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CD702: Working With People

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On February 22, 2023, I had the opportunity to join an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting through Zoom. The meeting was held at 6:45AM. On Online Intergroup of Alcoholics Anonymous (OIAA), the meeting was titled "Attitude Adjustment Meeting" and described that it was to find inspiration to start the day fresh. The meeting was held for about an hour and fifteen minutes and about 30 people were present. Through this essay, I will report on my experience of participating in an online AA meeting and detail how people seeked and found help. Finally, I will reflect on my experience to learn how the Christian Church may find learning opportunities to serve the people of God better.

Upon entering the Zoom meeting, I was greeted by the leader. To be honest, I was surprised to see that people were not all that kind. In fact, most were honest and blunt with their words. At first, this felt quite awkward and threatening as I did not know what to expect as a newcomer. The session began with reading from a book called *As Bill Sees It* by Bill W. who I learned is a co-founder of AA. We read an excerpt from page 90 called "To Watch Loneliness Vanish" where the author honestly discusses the feeling of loneliness that alcoholics feel and how they can watch it vanish through their newfound friendships at AA. After the reading, the forum was open for each person to share their reflections for 3 minutes each.

From the very first person sharing, I learned a few things about AA meetings. First, everyone introduced themselves as an alcoholic. Having heard it for the first time, I realized that

I was a bit confused and shook at the same time. It was unusual to see and hear people be so honest with each other. I realized that everyone knew AA to be a safe place and casting judgment upon each other was not allowed nor desired. People shared honestly about what they felt. Some raised their voices while others cried. Everyone was given space to be themselves and process their thoughts. In such a place, I was amazed at how everyone began freely sharing about their experience. Personally, I expected people to be hesitant to talk about the topic of loneliness as it could be quite difficult and traumatizing. However, when I saw that everyone began chiming in, I quickly realized that the members in the call felt respected, heard, and understood. Clearly, people were not present just to be present, they showed up because they wanted to change and grow. They showed up because they were honored and cared for.

Another thing that stood out to me was how people did not feel the need to explain away their difficulties. They shared about their difficulties, temptations, and mistakes without fear of shame. Everyone, from the moment they spoke, acknowledged that they were an alcoholic and spoke with the understanding that they were nowhere close to being perfect. This leveled out the playing field; no one was better or less than the other. There were those who have been sober for multiple years, those who started a few months ago, and even those who failed just the other day. I was astonishing to see that, wherever they found themselves in, people were willing to show up and be there for one another.

Finally, as the group spoke about their experiences with loneliness, they also shared their experience about finding new friends through AA. It turns out, many people came to AA desperate and lonely. They felt that they were broken, hurtful, and did not belong anywhere in the world. They carried shame and guilt and had no opportunity to find freedom from it. What they found at AA was that they were not alone in the matter. There was one specific person who

shared that he in fact met and married his wife through an AA meeting. People at the AA were tightly connected, especially those who have been part of the meeting for some time. They all shared a sense of belonging as they spoke about the day's topic and relating to the Twelve-Step Program of AA. Many mentioned step four, "Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves" while talking about loneliness. As all members of the AA meeting were dedicated to these steps (and step 4 clearly indicating 'self-awareness') they created a group that had a bond beyond any relationship they could possibly find outside with those who had no knowledge of AA.

I believe the Christian Church can learn several things by observing an AA meeting. First, AA meetings display the power of honesty. Even though everyone was coming together from all over the world and backgrounds of life, people felt connected to each other. Each member was genuine and spoke from their heart. There were no 'church rules, traditions, clothes'...etc that people were worried about. No hurdles to jump over. People were invited to be honest and, clearly, everyone felt safe to do so. Second, members of an AA meeting recognized their brokenness and did not fret over it. Although imperfect, they did their best to counteract shame and guilt by admitting their imperfections. This was clearly evident in their honesty and effective towards growth. Lastly, AA meetings create a safe environment where the members can create genuine relationships. It was incredible to see how members of the meeting were so tightly knit with each other. From what I can observe, people attend from all backgrounds (financially, ethnically, regionally, religiously…etc) and are friends with each other. I was even astounded at how diverse the group was. I hope and pray that the church can partner or even attend AA meetings to learn from each other.