

The Casserole Bite

A Newsletter from Faith Partners Nebraska

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Why Can't Church Be More Like An AA Meeting?

and Other Questions Christians Ask about Recovery” by Stephen R. Haynes, Professor of Religious Studies at Rhodes College.

It's a dilemma. On Saturday night Stephen Haynes goes to a 12-Step meeting (Recovering Couples Anonymous) in a church basement, where he feels the Holy Spirit's healing and loving presence. On Sunday he goes upstairs to church and finds “fine clothes, polished smiles and careful choreography.” So, he sets out to explore the difference and to find a way to bring that fresh and healing spirit of 12-Step recovery into church.

Haynes explores the Christian roots of AA, the Oxford Group that both founders of AA, Bill Wilson and Bob Smith, had earlier embraced. And he explains why they parted ways. He looks at churches' responses to the 12-Step phenomenon — reject, adapt or embrace. He acknowledges the feminization of AA, focusing on forgiveness, acceptance and the healing power of love.

He touches on the recovery revolution where the 12 steps stretched its arms to wrap around dozens of other addictions, reached out to cover the broad issue of codependency and joined hands with the therapeutic community. The book will fascinate those in 12-Step recovery who know its simplicity, where struggle is the common ground and honesty the common language.

Haynes talks the languages of theology and recovery. He has found a few recovery churches, where people come together in humility, brokenness and honesty combining the liturgy and language of the 12 steps with their Christian faith. But primarily he offers a look at AA's intersection with American and Christian culture over the decades.

Thanks to Nancy Hicks-Rose for this review.