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FAITH MATTERS
by the reverend christine leslie



Faith Matters and Change Matters

I have often heard it said, "If you want to change the world, change your mind."

This echoes something Gandhi said: "We must be the change we wish to see in the world." As I ponder the beginning of this newest year, I am asking myself "What do I need to change in my beliefs and behavior in the coming year that will help the world to be a better place in which to live?"

This is not an easy question to ask ourselves, and yet it is so worthwhile, even if we identify only one thing we need to remedy in our lives and then actually do it.

Now I am not recommending that we beat up on ourselves and bully ourselves into some kind of emotional and mental reform school. Nor am I talking about the shallow New Year's Resolution game so many of us play this time each year.

I am talking about what those in recovery struggle to do to stay sober. I am talking about summoning the courage and humility to take "a fearless and moral inventory" of our beliefs and behaviors to determine for ourselves what it is that we really need to change about ourselves for the better.

Twenty-three years ago this winter, I began my seminary studies. One of my classes was on death and dying, and in it, I learned a simple exercise I have never forgotten. It is an exercise that has helped me, and many with whom I have worked over the years, not only to ask these questions on a regular basis, but to answer them as well.

The exercise invites us to imagine that we are dying. Once we picture ourselves on our own deathbeds, we are then invited to ask ourselves what we want to be thinking and feeling about ourselves and how we lived as we prepare to leave this earth. Another part of the exercise is to ask ourselves what we want people to be able to say about us at our funeral or memorial service. An even more poignant question: "If I were to die today, would it be an OK day to die?" If the answer to that question is "No," then we

need to ask ourselves "why not?"

This exercise has never failed to motivate me to ask what I need to change here and now so when I am on my deathbed, I have more joys than regrets to remember, and to ask what I need to do so I don't leave the earth tomorrow or 40 years from now having had only a "near life" experience. For those of us in the GLBT community, these questions often put us smack dab in the middle of grappling with how well or how poorly have we come to terms with being gay, lesbian, bisexual and/or transgendered people. I have found that the level of comfort, self-love, self-care, and acceptance we have reached deter-

However, the process we each need to go through and the end goal are ultimately the same. It involves being vigorously honest about what we are doing to hurt rather than heal ourselves and what we are doing to distance ourselves from the love others and The Holy One feel for us.

The end goal for all of us is to have lived every day in a way we will rejoice in on our deathbeds rather than regret.

In a poem called "Reflections on Death," Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross sums it up quite well. (Insert)

In this newest of years, my prayer for all of us is that we ask The Holy One for the strength, courage, and willingness to make the changes in

*"When you love, give it everything you've got
And when you have reached your limit — give it more.
And forget the pain of it,
because as you face your death
it is only the love you have given
and received that will count.
And all the rest —
the accomplishments, the struggles, the fights —
will be forgotten in your reflections.
If you have loved well
then it will have been worth it.
The joy of it will last through the end;
But if you have not,
death will always come too soon."*

mines to a great degree the quality of our lives and our relationships.

The next questions are these: "Do we want to let the next year go by without attempting to make the changes that we need to make? If not, then what are the changes that matter the most that we need to make and how do we go about making them?"

Each of us will have different answers to these questions.

our lives that matter in the ways that matter so none of us ever suffers a death that comes too soon.

Rev. Christine Leslie, founder and director of Triangle Ministries, A Center for Lesbian & Gay Spiritual Development near Williston, VT, is available for individual & couple counseling and workshop/retreat leadership. (802) 860-7106 or revcsl@aol.com