

Can you imagine walking from Hilo to Kailua-Kona, by way of Waimea? More than 90 miles. It might take four or five days. That's how far it is from Nazareth where Joseph and Mary lived to Bethlehem where they were required to go to register to pay taxes to Caesar. Ninety miles! On foot. Perhaps Mary rode on a donkey, but that couldn't have been very comfortable. She was pregnant, nearly at full term.

So they hoped for a room to be waiting for them in Bethlehem after being on the road for five days. Dusty, tired, maybe hungry and feeling exhausted, a private room to call their own would be like heaven. But there was no room... They tried, they looked, they asked everywhere... but in the end, there was no room.

Except for a stable – filled with animals, chickens, goats, sheep, donkeys, maybe a camel. It was a room without much privacy, and filled with the aroma and sounds of animals. It was just a room, ordinary, simple and maybe even a bit dirty.

But in that room, a miracle happened. God entered the world as a baby whose name would be Jesus. The baby born in that stable room would change world history and transform countless lives. It was just a room, but oh the miracles that happened because of that room.

There have been other rooms, quite ordinary and plain, but in those rooms lives were transformed and the history of the world was changed. How many rooms has God used to change the world.

There was the “no room” Inn at Christmas ... that sent Joseph and Mary to the stable.

There was the room where the little girl lay dying, until Jesus came in and took her hand.

There was the room where a disabled man was lowered by his four friends to be healed by Jesus

There was the “upper room” where Jesus gathered his friends for the last time.

There was the “locked room” where they hid in fear because Jesus had been crucified but then

Appeared in their midst.

Did you know that our church also has Miracle Rooms? The rooms we maintain, pay the utilities for, paint and furnish and clean... these rooms are also rooms in which God has performed miracles – and still performs miracles every week.

“Do you know how many lives have been changed in this room?” the woman asked. I was in the SS room unpacking the new chairs and tables purchased by the church as part of the renovation for that space. She had led one of the Narcotics Anonymous groups that meet in our church for twenty two years. She began to share some of the stories of the people whose lives had been changed over the years through the meetings that were held in that room. As I listened, my heart was touched and I felt a deep conviction that others needed to hear what I was hearing. I asked if she would be willing to share some of the stories with our congregation. Here are some of the stories she shared with me...

“After College I had a beautiful life and career as a Photo Editor at a major Magazine when I married the man of my dreams. He turned out to be a violent abuser and broke my jaw, fractured my eye socket and broke both my legs. It was 6 years of killing the pain before my total desperation allowed me to crawl away and get help back home here in Hawaii. It's not a story I tell my co workers but it is a story I have shared with many many women in abusive relationships. Our weakness and failings become our strengths.

It is hard for me to write about the little room at FUPC without a big lump in my throat and tears of gratitude coming to my eyes. For the past twenty-two years I have been helping to open the NA meeting in your Church SS rooms and during that time I'd estimate I've seen over two thousand individuals seeking help for Addiction come to our meetings. Some people come and never return and others come and return years later to try again, often in much more dire circumstances, and others come and stay. I can't ever predict who that may be but I want anyone

to have a chance. When people stay and give the program a try, I see lives change. Not just the life of the individual but change for the better in their families, and in our community. This is thanks to your trust and generosity.

Many lives have been saved and I have witnessed many miracles as people's lives are transformed by recovery. Here are just a few examples out of the countless stories I have witnessed.

-I have seen a young Desert Storm Veteran with his hoodie pulled over his face, heavily traumatized, addicted, and antisocial, become a community honored Counselor himself and marry his sweet heart and become a dedicated Father of two beautiful children.

-I have seen a Prostitute who had 38 prior arrests, whom the local Police had just given up on, become the Director of a Women and Children's Shelter.

-I have seen a 3 time Prison sentenced Drug Dealer go on to work for the State as a "Mentor" for at risk Youth and create an annual Surf Event for children in our community.

-I have seen a homemaker - a seemingly happily married Mother of 4 - who was terrified she was putting her children's lives in danger regularly driving while intoxicated and unable to stop using, surrender her fear of exposure and find recovery in the safety of this anonymous program. I also saw this same woman go back to college and earn a degree and graduate with her 3rd eldest child from UH!

-I have seen a Nurse and a Doctor who lost their licenses due to drug addiction recover and practice medicine again, opening a meeting for others in their profession.

-I have seen hundreds of men and women be reunited with their children who were taken from them, able to provide a healthy home and stop the cycle of abuse.

-I have seen a girl who was a chronic addict and juvenile delinquent from a "broken home" become a Lawyer for Children's Justice.

-I have seen a former athlete that couldn't stop using drugs get clean and become a Little League Coach and open a Fitness Center and become a Church leader.

-I have seen a young Mother and Father bring their 5 day old child up to the meeting from the Hospital to get a "celebratory cake" for the young Mother's 5th Anniversary clean.

-I have seen a Judge and a Lawyer with tears in their eyes give a cake to a former Inmate who had appeared in Court so many times they couldn't count, for 10 years clean and sober, now a respected Restaurant owner and (prominent Community Service Club) member.

-I have seen children hug the parents returned to them by a life that was clean and parents hug the children they knew they had surely lost to drug addiction.

-I have seen people walk in that room looking as if they were on death's door and I have seen them restored to health; mental, physical, and spiritual. The light comes back into their eyes and old dreams awaken. They arrive living behind a marginal existence and begin to live the life story god meant for them to. This has come from your trust and generosity.

Since 1987 here in Hilo we were meeting in pavilions or covered picnic tables often in the rain and dark of Wailoa Park or at the beach. In 1993 we took a chance and asked First United Protestant Church if we could hold meetings on a few week nights in your rear classrooms and gratefully, you said yes. There are many hundreds of individuals in our community who came to their first NA meeting at your Church who remain clean today and are living a new way of life. To be in the sunlight of the spirit is truly to be alive and we can feel the love of a Higher Power and live a life with health and dignity. We are so grateful to you all for your trust and generosity for those suffering who may find us in the evening meetings and for those of us who dedicate our own lives to service so that we also may continue to live clean and carry the message to the still suffering addict. No one need ever live the degradation and dereliction of a life of addiction. The ends are always the same: jails, institutions, or death. There is hope for a different way of life and addicts can recover thanks to the Program of Narcotics Anonymous and to your compassion and faith in allowing us to hold meetings at your facility."

That's just one program that meets one night of the week. There are two other NA meetings, one on Monday and another on Tuesday night and they reach a different group of people. And twice every week, on Wednesday and Friday nights, the families and loved ones of people who live with the disease of addiction gather in Al Anon meetings for mutual support and education/training in how to live with their loved ones who have substance addictions. They also have stories to tell of how the Al Anon meetings helped them to cope with all the destructive and demeaning results of addiction in their families and with their loved ones. These groups have easily touched several thousand individuals since the early 1990's when they began to meet here.

Name after name, men and women who had come seeking help, freedom, deliverance, victory, sanity, a sense of control and hope and tools for getting through each day... these people count on us being here. The room we provide is an anchor in a stormy passage, a safe haven in a threatening world, a place of peace in a chaotic noisy world.

But there are others who use that room. It is our Sunday School Room. That whole wing of the church was designed to accommodate a growing number of children and young people. How many children and youth of our church do you think have used those rooms since they were built? I would venture a guess that the numbers of children are well into the hundreds and maybe even a thousand or more.

It was there that they learned the names and stories that are rooted in our memories throughout our lives. Adam & Eve, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Daniel, King David, King Solomon, Ruth, the disciples of Jesus and Paul, Mary and Martha. In those rooms they learned the stories of our faith, and what it means to be a Christian. They formed beliefs and values that have shaped their lives and grounded them on a foundation of integrity, honesty, self-respect, generosity, regard for their neighbors, humility, faith in God and love deeper than emotion. Teachers and parents have worked together in those rooms to pass our faith along to the next generation. Now, we have a preschool in two of those rooms. And with the one room we have available to use for everything else, we want to honor our children and make them a priority. So we're trying to make it kid-friendly, a happy space that is inviting and warm and that reflects their vision and imaginations. It's a work in progress and we're gradually learning to listen to what our kids would like to have that room look like and feel like. Its just a room, but what profound miracles, learnings, and relationships are formed and grow because God is in that room.

I could go on and talk about Kindermusik, a program that reaches out to the preschoolers in our community and introduces them to music and how it is an important and fun part of our humanity. Twice each week, children and their parents come and spend time with Roni Koscik in that room... and leave feeling happy that there is such a program and such a place as that where their child can begin to sing.

Kamehameha Preschool has 33 students this year with six teachers and each month I meet with them at least once, sometimes twice to talk about God and our faith. The children have parents and grandparents, sisters and brothers... and on Friday they had a Christmas program here in our sanctuary. The parking lot was jammed with cars. Do the math. Through the rooms that we provide, our church has touched hundreds of families through the years that they've been here.

Charlotte Moss said, "An empty room is a story waiting to be told and we are the author." Those rooms represent the face of our mission in the community. We don't donate a lot of money to mission projects or support a missionary in another country. Our budget doesn't even have a category called Mission. But we do have rooms, and its through those rooms that we are fulfilling our mission in the community. So whatever we do to make those rooms inviting and useable is really an investment in our mission as a church.

Its just a room. But when God enters a room, everything changes. A room blessed by God and filled with Spirit's presence is a place of miracles. It becomes Sacred Space, a Holy Place. We just pay the utility bills, refurbish and paint it from time to time... and God does the rest. God uses rooms... and we have the privilege and responsibility of providing important rooms every day of the week to our children, neighbors, friends and family members who rely on us to make those rooms available... a lifeline to education, learning about our faith, transforming ugliness to beauty, finding sanity, embracing freedom, finding healing and discovering hope. Its just a room. Amen.