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TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION FOR CHURCH IN SOCIETY
and PARTICIPANTS IN THE AIDS MINISTRY PROJECT
Delaware-Maryland Synod

FROM: Ron Mulberger *RM*
Chair, Commission for Church in Society

We have finally settled on a date for the day of study with Bishop Mocko and "The Study of Issues Concerning Homosexuality". Bishop Mocko will be attending a meeting of the ELCA Bishops in January at which a new study on Human Sexuality will be discussed. He has also led studies on our topic before in other settings and so in conversant with the material.

The date is, SATURDAY, MARCH 14, 1992 - 9AM to 4PM. We will meet at ST. JOHN LUTHERAN CHURCH, THURMONT, Bill Peacock in the pastor loci. The setting is great for this sort of gathering and the hospitality of the congregation is just marvelous. So mark your calendars now. All of the members of the commission are expected to participate and all those involved in the AIDS Ministry Project are urged and invited to participate. All of us agreed, at some point, that we wanted to engage in this study.

For those involved in the AIDS Ministry Project, we are planning a gathering on Friday Evening, MARCH 13, 1992 from 7-10PM at St. John, Thurmont. We will be interested to know how you are doing, if there is any progress, what have been any roadblocks, can we help in any way, what might you need from us? If you are able to attend this gathering and the day of study with the Bishop on Saturday, and need overnight accommodations please RSVP Bill Peacock by completing the form enclosed and returning it to Bill by January 31, 1992 or call him at (301) 271-7877. Also enclosed you will find your copy of the AIDS Resource Guide for Central Maryland. This guide is compliments of AIDS Action Baltimore and any contribution you might like to make to the cause would be gratefully accepted by this organization. Bishop Mocko has accepted our invitation to be with us on Friday Night as well. So you will all get the chance to get to know the Bishop and we will be able to share a lot with him I am sure.

I hope that all of you will be able and willing to attend the events of March 13 and 14, 1992 as both will support our efforts in ministering to an increasing number of folks in the Synod. "The Lutheran" has expressed an interest in a story about the AIDS Ministry Project and the Commission for Church in Society of the ELCA has now been informed about the project. So we may become a model for this sort of ministry in the national church. I find it really exciting that we have decided to deal with this issue of ministry in a forthright and direct fashion. And I hope we can generate as much excitement in our congregations.

See you all on the weekend of MARCH 13, 14, 1992

Hear the Angels sing ☩
Pray for Peace ☩

Workshops Session C

4:15 to 5:45 P.M.

(Participants with YELLOW NAME TAGS have registered early and have priority seating in the workshops of their choice. All other participants may take the empty seats in workshops on a first come, first served basis. THANK YOU for your cooperation in this situation.)

COMMUNICATION AND EVANGELISM

C01 Marketing The Church or Selling Out the Gospel

Concepts and language from secular marketing are finding their way into the church. What are the associated theological and social problems? What are practical applications of marketing ideas which can help congregations, without sacrificing the integrity and faithfulness of our ministry? This forum will include examples of congregations which have used marketing techniques in helpful ways.

LEADER: THE REV. DR. MICHAEL ROTHAAAR, ELCA Division of Congregational Ministries, has staff management responsibilities in evangelism, worship, Christian education, leadership development and social ministry.

WORSHIP AND MUSIC

C02 The Ministry of the Altar Guild

The church building worship space is a meeting place between God and the people of God. The ministry of the altar guild involves preparing that worship space with furnishings, appointments, vessels, elements, linens, and paraments used in the liturgy. This workshop will provide suggestions for organizing an altar guild, help altar guild members understand their basic responsibilities as well as give practical suggestions for performing their tasks.

LEADER: MRS. GYNNIE FRANTA, Altar Guild Ministry, St. Mark Lutheran Church, Wilmington, DE.

C03 Literature for the Small Organ

This session will cover: music which works well on both pipe and electronic instruments, easy/advanced compositions appropriate for liturgical worship, discussion of creative registration, and use of additional instruments with the organ.

LEADER: DR. CLAIR JOHANNSSEN, Organist and Director of Music and Worship, Trinity Lutheran Church, Hagerstown, MD.

CONGREGATIONAL PLANNING AND LEADERSHIP

C04 Effective Church Leadership

Kennon Callahan, author of Twelve Keys for an Effective Church, has written a follow-up book on effective church leadership. Learn how the service of pastors and lay leaders has changed from the church culture of the fifties to the American mission field of the nineties. Discover practical implications for church staffing and evaluations.

LEADER: THE REV. ANDREA R. HAGEN, Assistant to the Bishop, Delaware-Maryland Synod.

EVANGELISM AND OUTREACH

C05 Escaping the Survival Syndrome

Many congregations have caught this disease. They have lost sight of vision and purpose. You will learn how to identify the symptoms, the causes, the effects, and the interventions.

LEADER: THE REV. JAMES W. MOSS, SR., Assistant to the Superintendent of the East Pennsylvania Conference of the Church of God; Author of People Spots Seminars.

STEWARDSHIP

C06 Caring for Young Stewards as We Are Growing into Mature Stewards Ourselves

Discuss how to prepare a Biblical stewardship plan in the congregation, with emphasis on stewardship education for youth and ways to empower Christians in daily life to respond to the Gospel.

LEADER: ROGER SMITH, Region 8 Staff for Stewardship, ELCA Division for Congregational Ministries

CHURCH AND SOCIETY

C07 Called to Care for a Hungry World

Objectives: To understand the broad issues and circumstances which result in a hungry world. To understand the many-faceted ways in which the ELCA responds to the hungry of the world. To begin to explore channels of action for individuals and congregations who want to make a difference.

LEADER: THE REV. DAVID ORAVEC, Assistant Pastor, Evangelical Lutheran, Frederick, MD; Chair, Delaware-Maryland Synod World Hunger Committee.

COMMUNICATION AND EVANGELISM

C08 Focus on Fundamentals: Improving Your Church Newsletter

Whether you've been working on your newsletter for all time, or whether you've just been conned into tackling the job, you'll benefit from this review of what makes a good newsletter. A key element of the session will be your analysis of a recent issue of your own newsletter, so be sure to bring copies for yourself and for sharing.

LEADER: MS. LINDA LOVELL, Communications Coordinator, Delaware-Maryland Synod.

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AND YOUTH MINISTRY

C09 Cross Signs

Education leaders and teachers of adults will be introduced to the newest adult Bible study from Augsburg-Fortress. Cross Signs is for use in small group settings and it will challenge participants to serve as sign of the cross in God's world. Come and explore this exciting resource and learn how it can be used in your adult classes.

LEADERS: MS. JANET WITTENBERG, ELCA Publishing House Congregational Resource Services and THE REV. SCOTT TUNSETH, Development Editor of Adult Education Resources at Augsburg Fortress, Minneapolis, MN.

C10 Linking Education to All Aspects of Congregational Life (Part 2)

A continuation of Part 1 - Looking at the congregation as an interconnected organism with a history, life-style, and world view, we will envision creative and practical programs and structures which engage people in learning and growing in their faith commitments, throughout all of congregational life.

LEADER: THE REV. RONALD REAVES, Pastor, St. Benjamin Lutheran Church, Westminster; Chair of the Delaware-Maryland Synod Division for Congregational Ministries.

C11 Emerging Models for Youth Education

A look at over two dozen program possibilities for confirmation ministry and youth education. Offering of a practical method for using two different grids to develop program possibilities in your congregation.

LEADER: THE REV. KENNETH SMITH, JR., an ELCA Division of Congregational Ministries Specialist for Confirmation Ministries/Jr. High Ministries.

CHURCH AND SOCIETY



C12 The Church's Role in the Prevention of AIDS

Focusing on open, honest, straightforward discussion of sexuality in the life of the congregation.

LEADERS: AIDS EDUCATION TASK FORCE of the Delaware-Maryland Synod Commission for Church in Society.

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AND YOUTH MINISTRY

C13 Clowns and Christian Ministry

Put on a happy face and explore the world of clowning as a creative form for the ministry of Jesus Christ. Hear practical ways to organize your own Clown Ministry using Floyd Shaffer's book *Clown Ministry* with taped program, as well as ideas for makeup, costumes, props, scripts. Discuss possible settings within your congregation and outside your congregation for clown worship and service. Wear casual clothes. Limited to 20 participants.

LEADERS: CLOWN MINISTRY COMMITTEE, Holy Communion Lutheran Church, Fallston, MD.

FAITH AND DAILY LIFE

C14 - Do-it-Yourself Bible Study

Ever have the urge to do some independent Bible Study? Or perhaps study with a friend? This workshop will suggest some plans, resources, and other ideas to help.

LEADER: THE REV. DAVID KAPLAN, Pastor, St. Luke Lutheran, Baltimore, MD.; Writer of Adult Education Curriculum, Augsburg Fortress

GLOBAL MISSION AND OUTREACH

C15 Practical Ways to Get Involved in Global Mission Ministry

Participation as a Companion Synod is one of the ways our synod is seeking to grow in awareness of the gifts, talents, and visions of other global Christians throughout the world. Come and dialogue with synod members who have made new friends in Finland and Estonia. Hear the "ins and outs" of being a Companion Synod. Also, discover how to be a missionary for a day. Learn to make mission come alive in your parish. Build foundations for the future by involving congregational children in Global Mission ministry. Resources for global mission involvement and education exist in every area of our synod and there are practical ways to stretch our mission dollars.

LEADERS: DIVISION FOR GLOBAL MISSION of the DE-MD Synod.

NOTES:

Outline used for AIDS/HIV Prevention Session
at "Partners in Faith" training sessions of
DE-MD Synod of ELCA in Perry Hall, MD.
Oct. 2, 1993

AIDS Prevention--Partners in Faith

(Ask participants what they already know. We fill in any gaps and dispel myths.)

I. How is HIV transmitted?

A. Unprotected intercourse with an infected person

1. Body

- a. vaginal intercourse
- b. anal intercourse
- c. oral intercourse

2. Who?

- a. heterosexuals
 - women
 - men

- b. homosexuals
 - men
 - women

c. teenagers

d. elderly

- e. married couples when at least one partner has been unfaithful or is an IV drug user.

3. Rape

B. IV drug use

C. Vertical transmission (i.e., from mother to baby)

- 1. vaginal birth increases the risk of HIV transmission
- 2. breast milk

D. Blood supply, but the risk is decreasing because blood is tested for HIV antibodies

- 1. hemophiliacs from clotting factor made from donated blood

E. Accidental needle sticks, medical personnel at highest risk of this happening

II. How is HIV not transmitted?

- | | |
|---------------|---------------------|
| A. touching | E. mosquitoes/ticks |
| B. hugging | F. food utensils |
| C. kissing | G. waiter |
| D. hand shake | H. water fountains |

III. HIV/AIDS Prevention

- A. Sexual abstinence, including masturbation
- B. Insist that each person in a couple be tested for HIV antibodies for up to 1 year. Once both have consistently tested negative to HIV antibodies, then is it safe to have sexual intercourse, assuming the couple remains monogamous (e.g., couples wanting to marry).
- C. Safer sex
 - 1. barrier use
 - men: latex or new thermoplastic elastomer condom
 - women: polyurethane female condom (Reality)
 - nonoxynol 9 spermicide deactivates HIV in the lab, but appears to facilitate HIV transmission during intercourse (e.g., prostitutes in Nairobi).
 - for oral sex involving the vagina, dental dam
- D. Abstain from sharing needles
 - 1. especially involving IV drug use, e.g., heroin, steroids, insulin
 - 2. if using IV drugs, use clean needles. (bleach?)
- E. Autologous blood donations prior to own surgery

Back by -

I'm just catching
up on stuff I'd
brought back from
various meetings &
trips - this is from
mtg @ Lutheran AIDS
Committee of Del/Md. -
met with them in
Baltimore -

The Gray Bags: A Response from the AIDS Task Force

The AIDS Task Force has taken complete responsibility for the distribution of the "Gray Bags" at the 1993 Synod Assembly. That some were offended by the contents of the bag is an unfortunate consequence of our action. An examination of the reasons for the negative reaction might, however, be a reasonable exercise for all to engage in so as to encourage discussion.

We did not intend to suggest that anyone in attendance would need the condom enclosed with the bag. The contents of the bag were intended to bring to the forefront the seriousness of the pandemic of HIV+/AIDS and related diseases such as Hepatitis B, Clymidia and others, all of which are incurable and one of which, viz, HIV/AIDS, is **always eventually fatal**. This is quite different from the pre-AIDS days when sexually-transmitted diseases (STDs) were curable with the administration of antibiotics. With the onset of the AIDS pandemic in the late 70's and early 80's in this country, we are dealing with a syndrome that has the potential, here and worldwide, to decimate the human population in an analogous way to the Plague that swept across Europe in past centuries. It has already surpassed the Bubonic Plague in its sweep across the world. Estimates of the rate of infection and onset of opportunistic diseases is rising rapidly, indeed exponentially in the world. THAT IS FRIGHTENING.

The information in the gray bag was obtained and provided FREE from the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and other non-profit agencies at absolutely no cost to the synod. That information was then distributed with several goals in mind:

1. To lift up the seriousness of the pandemic.
2. To make people aware of the facts concerning how one can contract HIV/AIDS and how one CANNOT contract it. There is an enormous ignorance and hysteria in this regard in the society.
3. To make folks aware of the available services provided in the community for those who are HIV+ or have full blown AIDS or ARC (AIDS Related Complex), and their friends and families.
4. To inform the sexually active that unless they have been married monogamously, and utterly faithful for more than 15 years, they should not be sexually active with anyone else* until they have been tested and shown to be negative on those HIV tests for a period of at least one year during which they have been tested at least twice.

*If they pursue any new relationship sexually, then available protection should be used, not only for their own life, but for the life of one who may be conceived in the act.
5. To inform pastors and church leaders about HIV/AIDS to enable them to counsel those who come to them for help and information.

The Department of Health provides the information free to anyone who asks and solely as

preventative medicine. Preventative medicine ought to become routine for everyone about everything that affects the health of humankind. The information is value-free, that is to say, the state does not enter the sexual morality debate because that is not its function. The state treats STDs like AIDS as a public health issue because like all transmittable diseases, if not checked, they will spread. And if AIDS continues to spread at its present rate, the devastation in humankind will be like nothing we have seen, nor can imagine.

In providing the gray bag, the AIDS Task Force was interested in giving information that is needed to know about prevention, as well as how one acquires the syndrome known as AIDS. It is analogous to evangelizing the poor. One first ministers to their creature needs and satisfies their physical needs for food, water, clothing, safe shelter. Then, because that is not the way the world responds to them, the poor ask, "Why do you do this?" That's a faithful question! It is then we can provide what satisfies the hungry heart.

The biblical and churchly position is clearly, at least at first glance, that folks ought to abstain from sexual intercourse outside the context of the marriage covenant, a covenant in which the partners are loyal, monogamous, faithful, loving, caring, nurturing. That is the purported position of the church catholic. And, given the AIDS pandemic, it also seems the wiser course of action.

So, we need to talk about sexual abstinence as a lifestyle outside of the context of long-term, committed, faithful relationships. But that is only one of the things we need to talk about. We also need to talk about SEX, sexuality, relationships and what all that means in a healthy, redemptive and tolerant world. We need to talk about what it means to be loyal, committed, monogamous, faithful, caring and nurturing in our relationships. We need to talk about the sinfulness of humankind. And we need to talk about the cross and forgiveness, and the healing of broken relationships and the healing of broken lives because of bigotry, hatred and intolerance.

*The HIV+/AIDS Task Force
Delaware-Maryland Synod, ELCA*

HIV + / AIDS Education Task Force

of The Delaware/Maryland Synod of The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America: September 1993

October 16, 1993

at

**Our Saviour Lutheran Church
in Lansdowne
10:30 a.m.**

1. Opening Prayer
2. Any leftover business from the August 28, meeting
3. Discussion with our Bishop,
The Rev. Dr. George P. Macko
4. Closing Prayer

Directions to Our Saviour in Lansdowne

From the Beltway [695] get to Exit 9 [Hollinsferry Road] go East on Hollinsferry Road to the first traffic light. On the Green Left Turn Arrow - Turn Left and proceed North on Hammonds Ferry Road to Lavern Avenue [several blocks]. Turn Right onto Lavern and the church is 1 1/2 blocks up Lavern on the right side of the street, across the street from the Lansdown Volunteer Fire Company. If you get lost - call Ron at 410-242-2141 (O) or 410-242-0083 (H)

If you cannot attend this meeting be sure to give Ron Mulberger a phone call as soon as you can.

Thank You.

There are two (2) enclosures with this mailing:

1. Update members list
2. The Gray Bag Response

Highlights from

The August 25, 1993 Meeting

1. Workshop leaders for the October 2 Partners in Faith event:
 1. Teen-agers: Don Keyser, Cindy Rasschaert and Elaine Kelbel.
 2. Pastor's: Ron Mulberger, Margaret Goodlin and Marina Flores.
 3. Prevention: Dana Weckesser, Ron Mulberger, Margaret Goodlin and Kay Brister.

All other Task Force Members are asked to be present and to fill in where ever needed.

2. Up-date training session for Saturday October 23 at St Mark's in Baltimore.
Ron Mulberger and a group from the Task Force that is located in the greater Baltimore area will be putting the training session together for us. **Even though this is a refresher for the Task Force - any others who would like to join the work of the Task Force are encouraged to attend.**
3. Marina Flores (due to being a Union Parish and able to get a cheaper price from the UCC) will be ordering a copy of the new **Affirming Persons - Saving Lives / AIDS Awareness & Prevention Education for SCS use.** After we get a chance to preview the material - it will be housed in the Vineyard - the Synod Resource Center.
4. The September 25 session with our Bishop has had to be moved to October 16 due to the Bishop's schedule. We will be meeting at Our Saviour in Lansdowne.
5. There are some tee-shirts for the Task Force left over and we need to purchase them. Please Call or see Marina Flores about getting **your tee-shirt.** Marina paid for all of them and we do not want to see her stuck with the bill. Thank You !

5. The Gray Bag Revisited:

- a. In regards to the number of Bags left following the Assemble - there should have been **More** left over !

There were over 1,400 Gray Bags prepared. 1000 of which had condoms and the large gray brochure full of information. Over 400 did not have the condoms or the gray brochure and lacked some other material because we did not have 1,400 pieces of every bit of information given to us to hand out.

There were gray bags place in the trash cans on Friday - approximately 20 or so. But on Friday evening following the last session - only 3 were retrieved by a Task Force member & spouse - delegates/visitors saw bags, retrieved and took the bags with them. The three that were left on Friday night were placed on chairs in the visitor seating area on the main floor.

Many of the bags that were left on the table and not touched - belonged to delegates who did not come to the assembly - or who were there on Thursday and did not return for Friday or Saturday. These bags and any others that were left over in the visitors seating on the second floor (non left on the main floor) were gathered by Task Force members and the pages and were re-boxed to be taken to the Synod House where Ron Mulberger was to pick them up later for use at other events this fall.

Based upon the numbers reported out by the registrar for the assembly - the assembly never reached the maximum number of delegates (if we had we would have had 700 or so used at the assembly and under 700 left for other events). We should have had over 800 + gray bags left, but we don't.

Several Task Force members reported people taking more than one bag with them from the tables and the chairs when they left on Friday night and also on Saturday.

Bill Peacock did count all the bags as they were packed at Christ Lutheran, helped with the distribution and the re-collecting with the pages.

For people who have made comments about all the "left over bags " Bill hopes some facts and figures will help all of us see a little different picture. It was not that people did not want them and left them at the assembly - it was just the opposite. A good number of the delegates and visitors had to take more than one bag since we had so few left over and since there were Task Force Members doing a garbage can check on Friday and Saturday.

Also, from the exposure at the assembly we have gained new members to work with the Task Force.

- b. Hind sight being better than foresight - the Task Force spent most of the day composing a document titled **The Gray Bags: A Response from The Aids Task Force**. This is an enclosure in this mailing. This Response is being sent to Marilyn Loewer for enclosure in the October Visions packets set to all Pastors and AIMS, and to Linda Lovell for publication in the Network, the Synod Newsletter.

6. A Little Clarification:

Some of those in attendance at the Assembly were not listening when Muriel Heichler introduced Terry and Robin Crawford. Terry and Robin are husband and wife - not Mother and Son !

7. Terry has been in the hospital for a stay since the assembly. His potassium count was elevated and had to be brought under control. If all goes well, Terry & Robin are hoping to get a week away in Maine the very first part of September. Please continue to keep them in your prayers.

See You On October 2 !

Could the illness AIDS
be a plague from God?

Oh, my dears, what a terrible thought
that God would ever send a plague.
How can we hope to heal this affliction
if we step aside and blame it on a deity?
No. No. You who recognize your autonomy
in your own lives
know full well that this is not the cause.

No God of loving compassion
would ever inflict upon anyone,
be it individual, group or community,
any illness at all,
not even the common cold.

If you believe
that you are deserving of punishment
you need to question
what you feel is amiss in your life.
Is there a sense of guilt?
Where you align yourself with any posture
that hints you are deserving of God's punishment
then that is the issue at hand.
Not the illness itself.

• JULY 18 •

*Namaste. I salute the Divinity in you which
salutes the divinity in me.*

— Yoga greeting

Many of us grew up believing we are each separate, isolated, and alone. We learned to live in fear, afraid other people were going to hurt us, afraid there wasn't enough love to go around.

There is another way to view the world. It says we all are one. No one is separate. We're all made up of the same stuff, all part of God. When I look at you I can choose to be afraid or I can choose to see myself reflected in you. Then, giving and receiving are the same, there is no lack, and I need not be afraid.

When we feel alone and small, we have chosen to believe in a world of separation and fear. We can change our minds and choose a world of unity and love. Every person we meet today we can silently salute with the greeting: *Namaste*. We can also place the palms of our hands together, hold them over our heart, and bow slightly to ourselves in the mirror. *Namaste*.

You are part of God and so am I. Namaste.

• APRIL 20 •

[Compassion] means, as far as I understand it, the ability to see how it all is. As long as you have certain desires about how it ought to be you can't see how it is.

— Ram Dass

AIDS is teaching us compassion. We're learning there is no right or wrong way to have AIDS or love a person with AIDS.

We're learning that the most important thing we can do is listen with an open mind and an open heart, trying to understand how things are for another person.

If we can be compassionate with others, we can also be compassionate with ourselves. Just as we accept others, we need to accept ourselves, without judgment, blame, or guilt. In fact, if we want to be compassionate to others, the place to begin is at home. As we accept ourselves, unconditionally, we find it easier to do the same for others.

I let go of all judgments about myself, about other people, and about how life ought to be. I listen to myself and others with an open heart.

• MARCH 6 •

A Always

I In

D Divine

S Safety

— slogan from a Healing Circle button

What a lovely alternative to the prevailing attitude that equates AIDS with fear. AIDS seems to foster fear. But then, so does reading a newspaper. And whether we're worried about our health or the condition of the planet, fear can paralyze us.

Behind the fear of AIDS is a belief that we are helplessly unprotected in a dangerous, unpredictable world. Most of the media and the medical community promote this belief with statements or phrases such as, "if you get AIDS you'll die," and "the deadly AIDS virus." But a belief is just a thought we're in the habit of thinking. We can change our thoughts. Instead of thinking about our aloneness, we can think about our at-one-ness. We can think about our unity and connection with all living things.

The more we think about being one with the power and love of the universe, the more our fear begins to be replaced with faith, and we acquire new habits of thinking that serve us better.

I am always in divine safety. I am protected and cared for.

THE COLOR OF
LIGHT
PERRY TILLERAS

Do not let AIDS drive you into a corner, forgetting the purpose for which it has come. AIDS is fear and fear comes in many forms. It is an energy current in your body. It is a false belief from childhood. It is an old tape in your minds. Before the cure for AIDS is announced, do your homework or you will move to something else. The learning opportunity is here. Why wait?

Explore everything, examine everything in your lives, but always with the question "Am I choosing love or am I choosing fear?" When you find that you have chosen fear, move not one inch further until you have walked through that fear and found the love beyond. This is your task. Through the wisdom of your soul, it can no longer be avoided. You have given yourself a gift. The only healing is love.

Take yourself tenderly by the hand. Reach your hand to others only as you become secure in your self-loving. Never offer a hand to another in fear. If they are in terror and you feel a resonating fear in yourself, walk away. Your task is to choose love, not to serve the fear in others—an important distinction. Welcome to the graduate course. You are both professor and student.



Do you see a cure for AIDS in the foreseeable future?

Yes, and it is coming swiftly. So the time is short for you to learn from the manifested teaching that AIDS offers. The moment there is a cure for AIDS, if fear has not been reckoned with, you open the way for another fearful something. There has always been a simple cure for fear—the choosing of self-love.

[Editors' note: Emmanuel said this in the Autumn of 1983]

Illness Is a Doorway 121

How many who have ultimately died of AIDS have found along the way the wisdom to begin to love themselves? How valuable a teaching to the soul! Human fear says, "Yes, but they died." Well, they left their bodies. Some have already come again to teach what they have learned. At the moment of dying, or soon before, they came to the realization that they are worthy of their own love. With such empowerment, they return swiftly. The next ten years will see an influx of wise and loving children. It is a far vaster dance than seems apparent in your human world. Remove the lenses of human focus and you will see from the viewpoint of spirit the wonder of it all.



How, then, can we best learn from this disease?

Take a moment to step back and perceive the entire business of AIDS from a vantage point outside it. Whether you have been diagnosed as having AIDS, whether you have just had a child or lover die of it, remain on the fringe of your own terror. Look at the AIDS epidemic as though it were encased in a crystal ball, in a container that allows visibility. What you see is this: an attack upon the immune system of the body that renders it incapable of self-defense. All the elements that are in your world—in your air, your water, your bodies—then become threatening, and you are no longer able to keep them under control.

From outside this framework, what has been in your human experience that you have felt you must defend against? There is no structure required except that you be willing to see, beyond the terror of the fixed focus on AIDS, what its message specifically is for you.

You have not failed when you become ill. When the body takes upon itself an affliction such as AIDS, the human personality becomes an enemy far more destructive than any virus. Because you turn upon yourselves. You close your hearts. You take terror by the hand. Fear, resentment, rage—all of those emotions, even without the virus, will render you helpless.

You have chosen to walk on this particular path, and I do not mean the path to your imminent demise. I mean to WALK ON THIS PATH. Look at the scenery of opportunity and do not for one moment abandon your life. Utilize every aspect of living to perceive wherein the greater design of your soul has offered you the gift of choice—love or fear.

If I were to give you anything in God's Kingdom, It would be the truth that what exists here and now is surrounded by an eternity of love and Light and what you experience in your humanness is the choice of your soul—not to its destruction but to its liberation.

How to work with someone who is dying?

See them in the light of what you know of who they are and why they have come, and you will ask the appropriate questions to open the door to their memory. But be very aware where you are in fear, you are no longer in truth. And when you are no longer in truth, you have no business being with somebody who is dying, because they are expanding into truth, and they need to move in joy.

Death is not a failure.



How can one with a fatal disease dance out of life when life is considered the only meaningful possession?

And that is probably what made room for the fatal disease. Well, let us first go back to the Greater Reality. Life is fatal. Therefore, everything that you do, if you want to look at it in that manner, is fatal. Being born is the most fatal thing you can do. When one says, "fatal disease," one is allowing fear to displace reality.

There is nothing more fatal about disease than about anything else except the label. Am I being unfeeling? I don't think so. I am naming the dance.

Living with AIDS: Spiritual Issues and Resources

Introduction

No disease of the twentieth century has provoked such violent religious reactions as has AIDS. Unfortunately, most of the religious voices seem to come out of the Middle Ages. Clerics then said the bubonic plague was a result of unholy living, and many today are shouting that AIDS is God's judgment on deserving sinners.

One of the most damaging results of this attitude is alienation. When God is seen as a sadistic torturer who inflicts pain and suffering on us, our natural reaction is to run the other way. The anger of *Why did God do this to me?* is an understandable reaction. But if we don't own the anger and use it creatively, it distances us from God and from our spiritual care-givers. It also creates a sense of powerlessness and victimization that makes it much more difficult to call upon our own spiritual resources, as well as the power of God, to sustain us.

Many contemporary Jewish and Christian teachings do not assert that God is the source of evil (including illness), nor that God uses illness to punish or afflict people. For all of human history, the God of the Jewish and Christian

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Editors: Betty Clare Morratt, M.A., Judith Spiegel, M.P.H.
Steve Parrish, Michael Helquist pp. 217-253