Freedom to Worship

Got the need to pray? Seek and ye shall find a kinder version of your first faith.

September 1, 2005 By David Evans

Testing positive does it to some HIVers. For others, it's starting meds or getting sick. But no matter the cause, most people with HIV know all too well what it's like to have their entire sense of self and safety come undone in seconds. What may surprise you is that many HIVers with a religious bent define such moments less as emotional traumas than spiritual crises. Not that they welcome misery, but they do try to see it as an opportunity for growth and healing. In fact, it's often what sends them back to God again.

If your mind keeps playing the sound of a long-forgotten hymn, consider heeding the call. Such subtle intuitions can lead to life-changing discoveries, and a church, temple or mosque may provide the hope and strength you can't find elsewhere. But seeking comfort in the arms of organized religion—especially when it is so often the voice of anti-PWA rhetoric and policies—is a hard pill for many HIVers to swallow.

"The essence of ministry *should* be the willingness to listen first, no matter where a person comes from," says the United Church of Christ's Michael Schuenemeyer about intolerant congregations. The minister, who directs his church's global HIV-awareness programs, encourages all soul-searching HIVers to look for an open and affirming one, no matter their faith of origin.

For the best resource on HIV-sensitive denominations, look to the divine light of the Web. The Council for Religious AIDS Networks (www.aidsfaith.com) and Belief Net(www.beliefnet.com) will get you started. Going home may be frightening, but as Martin Luther King Jr. said, "You don't have to seethe whole staircase—just take the first step."

SOUL FOOD

Nourish your spiritual needs at these progressive onlinesources:

- Unitarian Universalist Association (www.uua.org)
- United Church of Christ (www.ucc.org)
- Center for Progressive Christianity (www.tcpc.org)

- Congregation Beth Simchat Torah (www.cbst.org)
- Union for Reform Judaism (www.urj.org)

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