

The first meeting of the Ocala Group was held in 1945 at the First Methodist Church on Fort King and Main Street. Its location then changed to the Charter Springs Hospital. That hospital requested us to make it a NO SMOKING meeting or move-so like good little alcoholics, we moved. Our next location was to a small church in a strip mall on North Magnolia. For 2-3 years, we met there and moved again to the Unity Church on NE 14th St.

After 3 more years we were asked to relocate. We were not sure where we'd go next, when one member, a new pastor Dan Jones, told us we'd be welcome at St. Mark's Methodist Church on 8th Avenue. To this day, we still meet in the little brick parsonage of this church.

In the early days, we only had one meeting/week. Ocala group was a mixture of men and women, and would often have to travel to 2 other new groups that formed in Ocala, the Grace Group, and Serenity Group. Many would attend all 3 meetings in one week to hold on to this precious gift of sobriety.

Anniversary night was held the last week of the month, and still is today. For a long while, you could find the celebration in the rec hall behind St. Mark's church-many folk attended, and there was always food and a speaker prior to the presentation of medallions. Our anniversary nights have gone from large potluck dinners, to a sheet cake, and at one time Italian ices were available. Now we're back to hamburgers and hot dogs on the grill and sides brought by guests. Anyone who wishes to celebrate their anniversary with us is welcome-just write your name and years of sobriety on the kitchen posterboard, and we'd love to give you your medallion!!

The membership of Ocala group has waxed and waned over the years. At one time, the main meeting group overflow was taken back to 2 smaller rooms in the parsonage to hold a separate meeting. At present, the main meeting room porch doors are open to accommodate our attendees. We entertain a mixture of men and women, newcomers, old timers, and out of town folk in our 13 meetings/week.

Ocala group holds annual holiday Alcahons over Christmas and New Years. The meetings begin at 5:30 eve of the holiday, and are every 2 hours through the night until 12:00 Noon of the holiday. Dinner and breakfast are served along with donations of desserts, and side dishes. This function provides a great way to spend holiday times whether in gratitude with other AA's or a respite from family. Holidays can sometimes be difficult and slippery. When darkness comes, we build a bonfire to stay warm which allows us to gather and visit outside.

This year Ocala group is celebrating its 75th anniversary. We are having a big birthday party on Saturday July 3rd in front of St. Mark's from 12 Noon to 7:00 PM. There will be music, speaker meetings, raffles, and a pig roast. Tickets will go on sale soon, only \$5.00. Please come and celebrate the 75 years of the Ocala Group-we love to SHARE!!!

History of Ocala Group rough draft 5/6/2021

Notes taken from Preacher James and his accounting of the history.

People to call that might have more information:

1. Chuck Henderson
2. Jim Kitchen
3. Judy Lins 352-804-3488
4. Bonnie Heath 352-362-8544
5. Sherry Riley 352-812-9045

The Ocala Group was first at the 1st Methodist Church in 1946 Fort King and Main Street.

Ocala group was at the First Presbyterian Church in 1980 and then it moved to the Charter Springs Hospital

Charter Spring Hospital was a psych hospital for alcoholics 28 day treatment plan ended up not doing too well financially. It was bought by Donald Disney who was a CEO of Health care company and thought that it might be a good investment. It was named after a famous race horse "Tinbroke." They were having AA meetings there and the director of the facility was very active in helping with the meetings, when he passed away the meetings started to shift and change. The meetings at that time were smoking meetings and they were asked to not smoke or move the meeting, and they decided to move the meeting it to a Strip Mall on North Magnolia into a small church there. They were there for 2-3 years. They then moved to NE 14th now known at Bonnie Heath Blvd, to the Unity Church there. After 3 years they were asked to move to a new location. Dan Jones who was new to Ocala and the pastor of St. Marks invited them to his church to have meetings there and that was the beginning of the Ocala Group at St. Marks in and around 1996. This has remained their location to the present.