

but you are a thread in the fabric of a rainbow flag that will liberate us all. Together we serve the church and the l/g/b/t community as a living parable about our need to pray always and not to lose heart. ▼

Chris Glaser served as the founding director of the Lazarus Project, a ministry of reconciliation between the church and the l/g/b/t community. This is excerpted and adapted from a sermon delivered to West Hollywood Presbyterian Church in California, Oct. 18, 1998, in celebration of more than 20 years of ministry of the Lazarus Project.



Health

Discerning the Nearness of God *Lectio Divina and AIDS*

- Patricia Hoffman

"There was always this big chasm between God and everyone else," Art said, reflecting on his past experiences in the church. "The message was, 'You're broken and God isn't.' In Spiritual Questing I've discovered our unity in God that transcends whether we're broken or not. In this group the focus is off of the brokenness and on the wholeness. We're on a path toward wholeness."

It was deeply gratifying to me as the chaplain at AIDS Care to hear Art's observation after three years of participation in Spiritual Questing groups. From the first group, which was eight gay men, I could see that alienation was a major issue—alienation from self, God, and others. During our weekly meetings some expressed difficulty accepting their own feelings as good and trustworthy. Others struggled with images of a distant and judgmental God. Most, if not all, have told painful stories of familial and social abuse.

The idea for the Spiritual Questing group began to hatch seven years ago. I had just moved from Los Angeles up the coast to the quiet city of Ventura. That summer my husband and I spent a week on retreat in the desert at St. Andrew's, a Benedictine Abbey, where we were introduced to a group *lectio divina* process. At the end of the week, as we drove out of the Abbey grounds, I said, *lectio divina* could be a wonderful gift in the gay community. I thought of myself offering it, but could not imagine a setting. I was a lay woman who had worked in ecumenical social change ministries. Leading spiritual support groups had not been part of my life history. But a year of volunteering for AIDS Project Los Angeles as a hospital visitor had opened me to new possibilities. A year after that retreat at St. Andrew's, I was in my first extended unit of Clinical Pastoral Education, training to be a Chaplain in AIDS ministry.

In the group practice of *lectio divina*, participants hear a brief passage from Scripture or some other reflective reading and notice a word or phrase that attracts them. They stay with that word or phrase, repeating it silently. Each person is invited to share their word or phrase. The passage is read again and participants are invited to notice how the word or phrase touches them. After three minutes of silence, people in the circle are invited to share how the passage as a whole touches

them. There is a third reading in which they are asked to be open to an invitation that may come to them. Following the silence, participants are invited to share what came to them. The session concludes with each person praying—silently or aloud—for the person next to them, with special reference to what that person shared.

Lectio divina delivers back to a wounded community the authority to hear God's word to them. The spoken word from written scripture that meets a person's heart becomes the voice of the Sacred brought near. As it says in Deuteronomy 30:14, "The word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe."

More than ninety percent of the men and women who have been part of Spiritual Questing during the past three years have been unrelated to a religious community, though raised in ones as varied as Roman Catholic to Southern Baptist to Reform Judaism. Spiritual Questing has, as one man told me, "Given me permission to be spiritual." He and all the others who have come are people of spirit. Always were. Spiritual Questing offers people who have been wounded in so many ways a welcoming setting that suggests, this spiritual questing is for you. It is your right. It is your inheritance if you wish to take it.

Luke has an account of Jesus and a woman who had hemorrhaged for 12 years. She was considered unclean because of the bleeding. When Jesus stopped in the midst of the crowd to ask who had touched his garment, she had bravely said that it was her. He then addressed her as "daughter of Abraham." Calling her a daughter of Abraham delivered the woman back to her status as a member of the community.

What have I wanted as week after week I showed up to form the chairs in a circle, set out the candles, and find yet another good *lectio* passage? I have wanted to deliver men and women in the AIDS-affected community back to their status as sons and daughters of Abraham. ▼

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Chaplain Pat Hoffman (second from left) leads Spiritual Questing group at AIDS Care in Ventura, California.