

FAITH



MATTERS

# Faith Matters & Coming-Out Matters

BY THE REV.  
CHRISTINE LESLIE

I began my coming-out journey in the summer of 1969, between my junior and senior year of high school.

At the time, I had no names or explanations for what I was feeling when I fell in love with another girl I met at a summer program for "gifted" Georgia teenagers. This eight-week program provided us an opportunity to test-drive going to college. I left home a naïve girl, who had dabbled in things sexual with two different boys, and returned an awakening young woman filled with confusing longings I didn't know were possible, let alone know how to talk about or manage.

What made it really difficult to cope was my folks' decision to vacation as a family after I came home from the program. I didn't want to get on an airplane and go to the West Coast for three weeks; all I wanted to do was stay home and wait for Terry to call and ask me to do something with her. I simply didn't know I

was in love with her. Once we were on the West Coast I was cranky and crabby; I just couldn't explain what was going on for me to myself, much less to them.

When I think about the start of my coming-out process, I ache for us all.

All of this made my senior year of high school a mixed bag of shining, public accomplishments darkened by my private, inexplicable loneliness, confusion, and desperation. I even had a nightmare that kept repeating that year: I was inside a coffin with a window over my face. I could see out so I knew I was not dead. However, I was unable to speak, so I had no way of yelling for help. I can still feel the terrible constriction in my throat from that dream to this day.

My parents were so proud of me when I was accepted to the University of Cincinnati's College Conservatory of Music on scholarship in the spring of 1970. I never told them I had applied there only because Terry had applied to UC's ballet program. When Terry wasn't accepted I was devastated.

I just didn't have the courage to tell my folks I didn't want to go to Cincinnati if Terry wasn't going, too, especially since my mother had confronted me one night that spring when I was begging for the car so I could go see Terry.

Mom was trying to tell me she just didn't understand what was going on with me when she blurted out, "You treat Terry like a boy treats a girl friend." I froze inside. I knew what she was saying was true, and that it was something not pleasing to her. I could tell from her anxious voice that she knew something I didn't, and was afraid to tell me for fear she might be right.

I didn't protest what she had said. In fact, I sat in silence with an explanation for what was happening to me. I wasn't thrilled but I was relieved. From that point on at least I had an inkling of what I was dealing with, even though I had never heard the word "lesbian."

During my first two years of college, I spent a great deal of time and energy trying to figure out what to do with the information my mother gave me that

night in the car. When I fell in love with Lori and became lovers with her in the spring of 1972, I finally understood. I had come home to myself, and if it meant I was a lesbian, then so be it. Little did I know at that time it would

be today. Coming out and coming to terms with being lesbian was hard enough as it was. Had I had to grapple with a damning and hateful God, I probably would have been dead by now. Coming out and coming to terms with our

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take me 21 years to come to terms with being lesbian.

Although successful in my professional life, I struggled for from failed relationship to failed relationship until, in the summer of 1993, I finally realized I had to stop asking someone else to love me more than I loved myself if I was ever to be happy personally. So I went to work on why I didn't love myself — and was that hard work! Once I could embrace all of me, including being lesbian, with love, gratitude, and delight, I could devote myself to being out about who I am, wherever I go, to whomever I am with. It's also made it possible for me to be happily married to Martha Dyson these six years, with many more to come!

My parents may not have been able to help me when I was coming out, but they had raised me with a positive and loving understanding of God. Had they not, I just can't imagine where I might

sexual orientation is the process of internalizing the truth that from love we are made and for love we are meant, "no matter what our plumbing is," as my dad likes to say.

Coming out will matter as much as it does until the day no one has anything to come out about. What I would give to see that day while still on this side of eternity!

In the meantime, I will continue to support and encourage those in the coming-out process with a faithfulness that matters as much as the process itself, because from love we were made and for love we are all meant. ▼

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