

FAITH



MATTERS

Faith Matters & Community Matters

BY REV. CHRISTINE LESLIE

array of healthy, self-loving GLBT people in safe and supportive ways. Seeing ourselves in the mirror of others like us can mean the difference between silent, self-loathing desperation and joyful, self-loving celebration.

Think about it: religious folks have churches, mosques, and synagogues in which to find each other. Athletes have teams to play

by the creativity of the organizers and the program they presented as well as the food and socializing the evening made possible. I look forward to the day when we will be able to hold such a dinner in our own home.

Until that day comes, we will continue to create opportunities to commune with the help of allied spiritual communities all

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on. Singers and musicians have chorales and bands they can join. Recovering folks have AA and NA to attend. Hikers and bikers have clubs to tour with. Scholars have universities and colleges to study in. Where do GLBT folks go to commune openly on any kind of regular basis? Since Pride Day occurs only once a year, and bars meet only a sliver of our need for community, having a GLBT-identified community center as an entry point into the tribe seems like a really good idea, one I wholeheartedly support. It is my hope and prayer that that the RU12? Community Center could be just such a place of our own.

We have come a long way since the Stonewall Rebellion, which took place 30 years ago this month. I rejoice that we now have numerous GLBT-identified newspapers, bookstores, magazines, resorts, and youth and cultural organizations such as Outright VT and the Samadhi Singers in our area, helping us navigate the internal and external waters of homophobia. I will be even more glad when we have a community center that serves as entry point, home to a variety of programs and activities, and spring-board to life in the wider community without shame and fear.

My faith in the worthiness of our communing was strengthened by the RU12? Community Center dinner in March. I was fed

over the state.

In Burlington, Christ Church Presbyterian, a "More Light" congregation, provides The Samadhi Singers, with rehearsal space free of charge. I am very proud of the fact that St. Paul's Episcopal Church is sponsoring The Samadhi Singers' First Annual Gay Pride Month Concert, a benefit for Outright VT. We hope hundreds will commune with us on June 6.

The more community matters to us, the more faith — in ourselves as GLBT people and The One who made each of us — can matter. Such events as this and those planned for Pride Day help us grow in our understanding, acceptance, and support of who we are. They also help us keep learning that we do matter, in spite of the implicitly and explicitly homophobic messages we are bombarded with every day of our lives. And mattering to ourselves, each other, and The One who made us is what makes GLBT community meaningful and our lives ultimately worth living. ▼

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As many of us are already aware, a group of people have been organizing a GLBT community center in the Burlington area. The group's clever use of "RU12?" in marketing of the concept and naming the center has been effective and sometimes funny. (It has tickled me that RU12? had some of us wondering why on earth we would name a GLBT community center after a round four-foot-tall robot from the Star Wars trilogy.)

The dinner these folks organized at the Radisson Hotel in March was elegant and fun. It gave us a glimpse of what it might be like to have a gathering place that could be our community's home, in which all kinds of programs and activities might be housed and offered. Attending this dinner also got me thinking about our natural hunger for community and just how important communing with other GLBT people in safe and supportive settings is to our health and well being.

Due to the permeating presence of homophobia in our world, GLBT people have few systems or structures that help us recognize our sexual orientation without fear and frustration, and then embrace and internalize who we are in healthy, loving ways. We also have few systems and structures in place to help straight people become allies so they can come out of their closets of fear, ignorance, and silence to stand with us when and where it counts.

Many GLBT people come out and work to embrace and internalize their sexual orientation through trial and error. Some survive this process intact; some don't, only to live sad and lonely lives. Experience has shown me that many come out and live quiet lives of desperation and isolation until they commune with a wide

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