

## TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH



The Men's Step Meeting started sometime in 1985 because there were people in the area that wanted a Friday night meeting that started earlier than 7:30 p.m. Early members in this meeting were Otis A. and Larry B.

This meeting originated in the 12 & 12 Club and was moved multiple times. This meeting had been held at Trinity Episcopal Church years ago during the different moves, and ultimately ended up back there. Initially there were two meetings for this group; Wednesday's format was an open discussion meeting and Friday evening meetings encompassed topic, Tradition, Step and also Grapevine meetings. Eventually the Wednesday meeting was dropped, and the Friday night meeting became exclusively a Step meeting. Over the years the attendance has varied, but this group remains strong with committed members.



## A (Personal) History of the Friday Night Men's Step Meeting

by Larry B.

I had been out of rehab for a week when I found the Friday Night Men's Step Meeting on the District 48 meeting card and decided to pay a visit. I was just starting a self-imposed ninety-and-ninety, and the Men's Meeting looked good. Since it met at six o'clock on Fridays, I got it into my head that it was a white-collar, business and professional men's meeting, kind of like a men's club, when doctors and lawyers and stockbrokers spent Friday's cocktail hour. It was just the place for an English teacher, I told myself.

I couldn't have been more wrong—about the clientele of the meeting, I mean. As it turned out, the Friday Night Men's Step Meeting was just exactly the place for me. It just didn't look much like an exclusive men's club.

The meeting was fairly new in August of 1986, I guess (I really don't know when it started, exactly), and met on the second floor of the now defunct Twelve and Twelve Club on West Fourth Street. When I climbed the narrow stairs to the hot meeting room, I met the regulars: Otis A., Fred B., Kenny S., and a Latino guy named Raoul (I think). No businessmen there. I don't think anyone had a real job, the dress code ran to wife-beater undershirts and Goodwill shorts, and we all sweated—a lot—in the late summer heat as we poured over tattered Step books that were damp with humidity.

No one had much time in A.A. then, and we didn't observe the niceties about giving jobs in the group to people with this or that much sobriety. I chaired the meeting after a month, I think, because all the other jobs were taken and my thirty days were a lot of time then. Raoul—if that really was his name—disappeared one week with the treasury: all of a dollar and some change. Eddie W., who joined the group later, used to say that the Seventh Tradition collection we took up wasn't enough to get one of us drunk, but it was enough to keep all of us sober. That was certainly true in those days. We paid the Club rent and we also paid for the coffee we drank, so we never had more than pocket change in our treasury.

The Twelve and Twelve Club was in its usual turmoil, and at some point (in 1987?) the meeting moved to what was then the Bethune-Douglass Community Center on Walnut Street. It was the community center of the town's black community, and we were a mostly white group, but we were welcomed, even if the caretakers at the building sometimes forgot to let us in. On one snowy night, when no one in his right mind was out and about, we were locked out and had our meeting in a sandwich shop, reading the Steps and Traditions from cards that we carried in our wallets and trying to remember the exact format for the meeting. (Even then Otis could recite 'How It Works,' so we were all right there.)



We moved on, eventually, to Trinity Episcopal Church on West Fourth Street, meeting in an airy first-floor Sunday School room where the church held its church suppers. Those were the days when the town was supposed to be a recovery 'Mecca,' and the so-called 'recovery houses' all around town were filling up with what came to be known as the 'influx' of recovery seekers from New York and Philadelphia. Those were tumultuous times, with city commissions studying the recovery 'problem' and newspaper headlines about the 'influx,' and the Men's Step Meeting was right in the thick of it. Trinity Church was close to lots of recovery houses, and the meeting grew from its original half-dozen or so to—sometimes—twenty or thirty, all as green as they could be. Tom J., Eddie W., Mike G., Tom S., John S., Roy W., Gary W., and many other joined the group in those days of expansion.

About this time, we adopted the custom of reading a Tradition on the third Friday of the month and having a *Grapevine* meeting on fifth Fridays. It was in those days, too, when a gay biker chick and her girlfriend showed up for a meeting. A newcomer—new to town and to A.A.—told her that it was a men's meeting and she and her friend weren't welcome. She flexed her tattooed muscles under her leather vest and told him that she was twice the man he was. She and her friend stayed, and we had a perfect example of the Third Tradition—'The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.'

We really lived that Tradition in those days, and we changed from a pretty much white group to a pretty much black group, with Muslims like Mike J. and other African-Americans like another Larry, Warren, Don D., and Carl and Leo D. bringing their messages of hope to the meeting. Later, they'd be joined—or replaced by other men like Lowell, George, and a lot of Abduls and Hakims.

For some reason, we left Trinity Church for a while and moved to a black church on Hepburn Street, where we also expanded to two meetings a week—an open discussion meeting on Wednesdays and our regular Step meeting on Fridays. The discussion meeting was a hour, the Step meeting an hour and a half, with a smoke break in the middle. Sometimes there would be sixty guys crowded into the damp basement meeting room, some just coming into A.A., some on their way out, and a few who were solid as rocks. For years, our coffee and supplies had been 'borrowed' by other groups, and the custom was for the coffee person to haul all of our stuff around in his car—although at least one coffee person, stronger and braver than the rest, lugged it all with him as he travelled on foot. It was that kind of meeting.

We eventually moved back to Trinity Church (for reasons as obscure as the reasons why we left) and into the second floor gymnasium that was freezing in the winter and sweltering in the summer. Sometimes, locked out of the church because the custodian forgot about us, we held our meetings in Way's Gardens

across the street.

Along the way, we dropped the Wednesday meeting, cut our Friday meeting back to an hour (with no smoke break!), and saw our membership dwindle back to a dozen at most. We moved out of the attic gym and down into a pretty elegant basement-Sunday school room (where we meet now). Old timers drifted away and new members like Bill B., Chuck W. and Todd S. arrived to keep the group strong.

We like to think that we're a pretty informal group. Otis A. has been our treasurer for years and we have a GSR, but that's about it. Whoever shows up early makes the coffee, someone volunteers (or is 'volunteered') to be the chairperson, and someone else does the secretary's job. We read the week's Step (or Tradition), we talk about it, and then all head off into our weekends strengthened and refreshed. We really do keep it simple, and we've been passing it on for at least fifteen years.



6/10/21

This is to provide an update to the Men's Meeting and the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic. The last information was provided over 20 years ago, so this will also serve as an overall update to the meeting.

All was well from an AA standpoint, we are fully self-supporting, attendance was normal (low albeit consistent), format has not changed, and still at Trinity Episcopal Church on Fourth Street. Then, the Covid-19 pandemic came in March 2020 and the meeting, like so many others, was shut down as a result of the church closing.

By late May/early June, very few in-person meetings were taking place. The homegroup members of the Men's Step Meeting decided to restart the meeting at a different location (location to be unnamed). With the spread of the news of an in-person meeting, a second Friday evening group that was also still shut down joined up. The meeting was held at 6, format continued to be a 12 & 12 discussion, and dinner was provided. The attendance was rather large and the camaraderie was great! There wasn't a cloud on the horizon. We were part of life again!

Moving into late July, the other group's location had reopened and attendance fell off but was still strong. In the fall of 2020, Trinity reopened with guidelines, but the group decided to stay put until the state mandates & requirements lifted more. Everything was going along just fine moving into 2021, the holidays passed the snow was melting and the world around us was reopening. The question became, do we go back to Trinity? With the Traditions in place, a meeting was held to discuss moving back to the church that for so many years had welcomed us and kept us sober. Plus, the location on the meeting card was still listed as Trinity Episcopal Church. If a newcomer is looking for a meeting, don't we have a responsibility to be there for them? From that discussion, it was decided that the meeting would move back to the church, although the meeting held offsite would continue as well.

March 2021, we moved back to our old home located on the third floor of Trinity Church. The same atmosphere is still in place as the history states. We have monthly volunteer commitments for chairperson and secretary. The meeting is informal, and it is not uncommon to turn conversational. Most importantly, we are again able to be found by the alcoholic who still suffers. However, Nicole is still not allowed to come!

As for the unnamed location group, each group is autonomous.

Brett C.