstalk. In short, each Group, because of Group autonomy, has the freedom to define it any way they choose. However, definitions should be aligned with Al-Anon principles whenever possible and the assumption of goodwill should always be present.

Our district and area do not allow crosstalk. Many of the meetings in my district have terminology for this.

From the Monday Night St. Francis beginner's meeting:

In Al-anon "the loving interchange of help among members…makes us ready to receive the priceless gift of serenity."

The Monday Night Beginners Group has a crosstalk policy to encourage newcomers to speak up when they need clarification about what they may be hearing about the program from other participants.

It is NOT: advice-giving, one member monopolizing the conversation, the need to comment on every sharing, side conversation, or mini meetings.

Crosstalk may be: defining Al-Anon terms such as detachment, enabling etc. or another member sharing with a newcomer how they used the program to work through a problem.

We strive to give everyone a chance to share.

From the Tuesday morning meeting at St. Joseph:
No crosstalk. 'Cross-Talk' means giving advice directly to others who have already shared or questioning or interrupting the person sharing at the time. Discussion after the meeting is encouraged.
From the Saturday afternoon meeting at St. Mark:
In this meeting we also refrain from cross talk, which we define as giving advice to others who have already shared or spoken directly to another person rather than the group.
From the Monday morning meeting at Northminster:
There is no crosstalk which we define as comments referring to or responding to a person by name.
---------- Maureen Magee ----------
My home group: A. SOURCE: Inside Al-Anon, December/January 1988-89, Volume 12, No.1, "An Early Interpretation of Crosstalk" ● Talking out of turn ● Advice giving ● Questioning the person who is sharing ● Holding private conversations ● Having an individual comment on everyone's sharing ● And being discourteous and intimidating If you want to speak on what you hear, speak of your own recovery only, addressing a topic with "I" instead of "you". ---------- Fozia Khan ---------
I've heard the word Crosstalk defined twice since this forum started, two different groups, two different people and two different definitions.
I find the word "crosstalk" evasive. It gives us a word to talk about without discussing the character defect behind the problem.
I can visualize a workshop. The setting is a game show called "Name that Character Defect." Some members act out the disturbing behavior called crosstalk, the other members, divided into teams, try to guess what character defect is acted out. Lights are flashing, buzzers are blasting, people are shouting with joy as the game is played. The awareness is wonderfully painful, received with gratitude, and healing.
My problem would be naming the character defect. I would be standing there like a knot on a log, hand over the buzzer button, frozen and dumbfounded. I can see the problem, but I have trouble defining it. Is it self-righteousness, arrogance, or superiority? I'm not sure. Maybe none of us are sure but if we can somehow name the defect then we could talk about it, share about it, have meetings about it and start to heal from it.
On the other hand, a member commenting on another member's share, making direct comments to another member, interrupting and correcting others can also be interpreted as aggressive behavior, character defect gone wild. As we discuss meeting safety with our Delegates perhaps, we can suggest improvements to our Service Manual and other CAL that will address these obstacles to success as well.
---------- Rick Shields Florida North District 2 ----------
I think the crosstalk character defect I've seen is EGO - Edging God Out or is my self-righteousness showing?
Crosstalk recently came up with meeting safety in a complaint in my district. I did a lot of research on it and found that it appears crosstalk was specifically taken out of Al-Anon manuals and guidelines after 2011. My belief is because of group autonomy. There's a careful balance between loving interchange and crosstalk. What is necessary in a beginner's group is disruptive in other groups. Outside programs specifically call crosstalk out by name and restrict it. However, Al-Anon does not. I have found that to be the beauty of this program. ---------- Michelle K. DR Area 18 ----------
"There are no rules, no "musts" in Al-Anon. ... No one in our fellowship has the authority to say, "You should not do this," or "You must do that." (Al-Anon's Twelve Steps & Twelve Traditions) Rules invite perfection and control, judgement, and criticism, I'm better than you, conflict, anger, martyrs, and oppressors. I chaired a group inventory where someone said there was a lot of crosstalk and four sharers later, I heard, "Charlie you are absolutely wrong, there is no crosstalk here." I was at a meeting where they had a long paragraph in their opening enumerating crosstalk and yet they gratefully identified, repeated, and commented on what the meetings speaker shared. Most people I've met have their own definition, which is usually anything I don't like or would never do. It's like

righteous anger for AA's - dangerous. Elsewhere when I cluelessly broke rules, I got slapped down or disdained. Al-Anon showed me remarkable tolerance, love, and understanding. Instead of rules we have Traditions. Members seek to comfort each other, we understand, we remember when. Sure, we get challenged, the disease hates all of that and wants us angry, isolated, and alone. But the program is stronger, fellowship is stronger, grace is stronger. ---------- Richard McCluskey Massachusetts Area Chair, P59 -----

Talk to Each Other

gets too laid-back, the chair just closes the meeting for one-on-one time until the regular meeting begins. The focus in these meetings is always on the newcomer.

One of my meetings composed a two-paragraph addendum to the Suggested Welcome that covered the basic ideas of our program without discussing the details. It is beautiful to watch in action. We spend our time sharing and listening instead of trying to explain things our beginners didn't feel the need to know. And the newcomers know what questions to ask!

3. Group conscience When I see group conscience in our literature, it's usually about taking a vote on a particular issue. Voting is the "group" thing about it. The "conscience" part, however, is personal. Not only are we needed to vote our conscience, but we need to speak it without being asked when we see something we feel is wrong. Beyond all the brave social situations we've heard of, we can and should offer one-on-one help to newcomers at our meetings who are clearly foundering.

By Bob

I have been recovering in Al-Anon for many years and need my regular meetings to stay sane. When I am at a meeting that collapses around a newcomer's needs, I feel cheated out of what I come for. I also feel we fail the newcomer. We fail them because the greatest gift—the only gift we are qualified to give a newcomer—is our program: an opportunity to be still and listen, to hear supportive and effective strategies for "serenity and even happiness," and to belong to our circle, no questions asked.

A newcomer is full of questions—besides much else—but that one hour of meeting time, in my opinion, must serve the needs of all the families and friends of alcoholics present, and that includes the longtimers.

By Sarah

To me, crosstalk would defeat Al-Anon's principles and guidelines. Listening shows respect. When you speak, I can listen without others talking over and around the subject you are bringing to us.

When I came to Al-Anon I didn't have much respect for myself or others. Al-Anon's whole format has taught me to listen, learn, and show respect to the person speaking.

By Elaine, British Columbia

In all of the meetings I attend, we read a "no crosstalk" statement after the Suggested Welcome. Most of the time that statement prevents the giving of advice, the discussion of literature other than CAL, or the quoting of TV personalities. This keeps me focused on the real reason I am there—to take care of myself with the help of Al-Anon.

I learned from my first Sponsor to go to meetings early and stay after to visit. This is where most of the "loving interchange" happens. It is the time for me to share my experience, strength, and hope with anyone who wants it. It also gives me the opportunity to pass on meeting information and literature. During the meeting, I have one hour to listen to and learn from others about how they work the Al-Anon program. I have noticed in some meetings that if there is a newcomer, the sharing often becomes directed to the newcomer. This can take away from the other members who are there looking for the help they need in that one hour.

If chairing or leading a meeting, I ask newcomers to please stay after the meeting to visit because I would love to share the program that has saved my life with them.

By Jeanette, Texas

My group's policies include the suggestion that we try to avoid crosstalk at meetings. This and other points governing how we wish to conduct our meetings were arrived at by group conscience and are periodically reviewed and revised by the group as it changes.

Before the Suggested Welcome is read, our group has an announcement paragraph. It talks about meeting times, clean up, and how we will continue after the Welcome. It concludes with the following: "Please be courteous to your fellow members—keep in mind that all desire the opportunity to comment. If you are having a particularly difficult time and feel you need individual attention, please see someone during the break about a private mini-meeting during the discussion period." We don't specifically say that crosstalk is not allowed, but we do try to lead by example and, if necessary, gently guide someone who needs to vent into private conversations.

Many of our members jot down notes when announcements are read to be used in the discussion portion of the meeting or to be kept for review at a later time. Personally, I found this was a good thing for me as I didn't always listen to what people were saying to me, as I was busy thinking about what I wanted to say.

There is always the tool of Beginner's Meetings where we try to help newcomers understand what Al-Anon has done for us personally and what they might anticipate receiving from practicing the program. Some newcomers have a lot to say.

TALK to Each Other

The opinions expressed here are strictly those of the person who gave them and do not necessarily reflect the views of *The Forum*.

My new home group does crosstalk. This has been difficult for me and I have expressed my opinion when I chaired a meeting using the article on crosstalk. The good of the whole is they support the use of crosstalk. I embrace the silence of allowing each member to share without interruptions. Even though I cannot change what others want to do, I can "Let It Begin with Me" and do what is comfortable for me.

By Pam, Nebraska

Concerning crosstalk, what happened to "share my experience, strength, and hope" for the newcomers and all others at Al-Anon meetings? Not everyone has had the exact same experience or acted in the same way, but most have been helped by the sharing and caring of others at meetings of how they dealt with the problem. Maybe it was just a slogan or two like "Let Go and Let God" or "Keep an Open Mind." That's how "Keep Coming Back" has helped create many of our longtimers in the program.

Suggestions of Al-Anon literature that may help with a specific problem like references for readings indexed in the back of *One Day at a Time* (B-6) and *Courage to Change* (B-16) and other literature can be helpful. Newcomers don't know where to find answers without some sharing by longtimers. Sometimes someone's problem makes a good topic for a meeting.

By Sandy C.

I, too, came to Al-Anon in the days before crosstalk. The discussion format was *one* person with a problem and 30 answers. Good format for that *one* person, but heaven help the *second* person with a problem—they never got a crumb.

Growing up in an alcoholic home, my feelings were discounted and *I* was not allowed to talk. With crosstalk comes dominance and interruptions.

My home group has 45-minute discussions and no crosstalk. Fifteen minutes are allowed whenever we have a newcomer.

By Cherlyn C., Texas

I was really glad to see someone bring up the subject of crosstalk again. I never really understood the Al-Anon definition of crosstalk. I thought it meant a couple of people having a conversation back and forth during the meeting rather than allowing one person to share at a time.

I have been concerned about the lack of response when a newcomer asks for help. Everyone just sits there and says nothing for fear of giving advice. I thought we were here to share our experience, strength, and hope.

When I first came to Al-Anon, I was really grateful for the advice I was given—things like "Don't stand at the window watching for the headlights to come up the lane," "have dinner at the regular time for the kids whether he is home or not," and "if he passes out, leave him to wake up there." These were things members learned by using the program, things that worked for them.

Page 221 in *One Day at a Time* (B-6) gives us insight as to the kind of advice we give. It is up to me to choose what I try in my life.

I know that our disease is to try to fix everyone and Al-Anon has helped me understand that it is not my job to do so. But I came to the program many years ago to get help dealing with my husband's alcoholism. I am really grateful that members shared with me their experience, strength, and hope.
By Carol K., California
In the September *Forum* there is a discussion on crosstalk. I've been in meetings where there has been crosstalk and I don't believe there is a way to do so without being disrespectful to the one who is speaking.
Many of us who come to Al-Anon have a need for someone to really listen to us. Crosstalk is interrupting and breaks a person's train of thought. The person who crosstalks is either uncomfortable with what is being said or thinks their own experience is more valid. They are not listening. Everyone in the meeting should have a chance to talk about what they feel compelled to talk about. If one is looking for input, they can ask for it after they have said their piece or at the end of the meeting.
The writer of the crosstalk article talks about one person who was feeling suicidal. Something like that requires more than just a kind word or someone else giving their own experience. It should be followed up with after the meeting when there is plenty of time to properly address the issue.

Talk to Each Other

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on the meeting, members in attendance, and/or the topic, there were times I would either refrain from talking or choose my words very carefully. The focus was not on me. It was on what others would think about what I said.
Then I went to different meetings. Even if the group was large, they didn't split up and there was no crosstalk. To me, these meetings were like a sacred circle. Each member had the opportunity to share his or her experiences, thoughts, and feelings without anyone commenting. In that time and space, I felt safe and loved. The loving interchange happened after the meeting. Some members referred to it as "the meeting after the meeting." We would exchange hugs and talk. My recovery changed, for the better, as a result of attending these meetings.
Over time, I came to see the value of not having any crosstalk during a meeting. When I choose not to crosstalk at a meeting, I believe I am offering love and attention to other members. I don't believe I am ignoring their comments. If there is something I want to share with someone, I do it once the meeting has closed.
By Barb O., Illinois
For me, crosstalk rules are needed and are a form of boundaries. That being said, it does not imply that these rules need be considered strict and laid in cement. After all, the first part of the Fourth Tradition states each group should be autonomous. Perhaps it behooves the group to understand that guidelines for their individual group as well as regular business meetings can be the very thing that offsets the attitude of an unloving interchange.
It is only understandable that a newcomer will have many questions and has not yet put in the time to attend meetings, read literature, get a Sponsor, or use a phone list. During such times when it becomes obvious that a newcomer is loaded with questions, it is the group conscience that can direct such questions to wait until after the meeting or perhaps your group allows for explanations at a beginner's meeting. Every newcomer who receives a newcomer packet and reads it will have most of their questions answered. The key here is that it be stated in a kind, but accurate, manner.
All of us once were newcomers and we share that wonder expressed in their questions. However, that does not mean the group itself should be distracted from the very reason for the meeting—sharing.
By Laura R., California
I've seen members acknowledge the newcomer and offer a few words of understanding and hope at the beginning of the member's turn to share. I can feel the loving interchange in the room when this happens. Personally, I've never been attracted to someone who crosstalked. I've been attracted to the collective wisdom and safe structure of the group meetings.

By Annie, Maryland

Talk to Each Other

The opinions expressed here are strictly those of the person who gave them and do not necessarily reflect the views of *The Forum*.

• Giving newcomers free pamphlets and showing them the literature available for purchase
• Giving away CAL to newcomers after asking whether they wish to have it
• Attending at least one recovery get-together a week, where longtime members and newcomers can sit down and ask any questions they have about Al-Anon

Sharing is not about immediately answering questions from the newcomer or longtimers on the spot during the meeting. It's not about making sure that other people's feelings are responded to and taken care of right away, in public and it's not about solving other people's confusion or discomfort immediately, in front of the group.

Sharing is about sharing our own personal struggles with the effects of alcoholism, our own personal recovery principles and triumphs, and our own feelings and pain. We don't share about other people's difficulties, pain, or confusion; we don't speculate about other people's solutions and triumphs. We let other people tell their own story and we tell ours.

When we crosstalk, we directly address someone else's sharing, someone else's pain, or someone else's confusion. If I were to crosstalk, I feel that I would be meddling and disrespecting the other members because I have not asked whether they want my experience. And the worst part is I'm disrespecting them in public, in front of a whole group of people.

I once directly crosstalked in my sharing about a young woman because I felt her pain and confusion, and I thought my experience, strength, and hope expressed directly to her would be just the thing to help her. I felt that if it had helped me, it would help her too, right?

After the meeting, she came up to me and told me that she had not requested my comments at all, that they had hurt her terribly. She asked me to share about myself, my life, and my recovery and not crosstalk again. I have tried to fulfill that request ever since. So far, it has worked well for me and my recovery.

By Andrew L., Florida

Growing up with alcoholism, I strove to disappear in my home. I believed that the best thing I could do was to go unnoticed because drawing attention to me meant being criticized and blamed. I also felt that I was not worth much; when I spoke, I was often interrupted or my ideas discarded. I learned to survive by keeping quiet.

When I came into Al-Anon, I was relieved to be in a place where I was free to express myself. I never knew of a place where everyone was given respect and equality of being listened to without interruption or criticism. I was given respectful attention when I spoke. It allowed me to feel accepted. These traits, along with the tradition of anonymity, allowed me to express what was in my mind and heart.

The writer of "Crosstalk—or loving interchange?" suggests: "we have two choices: a small meeting of longtime members, strictly enforcing the 'rules' against 'crosstalk;' or a meeting where loving interchange is the practice…" But I believe this is all or nothing thinking. If the "rules" for crosstalk are so strictly enforced that there is no flexibility, then I see potential for damage by these group guidelines. I have repeatedly witnessed the crosstalk guidelines being used with flexibility and love.

Guidelines for crosstalk that I have experienced do not include "rules" about sharing on a topic that has been brought up by a member in the meeting. Often a member will share on a topic that will spark relation in another member. I have often shared how topics that have been brought up by another member in the meeting relate to my life. It becomes extremely important to practice keeping the focus on ourselves in these types of situations.

I think a crosstalk statement at the beginning of a meeting could be an effective tool for loving interchange. It can add to the loving interchange in the meeting by communicating the need to omit advice-giving, lecturing, and talking out of turn while also providing open, honest communication and a loving atmosphere in which the newcomer is free to share what is in his/her mind and heart.

By Chloe E., Illinois

The September 2007 *Forum*, pages 26-27, puts forward the suggestion that we don't give advice in Al-Anon. That is something I hear frequently at meetings. However, I turn to page 221 in *One Day at a Time in Al-Anon* (B-6) and I find the following:
"We hear it said that Al-Anon members do not give each other advice. This refers specifically to the kind of advice that suggests taking drastic action to bring about a radical change in a marriage relationship. This we do not—and must not—do. In other ways, we in Al-Anon give a great deal of advice. We suggest looking into ourselves for the causes of our problems; we advise dependence on God's guidance. We recommend lots of Al-Anon reading, the study of the Twelve Steps and the slogans. We suggest spiritual ways to find a new perspective and new strength, and we share our personal experience in applying them."
If we don't give this advice, we are not passing on what has been freely given to us and if we don't give it away, we can't keep it.
By Martha D., Ontario
Listening was not on my priority list when I first came to Al-Anon. At home growing up, listening was just about all I could do so I just tuned it out most of the time. But as time passed, I realized that I could listen when given a chance.
At the meetings I go to, it is suggested that we do not speak out of turn. This is being courteous. We take turns sharing on the subject. This gives us the opportunity to listen to what others have to say. Before and after the meetings we have loving interchange among members and newcomers.
By Vickie C.
The first time I found the rooms of Al-Anon, it was a life-saver. I learned many wonderful new ways to deal with my daughter's alcoholism. However, the crosstalk and well-intentioned "loving interchanges" gave a feeling and atmosphere to the meetings of unprofessional therapy sessions. Some members took it upon themselves to give advice and "tell" others what they should or should not do.
The second time I found the rooms of Al-Anon I was hopeless and angry, but this time no one gave advice or "loving interchanges." I went to a meeting every day for over three months. I mostly listened. I could never quite explain it, but I always felt better after each meeting. I came to re-learn—only this time on my own, not someone "telling" me what I needed to do to find recovery.
By Luci M., Connecticut
I don't believe crosstalking is practicing a "loving interchange of help among members." I practice a loving interchange by:
• Personally greeting members as they enter the room and after the meeting
• Offering refreshments when available
• Serving as a temporary and a permanent Sponsor
• Writing my experience, strength, and hope in essays and submitting them to *The Forum*
• Volunteering for service positions that keep the group functioning well
• Running recovery workshops at conventions

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on the meeting, members in attendance, and/or the topic, there were times I would either refrain from talking or choose my words very carefully. The focus was not on me. It was on what others would think about what I said.
Then I went to different meetings. Even if the group was large, they didn't split up and there was no crosstalk. To me, these meetings were like a sacred circle. Each member had the opportunity to share his or her experiences, thoughts, and feelings without anyone commenting. In that time and space, I felt safe and loved. The loving interchange happened after the meeting. Some members referred to it as "the meeting after the meeting." We would exchange hugs and talk. My recovery changed, for the better, as a result of attending these meetings.
Over time, I came to see the value of not having any crosstalk during a meeting. When I choose not to crosstalk at a meeting, I believe I am offering love and attention to other members. I don't believe I am ignoring their comments. If there is something I want to share with someone, I do it once the meeting has closed.
By Barb O., Illinois

For me, crosstalk rules are needed and are a form of boundaries. That being said, it does not imply that these rules need be considered strict and laid in cement. After all, the first part of the Fourth Tradition states each group should be autonomous. Perhaps it behooves the group to understand that guidelines for their individual group as well as regular business meetings can be the very thing that offsets the attitude of an unloving interchange.

It is only understandable that a newcomer will have many questions and has not yet put in the time to attend meetings, read literature, get a Sponsor, or use a phone list. During such times when it becomes obvious that a newcomer is loaded with questions, it is the group conscience that can direct such questions to wait until after the meeting or perhaps your group allows for explanations at a beginner's meeting. Every newcomer who receives a newcomer packet and reads it will have most of their questions answered. The key here is that it be stated in a kind, but accurate, manner.

All of us once were newcomers and we share that wonder expressed in their questions. However, that does not mean the group itself should be distracted from the very reason for the meeting—sharing.

By Laura R., California

I've seen members acknowledge the newcomer and offer a few words of understanding and hope at the beginning of the member's turn to share. I can feel the loving interchange in the room when this happens. Personally, I've never been attracted to someone who crosstalked. I've been attracted to the collective wisdom and safe structure of the group meetings.

By Annie, Maryland

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I have experienced strict adherence to no crosstalk on telephone meetings. I have maintained the strong boundaries (though when I'm on mute, the boundary is already in place). I believe it is so we don't fall into rescuing or enabling and so that we stay detached and on-track. Yet, there is little loving interchange over the phone. What I gain from my phone meetings is a chance to listen and learn different thinking and to express myself, my pain, or my progress. There is some comfort in that and I leave it at that.

For the most part, I have not crosstalked at face-to-face meetings because I realize that it's important to listen to others with respect. I can make mistakes of course—I'm only human—and that is okay. I have laughed at comments and smiled, sometimes teared up, even cried, over a tragic situation, and after the meeting have offered hugs, feedback, *The Forum*, CAL, or my phone number. This, I believe, is the loving interchange in action.

I have experienced crosstalk in face-to-face meetings more times than I can recall. I've been interrupted while sharing. I realized that those people wanted to draw attention to themselves. Sometimes I have spoken up, other times I have not. Once, I told the member it was crosstalk and continued sharing. Another time I ignored the member. I haven't had any problems since. I just worked my program, and went from anger to acceptance and from standing up for myself to letting it go.

We have a right to speak without being interrupted or given advice. We have been affected by the disease of alcoholism and we need boundaries to keep us safe. But we are not running the show. We are learning and practicing turning it over to let God run our meetings and our recovery. God, expressed by our group conscience, can see the whole picture and has the lesson plan. So, please, respond and help express this group conscience.

If crosstalk rules are so rigid that the meeting seems cold, uncaring, or uninvolved, who would want to come back? Conversely, if there is over-involvement this would be unhealthy and disrespectful. It is about exercising discernment. Perhaps balance, and not extremes, is the key.

By Jill, Illinois

"Crosstalk—or loving interchange?" made me cry for the people so desperately needing help. When I was a newcomer, people, trying to be helpful, said things such as:

- "Counseling doesn't work. Just 'Keep Coming Back. '"
- "Depression can be cured if you work your program hard enough."
- "You shouldn't be taking medication."
- "You don't belong in Al-Anon if you think your loved one is a drug addict."

We, as groups, started to realize that what we were saying was not loving or wise. We are not doctors or counselors. We are a group of people helping each other through our own experience, strength, and hope.

Today we know that Al-Anon works, and that some people need outside help. Also, we find that most people who come to Al-Anon, for whatever reason, realize after a while that there are alcoholics affecting their lives.

In my home group, we give the newcomer a warm welcome. We practice no crosstalk as we understand it, and we respect each other. In sitting quietly and letting people share, we listen and absorb each person's opinions and feelings. We don't tell people that they can't speak up or ask questions. People have shared that Al-Anon is the only place they have ever been where everyone allowed them to speak and not try to interrupt.

The meeting always has a topic to discuss, but we adapt the topic or at least consider the newcomer in our sharings. We offer one-on-one meetings for anyone who needs them. We ask newcomers to stay after the meeting and someone always takes the time to share with them. We give them our names and phone numbers.

I have grown and changed through Al-Anon, learning to keep an open mind while keeping to the principles of the program. Al-Anon has grown and changed, too, but it continues to work for those who work it, newcomers and longtimers alike.

By Mary K., Kansas

My experience with crosstalk is that groups have different ways of defining it. Interrupting, giving advice, responding to another's sharing by name, or having a side conversation are ways I have heard it described. What is discouraged in one meeting as crosstalk may be acceptable in another. Since our meetings are autonomous, this is in line with our principles.

I never heard of crosstalk before coming to Al-Anon. Some groups I have attended have provided a definition and others have not. I notice that newcomers are sometimes confused by this word, but if we have done our job, greeting them before the meeting, inviting them to coffee after the meeting, and asking if they have any questions about Al-Anon, the newcomers usually come to understand the norms of the group.

Al-Anon has taught me to stop interrupting people. I learned this because my home group allowed everyone to have a chance to share without being interrupted or receiving comments. I had spent years feeling that no one ever heard what I

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discuss their problems. It is my observation, at least in my district, that there are not enough newcomer meetings available where freedom to ask questions exists. However, one of the reasons I kept coming back was because no one *would* answer me directly and most of all they didn't tell me what I should do.

By Deanna C., Nebraska

I think crosstalk is a subject to which our Fourth Tradition applies: "Each group should be autonomous, except in matters affecting another group of Al-Anon or AA as a whole."

I hear Martha's frustration over occasions when a member's deep personal concerns were deferred in her group until after the meeting and would not want any guidance that required her group to adhere to a no crosstalk rule in those occasions. However, I believe that, for the groups I attend, a no crosstalk rule has been very beneficial. I would not want to discourage groups from having such a local practice either.

The "loving interchange" that we all wish to encourage is not limited to exchanges during the meetings. It includes all occasions for loving interchange among members, including immediately after meetings, at dinner before meetings, over coffee after meetings, on the phone, in a Sponsor relationship, and any other occasion where loving interchange is possible.

The following passage from CAL also encourages loving interchange during meetings: "Let us remember that our First Tradition says, 'Our common welfare should come first.' If one member monopolizes the time and attention of the group, the meeting is not serving others. Someone's helpful message may be lost. We must consider the welfare of the entire group." We read this at the beginning of every discussion, along with the sentence that includes crosstalk among gossip, dominance, and other subjects from which our group conscience requests that we refrain.

Our group conscience is that crosstalk does more to enable one member to monopolize the time and attention of the group than to encourage loving interchange among members. I would hate to see any group adopt guidance that discourages a group from adhering to our approach to loving interchange among members.

By Tom A., North Carolina

I am blessed with belonging to a strong and healthy home group. We follow the "no crosstalk" policy and it serves us well. It is not unusual for newcomers to be unaware of this policy even if they are present at the beginning of the meeting when these things are explained. Likewise, they don't often realize that at our meeting we share in turn around the room and don't get to speak again until everyone has had a turn. Newcomers come because they are in pain and crisis. They don't always listen. I know this because I was once a newcomer myself. But listening is what Al-Anon is about for me. It is not about responding. In fact, to respond to a newcomer's panic and crisis might not give him/her anything new. If I have a chance to speak I can empathize and share a related experience if I choose. But if it is not my turn and others share only whatever is going on for them at the moment, I do not feel that is inappropriate.

I have no way of knowing if the newcomer will hear something in another's sharing that he/she relates to. Perhaps by not reacting to his/her current needs, we are actually helping her to look at things in a new way. Maybe she will leave feeling her situation is not an emergency; maybe she will start to "Think" before talking only about the alcoholic; maybe she will start to want the smile and serenity she sees in others at the meeting.

Also, I have no way of knowing how much the member who has "only" shared what was going on for him really needed the time he/she got to be heard today.

I do know how much I have changed my behavior outside of meetings as a result of "no crosstalk." Now when my husband and I talk, I can actually keep my mind off my response and take in what he is saying.

When I listen to him, I notice that he's often saying what I need to hear and not what I'm preparing to defend against.
How rare it is to be listened to in today's world; even less so for those growing up with or living with the family disease of alcoholism…listened to in silence—no feedback, no response, no crosstalk—only love and acceptance. Maybe loving interchange can happen without discussion, answered questions, or dialogue; maybe it happens between our hearts.
By Peggy S., Maine
Although Al-Anon has no opinion on this issue, I came across an article on crosstalk written by F.M.M. in the June 1995 *Forum*, which I kept because it gave a great definition of crosstalk.
The definition was: "formulated at a workshop at the 1991 World Service Conference: 'Crosstalk occurs when one member monopolizes the meeting with one-to-one responses to another member (advice-giving). This includes the chairperson who feels the need to comment on each sharing (coming off as an expert). Other definitions include not using "I" statements, side conversations, and mini-meetings within a meeting. Most members agree these types of sharings are not in keeping with Al-Anon principles.'"
By T.A.G.

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Editor's Note: In 2004, the following two questions were raised and answered about crosstalk in the "Ask-It-Basket" feature of the Conference Summary:

15. How do we define "crosstalk"? How can we deal with "crosstalk" without becoming rigid or controlling? Does the WSO have an official stand on crosstalk? How is crosstalk defined? *It is within the autonomy of the group to define crosstalk. The World Service Office has no official stand on this practice. Reviewing the group's definition during the group's periodic inventory will help the group members maintain flexibility.*

16. What is the difference between loving interchange and crosstalk? *A group, at its business or inventory meeting, could determine its own group conscience as to the amount of interchange appropriate for the meeting. The size of the group, the length of the meeting, and the group's desire to hear from everyone in attendance are all factors for the group to consider. Reading and study of the "Three Obstacles to Success in Al-Anon" in* Alcoholism, the Family Disease *(P-4) and* The Twelve Steps and Traditions *(P-17) may help.*

Privacy Statement

Below is from page 16 of the 1992 World Service Conference Summary

OPEN DISCUSSION

The open discussion session afforded Conference members the opportunity to discuss those topics uppermost in their minds. Three topics receiving the highest number of votes were discussed on the floor of the Conference, and the remaining issues were sent to workshops with a reportback to the members.

The first issue centered around property ownership by Al-Anon. Members' opinions contrasted on the potential violation of Traditions should property be owned in the name of Al-Anon Family Groups. Personal and Area-wide expressions of concern and support were shared by the WSC members. In addition to the Traditions, members were encouraged to focus attention on the Concepts, which delegate authority to the Conference and the Board as trusted servants. Further discussion evolved around cost factors associated with ownership versus lease or rental of property. Members felt that much thought and soul-searching is needed before any decision is made. It was agreed that this issue would be resolved using the strength and love of the Al-Anon program and ultimately through a group conscience, under the guidance of our Higher Power.

Co-dependent issues were a topic for open discussion. One member shared a feeling of gratitude for being able to depend on the Al-Anon fellowship. Sponsorship was overwhelmingly encouraged as the key to ensuring that the program does not become diluted and to avoid confusion for the newcomer. Beginners meetings were suggested as a means for listening to new members and giving them the opportunity to "get it all out." Workshops on professional terminology are a helpful means of keeping new "buzzwords" from being brought into Al-Anon meetings. Meetings that stick to the Steps and Traditions are less likely to allow outside language. It was agreed that each Al-Anon member need not "take it personally" in order to keep Al-Anon, Al-Anon but should keep the focus on ourselves, work the program and set a positive example.

The final topic for open discussion was cross talking. Several members shared their definition of the term, which sparked varied and insightful discussion. Suggestions included: conduct workshops as a way of addressing issues that need the resources of a group; avoid giving power to a word; exchange cross talk for loving interchange; explain the purpose of the meeting in the opening; be a positive example for the newcomer; encourage the chairperson to keep the meeting in order, remove the words "cross talk" from meetings; eliminate articles, stories and talk on the subject; be understanding to the newcomer; work on having good Al-Anon meetings—they have a natural rhythm; if you can't call your group "the best," go out and find another one; be flexible with newcomers, gently explain the program and then move on. Members were confident that by keeping the focus on our primary purpose—to help the families and friends of alcoholics—problems would be overcome. Thanks were extended to all participants for not "cross talking during the session!"

Additional topics discussed in workshop sessions were: responsibilities of trusted servants and the Right of Decision; how to avoid racism; reaching out to minorities (race, sexual orientation, religion); dual members holding office; encouraging members to stay in Al-Anon and getting involved in service; the program needs of younger Alateen members; WSO finances, and group autonomy.