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Working With People
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VISIT TO AA MEETING

On February 13, 2023, I attended an AA meeting at Trinity Presbyterian Church, 422 West 57th Street, New York, N.Y. 10019. The meeting started at 12:30 p.m and ended at 1:30 p.m. There were about fifty (50) people in attendance. This was a well organized meeting. At the beginning of the meeting the facilitator greeted the people and then introduced herself. She welcomed anyone who was there for the first time, then she started to talk about her experience as an alcoholic. What surprised me the most was how open she was about her life. She talked about coming from a family of alcoholics, having an abusive alcoholic husband and attracting men with bad habits. She also shared how her life took a spiral downhill turn as her addiction got worse. She mentioned struggling to get out of bed in the morning. She said that her alcohol addiction turned to anger and depression. She stated that after attending an AA meeting and meeting people who were struggling like her, she felt like she was able to kick her alcohol habit. She mentioned that it has been five years since she has been sober.

When the facilitator was finished, a young man took over. He started talking about the twelve principles. He said the first journey to recovery is remembering the acronym HOW. Honest, Open and Willing. He also talked about Hope, Surrender, Courage, Integrity, Humility, Love, Responsibility, Discipline and Awareness. What I liked is as he was talking, he pointed to the twelve steps that were on a plaque on the wall, which was there as a reminder to everyone. While he was talking about these twelve steps, I began thinking that these were some steps to help them to try to find their spirituality and to get to know more about themselves. He spoke a

great deal about hope and what that looks like for an alcoholic. What I observed is he did not mention God but he emphasized on putting their hope in a higher power. He stressed on staying committed to their goals and taking personal inventory from day to day. He also commended the recovering alcoholics who were there on their achievement. I appreciated how transparent those who had recovered were, about what it takes to stay sober. They mentioned that it was not an easy road but they were getting through it one day at a time.

In the next session, the facilitator opened the floor for those people in the group to talk. They raised their hands and one at a time began to speak. I admired how they admitted that they were an alcoholic. What I heard from most of them is the frustration of being an alcoholic. They expressed their disgust of not being able to take control of their lives. Angry, lonely and tired were the words that they used to describe their frustration. Some of them spoke about being a disappointment to their families. I also heard one person saying that it is difficult to live with himself. At this point, I realized that they were all hoping for a better life. They were expecting changes and the way they go about it is by supporting each other. I noticed that their motto was each one help one. No one was in this alone. When one person spoke, the rest of the group showed their support to that person. They were encouraging each other to keep up the fight. Looking at their faces I saw the joy of being able to speak freely. They were happy to share their struggles knowing that no one was going to judge them. I saw the benefits of being in a group with like minded people. The meeting had a constant flow and it was all aimed at getting the people to feel better about themselves.

Towards the end of the meeting, the facilitator addressed the group again. She summarized all that was spoken by the group, then she continued encouraging them. She reminded them of their

goals and how they were going to achieve it. She also talked about setbacks and how it might affect their thinking. She told them about the resources they have, should they need to talk to someone. She closed the meeting by saying to them we are not bad people, we are people who are seeking to recover what we have lost and that is our self worth.

I was moved by this meeting and I believe that the church can learn so much from the way the people in the group conducted themselves. The level of honesty that was displayed at the meeting is something that is lacking in the churches today. People who go to church do not feel like they could be open and honest with other members for fear of being judged. No one was judging anyone at that meeting. They supported and encouraged each other, and I believe that this is something that is missing in the community that is called the church. I also looked at how they brought new people into the group. In my opinion they follow the pattern of discipleship. From my observation, I saw that they do not keep what they have learnt from the group to themselves, they go out and tell other alcoholics and bring them to the meeting. This is what the church was commissioned to do, to go out and make disciples. I also noticed that they enter the meeting with a strong level of commitment. Even though they did not call the name of God or Jesus, they have a strong hope and belief in a higher power. I believe that the church can benefit from the twelve steps that they follow. These twelve steps help to bring transformation to the alcoholics and it can do the same for the church.

The AA meeting is a place where the alcoholic can come and talk about their struggles and find ways to feel better about themselves. They support each other in that long journey to recovery. Those who recover become a beacon to those who are fighting their addiction. The church should be there to support them. When an alcoholic leaves the AA meeting and comes to

the church, they should feel as though they are welcome and not being judged. The church should be the place where they can be transformed by the renewing of their minds. If they do not have Jesus in their lives, they will not know who they are.

