

CHURCH OF A DIFFERENT SORT

By Pastor Timothy Green

I was eating at IHOP last week, and whenever we were finished eating and the waiter brought my ticket, I asked him where he went to church. He got quiet, acted nervous and said, "At my house." When I acted surprised, he told me that he lived in a halfway house for Alcoholics and that "they" didn't get out much. I invited him and all of his roommates to our church and told him that we would be more than happy to have them.

This conversation reminded me of an article that I wrote years ago and one alcoholic who said, "AA has replaced the church in my life. AA has no theology to speak of. You rarely hear about Christ. The group borrows the sociology of the church, along with a few of the words and concepts, but they have no under-lying doctrine. I'm trying to survive and AA helps me in that struggle far better than any local church."

Chances are if you were to speak to an alcoholic about the church, you would hear stories about rejection, judgment, and being put on a guilt trip. Most local churches are the last place they would stand up and say, "Hi, I'm Tom. I'm an alcoholic and a drug addict."

Tom was asked to name the one quality missing in the local church that AA had somehow provided. After staring at his cup of coffee for a long time, he said softly this one word; dependency.

"None of us can make it on our own – isn't that why Jesus came?" he explained. "Yet most church people give off a self-satisfied air of piety or superiority. I don't sense them consciously leaning on God or each other. Their lives appear to be in order. An alcoholic who goes to church feels inferior and incomplete." He sat in silence for a while, until a smile began to crease his face. "It's a funny thing," he said at last. "What I hate most about myself, my alcoholism, was the one thing God used to bring me back to him. Because of it, I know I can't survive without him. Maybe that's the redeeming value of alcoholics. Maybe God is calling us alcoholics to teach the saints what it means to be dependent on him and on his community on earth."

Ouch!

God wants us to be a church where the lost, hurting, depressed, frustrated and confused, can find love, acceptance, forgiveness, help and hope.

God help us to be the kind of church that our world needs us to be. A church where people like Tom, can find people like Jesus.