

health & wellbeing

FAITH



MATTERS

BY THE REV.
CHRISTINE LESLIE

Because my own soul is too full of pain and rage to write sensibly in response to Matthew Shepard's brutal beating and consequent death, I am passing this along to you. I found it comforting and a source of hope in the midst of the darkness that surrounds me during this year's annual observance of National Coming Out Day. The slogan so many of us have worn for so long, "Silence = Death" has never been more true. Matthew's murder is a raw reminder of this as are the Chaplain's thoughts that follow:

"I saw on the news today that Matthew Shepard died. He was the 22 year old man from Wyoming who was beaten and tortured and left to die for no reason other than he was a homosexual. This tragic murder has raised a national debate again, the kind of periodic soul-searching our society goes through whenever a crime of hate startles us into awareness. The burning of Black churches, the bombing of

Faith Matters & Silence Matters

innocent people, the death of a shy young man from Wyoming: these events suddenly shake us out of complacency and remind us that fear, prejudice and rage are always the shadows just beyond the light of our reason. And so people suddenly start to speak out. There are voices of outrage and grief. Voices of sorrow and demands to know why such a thing could happen.

And predictably, there are also defensive voices: the Governor of Wyoming trying to explain why his state has no laws to protect people from hate crimes and the leadership of what is called the Christian "right wing" trying to explain why their national ads against homosexuality don't influence people to commit such violence against gays and lesbians. In the days to come, these many voices will fill our media and the cultural consciousness it imprints until we are once again lulled into the more familiar patterns of our lives, dozing off as a nation until the next tragedy rings the alarm of despair.

As the chaplain for our own community, I would like to invite us all to consider Matthew's death in another way. Not through the

clamor or denials, not through the shouts or cries of anger: but rather, through the silence of his death, the silence of that young man hanging on his cross of pain alone in the emptiness of a Wyoming night, the silence that ultimately killed him as surely as the beatings he endured.

Silence killed Matthew Shepard. The silence of Christians (and Jews) who know that our scriptures on homosexuality are few and murky in interpretation and far outweighed by the words of a [teacher] whose only comment on human relationships was to call us to never judge but only to love. The silence of well meaning, educated people who pretend to have an enlightened view of homosexuality while quietly tolerating the abuse of gays and lesbians in their own communities. The silence of our elected officials who have the authority to make changes but prefer to count votes. The silence of the majority of "straight" Americans who shift uncomfortably when confronted by the thought that gays and lesbians may be no different from themselves, save for the fact that they are walking targets for bigotry, disrespect, cheap humor, and apparently,

of murder.

Crimes of hate may live in shouts of rage, but they are born in silence. Here at Trinity, I hope we will all listen to that silence. Before we jump to decry Matthew's senseless death or before we seek to rationalize it with loud disclaimers: I hope we will just hear the silence. A young man's heart has ceased to beat. Hear the silence of that awful truth. It is the silence of death. It is the silence that descends on us like a shroud.

At Trinity, as in Wyoming, we are men and women surrounded by the silence of our own fear. Our fear of those who are different. Our fear of being identified with the scapegoat. Our fear of taking an unpopular position for the sake of those who can not stand alone. Our fear of social and religious change. Our fear comes in many forms but it always comes silently. A whispered joke. A glance to look away from the truth. A quick shake of the head to deny any complicity in the pain of others.

These silent acts of our own fear of homosexuality are acted out on this campus every day just as they are acted out every day in Wyoming. Through silence, we give ourselves permission to practice what we pretend to abhor. With silence, we condemn scores of our neighbors to live in the shadows of hate. In silence, we observe the suffering of any group of people who have been declared expendable by our society.

As a person of faith, I will listen,

as we all will, to the many voices which will eulogize Matthew Shepard. I will carry that part of our national shame on my shoulders. But I will also listen to the silence which speaks much more eloquently still to the truth behind his death. I will listen and I will remember. And I will renew my resolve never to allow this silence to have the last word. Not for Matthew. Not for gay men or lesbian women. Not for any person in our society of any color or condition who has been singled out for persecution. Not in my church. Not in my nation. Not in Wyoming. And not at Trinity College."

I thank this chaplain for the courage and resolve stated here. I am grateful for the expression of support. May we all be as moved to give up our collusion with the silences in our lives that equal death. Perhaps if we do, Matthew Shepard's death will not have been utterly in vain. ▼

Rev. Christine Leslie, the first openly ordained lesbian in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), is founder and director of Triangle Ministries, a Center for Lesbian & Gay Spirituality near Burlington, VT. She is available for individual and couple counseling, commitment services, grief counseling, workshops and retreats. She specializes in the integration of sexual-identity with spiritual development. Call 802-860-7106 or email revcsl@aol.com. Visit Triangle Ministries' web site at <http://members.aol.com/revcsl>.

the healthsource

HEALTH

- ALANA Health Care Organization**
POB 957 • 179 S. Winsoski St.
Burlington VT 05401 •
864-2631/864-2632
- Dawnland Center (Native American)**
POB 1358 Barre St. • Montpelier VT
05601 • 229-0601
- Lesbian Cancer Support group**
660-8386
- Men's Health Project**
POB 5248 • Elmwood Ave.
Burlington VT 05401 • 863-2437
(800) 649-2437
- North Star Holistic Health Care**
RR2 Box 3255 • Morrisville VT
05661 • 888-2858
- Tribal Remedies**
(ALANA Community Organization)
8 Williston • Brattleboro VT 05301 •
254-2972
- Twin State Women's Network**
POB 3 • Cavendish VT 05142-0003
• 226-7807 • Margoc@mail.tds.net •
<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~hivnet/orgs/twsn1.html>
- VT Dept. of Health,
Office of Minority Health**
108 Cherry St. • POB 70 •
Burlington VT 05402 • 863-7273
- Vermont Women's Health Center**
336 North Ave • Burlington VT
05401 • 863-1386
- Alcoholics Anonymous**
Burlington, 658-4221 • POB 5653,
Burlington VT 05402
* Sundays, 5pm, Christ Church
Presbyterian, Redstone Camp.,
UVM.
* Thursdays, 7pm, St. Paul's
Cathedral, Cherry Street, 658-4221.
Concord, NH 603-357-4300
* Wednesdays, 7:30pm, First
Congregational Church, North Main
and Washington St.
* Saturdays at 7pm (call for location).
Hanover, NH
* Thursdays at 6:30pm, Dartmouth
Hitchcock Medical Center.
Women only.
Keene, NH (603) 357-4300

- * Saturdays, 7-8:30pm Call for location.
Manchester, NH
* Sundays, 7:30pm, UU Church, 669
Union St.
Nashua, NH
- Mondays, 7:30pm, Nashua
Unitarian Church.

HIV/AIDS SERVICES

- Hotlines**
Vermont (800) 882-2437
NH (800) 752-2437
NY State (800) 541-2437
MA (617) 522-4090
ME (800) 851-2437
National: (800) 342-2437
National TTY: (800) 243-7889
Teen Hotline: (800) 234-TEEN
- Addison County AIDS Network (ACAN)**
Maureen 863-2437
- AIDS Community Awareness Project (ACAP)**
POB 608 • St. Johnsbury VT 05819
• 748-1149
- AIDS Community Resource Network (ACoRN)**
POB 2057 • Lebanon NH 03766 •
(603) 448-2220/(800)816-2220 •
acorn@valley.net
- AIDS Services for the Monadnock Region**
(800) 639-7903
*Coffee Clatch meets Tuesdays from
1-2:30pm at 25 Roxbury St, Keene
- AIDS Services of Southwestern VT**
108 Union Street #3 • Bennington
05201 • Alice Mazur 447-8007
*Support group for persons infected and
affected by the HIV virus
1st and 3rd Tuesdays, 7pm
- Bennington Area AIDS Project**
POB 1066 • Bennington VT 05201 •
442-4481 or (800) 845-2437
- Brattleboro Area AIDS Project**
POB 1486 • 67 Main St., 4th fl. •
Brattleboro VT 05302 • 254-8263 or
254-4444 • sbell@sover.net
*Support group for PLWA, friends,
and families. Wednesdays 1-2pm
*Support/discussion group for gay/bi
men. 2nd and 4th Sundays 3-5pm

- *Support group for HIV+ Women
Greenfield MA.,
*Mondays, 3:30-5:30pm.
Call (413) 773-8888.
- Comprehensive Care Clinics**
Hotline: (800) 763-2460
Brattleboro: 257-8860
Burlington: 656-4594
Rutland: 747-1831
St. Johnsbury: 748-7361
- Franklin County AIDS Network**
Cricket 863-2437
- National Assoc. for People with AIDS**
(202) 898-0414
- NHVT HIV Information Network on WWW**
<http://WWW.dartmouth.edu/~hivnet/>
- Rutland County AIDS Network**
Mary Kathryn 775-5884
- Vermont CARES**
Vermont.CARES@Gte.net
POB 5248 • Burlington VT 05402 •
863-2437 or (800) 649-2437
PO Box 6033 • Rutland, VT 05601 •
775-5884
PO Box 275 • Montpelier VT 05601 •
229-4560
PO Box 503 • St. Johnsbury VT
05819 • 748-9061
*Support groups for people living with
HIV/AIDS in:
- Washington County,
Melanie 229-4560
- Rutland County,
Mary Kathryn 775-5884
- Burlington,
Michael 863-2437
- Vermont Deaf AIDS Project**
POB 172 • Brattleboro VT 05302 •
(800) 257-1123/ (TTY)
(800) 253-0195/ fax 257-2013
- VT Dept. of Health AIDS Program**
108 Cherry St. • POB 70 •
Burlington 05402 • 863-7245
- Vermont People With AIDS Coalition**
POB 11 • Montpelier, VT 05601 •
229-5754 or (800) 69VTPWA •
vtpwac@sover.net
<http://www.sover.net/~vtpwac/>
- Washington County AIDS Network**
Melanie at 229-4560

Designated HIV Provider, Anonymous Counseling, & Testing Sites in Vermont

- BARRE-MONTPELIER**
Berlin Health Center
371-4342
RD #4, Box 1370
Montpelier, VT 05602
- BENNINGTON**
Bennington Family Practice Assoc.
447-1191
140 Hospital Drive
Bennington, VT 05201
- BRATTLEBORO**
Comprehensive Care Clinic
257-8860
Brattleboro Memorial Hospital
9 Belmont Avenue
Brattleboro, VT 05301
- BURLINGTON**
Community Health Center
864-6309
617 Riverside Ave., Suite 200
Burlington, VT 05401
- COLCHESTER**
Family Health
655-2055
311 Malletts Bay Avenue
PO. Box 35
Colchester, VT 05446
- DANVILLE**
Health Center, Inc.
684-2275
Box 185, Hill Street
Danville, VT 05828
- HARDWICK**
Health Center
472-3300
High Street, PO. Box 535
Hardwick, VT 05843
- ISLAND POND**
Health Center
723-4300
Middle Street
Island Pond, Vt. 05846
- MIDDLEBURY**
Open Door Clinic
388-0137
PO Box 95
Middlebury, VT 05753
- NEWPORT**
Northeast Kingdom Health Center
334-5008
30 Coventry Street
Newport, VT 05855
- PUTNEY**
Thomas Hoskins, M.D.
387-5581
Main St., P.O. Box 247
Putney, VT 05346
- RUTLAND**
Comprehensive Care Clinic
Rutland Regional Medical Center
747-1831
- ST. ALBANS**
Robert Zelazo, M.D.
524-9553
2 Crest Road
St. Albans, VT 05478
- ST. JOHNSBURY**
Comprehensive Care Clinic
748-7476
Northeast Vermont Regional
Hospital
Hospital Drive
St. Johnsbury, VT 05819
- WINDSOR**
Leahy Hitchcock Clinic
674-2193