



Archdiocese of Newark
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Program

DEACON NEWS

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ALCOHOLISM

First of a Two-Part Series

Alcoholism is one of the most disastrous illnesses in America today. In fatality it is officially listed as Number 3, ranking next to heart disease and cancer. In terms of human misery it easily ranks as Number 1, for the illness brings agony and suffering not only to the patient himself but also to all who share his life, whether in family, in work associations, or in the community in which he lives.

In recent years, alcoholism has rightly been labeled an illness which is treatable and arrestable, though not curable. As in all illnesses, treatment in early stages always produces quicker results. However, unlike most other illnesses, the patient is generally the last to recognize his condition and his need for help. This is true because the illness, though undoubtedly physical in a pathological sense, is primarily mental and spiritual. As such, it shows itself in personality disorders and behavioral patterns which, in the early and middle stages, are unrecognizable to the patient himself. Most often, those associated with the alcoholic are aware of it long before the alcoholic himself realizes that his thinking is not normal, his behavior is irresponsible and his spiritual life is on the verge of bankruptcy.

If made aware of his behavior by well meaning members of his family or friends, the alcoholic generally becomes extremely indignant or resentful while secretly resolving to watch his drinking. But unaware that the use of alcohol is but a symptom of the real illness, his periods of self-imposed sobriety become short-lived and in increasingly lesser frequency. He is unaware of the fact that he is an alcoholic, not because he drinks but because he has to drink.

Consequently, until such time as he is helped to an understanding of himself and learns the "why" of his drinking, he will continue in a downward ever-tightening spiral of self-destruction. Dreadful as the fact of

unrehabilitated alcoholism is, God has again, as in so many baffling and destructive diseases, given the answer to successful treatment. It is in the program of Alcoholics Anonymous which today is the only known generally successful treatment of alcoholism.

In 1935 an alcoholic with several months' sobriety met with a still suffering alcoholic to attempt to get him to accept and follow the program of sobriety which had helped the first man to rehabilitation. This turned out to be a session which is now regarded as the first A.A. meeting. The two men discussed the "why" of their drinking. Through this and future sharing of insights with other alcoholics, a program of rehabilitation was gradually developed.

Membership in A.A. requires only an honest desire and sincerity to stop drinking and, upon this honest desire and sincerity in following the program, success in rehabilitation can be achieved. This success can be measured by the worldwide spread of the program and the hundreds of thousands of alcoholics who have been helped back to useful and happy living. Though A.A. is non-denominational, it is definitely a way of spiritual life, stressing God-dependency. The alcoholic is aware of his many sincere but futile efforts to sobriety and is helped by the program to a realistic approach to God to restore himself to sanity and sanctity.

The twelve steps of the A.A. program are designed to treat the mental and spiritual disorders associated with alcoholism. It is a continuing program of therapy which, if followed faithfully as a way of life, brings about a total revision of mental and spiritual outlook. The following are the twelve steps of recovery:

1. We admit that we were powerless over alcohol...that our lives have become unmanageable.
2. We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. We made a decision to turn our will and our lives to the care of God as we