

Understanding Autonomy

“Each group should be autonomous, except in matters affecting other groups, or N.A. as a whole.”

Our Fourth Tradition is probably one of the most misinterpreted spiritual principles in our Fellowship. Very simply, it means just what it says: groups are autonomous. Groups may design their meetings to meet the special needs of the members. Groups attract newcomers to N.A. in their own special way, as long as our unity is not compromised.

My home group has only one meeting a week. We fulfill our group responsibility for sponsoring the newcomer by suggesting meetings for them to attend on other nights of the week. We suggest groups meetings that carry an unconfused message of recovery from addiction, meetings where members express their identity as addicts, and share recovery maintained through the N.A. Program at N.A. meetings. Autonomy is not anarchy. We feel that we are not free to suggest anything but N.A. recovery in our N.A. meeting. To do so would be to affect other groups and N.A. as a whole.

Only groups are autonomous. Service boards and committees exist to serve N.A. groups and members, and are directly responsible to them. Projects undertaken by these service boards and committees as well as all of their actions affect many groups and N.A. as a whole. They are not autonomous, but directly responsible to our loving ultimate authority expressed through our autonomous groups. The misperception of service board and committee autonomy has at times put our common welfare in jeopardy. As we grow and mature as a Fellowship, the importance of unity through the expression of group conscience in our service boards and committees affects more lives. We need to protect our group autonomy by reminding our service committees and boards that they are directly responsible to those they serve; the groups and are not autonomous.