

# Alternate clinical experience: a.a. meeting essay

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The meeting I attended took place at 8 pm Sunday night at Holy Name Church in Pompton Plains. It was an open meeting and held in the basement of the church.

Upon entering I was introduced, greeted warmly and was offered coffee and cake. To my surprise, I ran into two members that I knew in the past. There were 16 attendees excluding me and another student.

Among the attendees there were fourteen males and only two females with their ages being approximately forty to sixty five. Before the meeting began the main speaker offered me more cake and coffee. He did so as more a way to segway into explaining the night's theme as being a celebration. The meeting was of celebration of members anniversaries for not only being AA members but that of being sober. The speaker then offered a prayer to begin the meeting. He then introduced himself, the secretary and the treasurer with each announcing that " I am an alcoholic" after their name.

He read the twelve steps that are the guiding principals of the program, and followed with the accompanying twelve traditions. Although the twelve step program is the guideline by which each A. A. roup follows, the speaker said the primary purpose is to stay sober and to help each other stay sober threw their fellowship.

Essentially there are no fees associated with joining the group, it is self supporting through mostly member donations and fund raisers. Although they claim they are not affiliated with any sect, denomination, political party or any institution, they prayed and all but one thanked God for their strength and guidance in helping them through the process. The speaker then asked

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the celebrating members which were four in total, to come up and speak about their trials and tribulations of alcoholism. They were to be given a commemorative coin embossed with their years of sobriety as a reminder.

Interestingly enough, three of the four celebrants asked a fellow member to speak on their behalf. The first to speak as a guest speaker explained of how he originally did not believe in the program, and believed he can defeat his "demons" on his own. It was not until his wife left him and he started thinking he was really doing nothing positive as a father of two children, a husband, brother or son that he realized he needed help. He reached out to friend who was himself a recovering alcoholic and a member of the local A. A. group. His friend is the person that sponsored him and also asked him to speak on his behalf. He spoke of his changes within himself since being sober for a year and on half.

He was proud of his "new high" that comes from helping new members and speaking at functions and proud to belong to this community of friends that come from all walks of life. He openly admitted that although he enjoys seeing the love and the compassion that the others enjoy through their connection to God, he is "not quite there yet with the God thing! The other three speakers all spoke of similar stories of their daily struggles to stay sober. They told of how they lied to others and lied to themselves, that there was no problem with having a drink or two. How they lost jobs, family and friends trust and companionship. They also spoke of how this support group, and the support of the members within the group for each other is what and how each one of them maintains a semblance of normal life without reaching for a bottle. It became clear to me that every member in the group has told

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their story and has listened to everybody's story more than one time. It was not really about telling a new story but to keep reminding themselves of where they once were and why they are here today. I think it was also for reminding each one of them that although they come from different homes and different walks of life that there is a commonality to each and every persons story in that room.

I believe that is the reason the meetings are a success, that each person is different but they are the same. The reasons these meetings work are that nobody understands their issues better than those that has been through the same addiction, and that they share that special bond together.