

# bread for the journey

## What's New?

What will it be? Will it be the same old thing for us or will it be a new beginning at the beginning of a new year?

Do we still believe in the God of second chances and new beginnings? Having returned to Rosecrance as chaplain to our adolescent population, I am keenly aware of their resiliency. Adolescent addicts are surprisingly able to reinvent the wheel in their brain. They can make all things new in their lives. They are able to renew both their biology and their psychology. The unpredictable grace of God uses their stubborn tenacity and will to live. I am not certain they always believe that. I wonder if you believe it. Sometimes, I wonder if I believe it myself! People often sneer, "Can these kids recover? Once an addict, always an addict?"

I would like to reflect upon the *possibility of change* for a few moments. Adolescents may have used dope, but they are not mopes. They may have gotten into big trouble with school, family and the gods, but as Yogi Berra once said, "It ain't over 'til it's over." And it's not over. Not for them. You may think I am naive when I suggest their astounding capacity to heal. Adolescents themselves have gotten prematurely cynical over the possibilities of their own recovery. Many of them have seen their peers overdose. Our motto at Rosecrance suggests, "Life is waiting." Their response is often, "Yeah, right. You can't change ugly, and my addiction has made me ugly to myself, to my family, and to the rest of the outside world."

Kids are not the only ones who are cynical about the possibility of change. We victimize ourselves, too, with our own negativity. Nothing seems to change for the better. Initial outcomes for adolescent addicts illustrate the point. They are discouraging; many kids relapse after treatment rather than stick with the program. Nevertheless, treatment more often than not ultimately

arrests a using career. Many of our kids who were treated here return to say "Thank You." Some return as staff members. The numbers at first blush confirm our suspicion that naysaying Ecclesiastes is spot-on for maintaining all is vanity and there is nothing new under the sun. Ecclesiastes is wrong. If he wasn't, there would be no reason to hope, expect, anticipate, or imagine a new life for ourselves and for kids who otherwise seem hopelessly lost. But there is. Nonetheless, cynics and skeptics prevail.

Many of us—leaders in the church—can identify with adolescent addicts and their families. Especially during this time of year. We don't believe the hype, hustle and hullabaloo. We never did. It is tough for many of us and our colleagues to see the sunshine of today when so many of our yesterdays have been stormy and dark. This isn't our first rodeo. It is not the first rodeo for the adolescent addict and his family either. Disappointment stalks them. Impatience tackles them. Impulsive stupidity is the backstory of their lives. They seem trapped in a repetitive cycle of failure.

The pain many of us experience is similar. Our own losses drain and depress us, too. It is especially difficult for us because we are in the "hope" business. We understand the addict's experience more than we are willing to admit. You feel the point. Life can be painfully empty, jarring, and lonely. We fear nothing will change. The advice to "hang in there" is cheap comfort indeed.

But change is possible. Sorry Ecclesiastes. When it comes to recovery or "wholeness," there *is* something new under the sun. Lousy statistics regarding low recovery rates are misleading. A more accurate declaration is this: Every adolescent addict who comes to us for treatment has the opportunity and the capacity to receive the gift of sobriety. Many are successful. More than we think.

Change happens, recovery takes shape, and homecoming is real ... IF.

(continued on back)

If we summon the courage, discipline, willingness, and honesty to take certain steps, change happens. I suggest you study well an often-ignored but spiritually driven GPS system that offers clearly stated directions for a journey down a road less traveled.

The gospel-inspired 12 steps of AA are built upon a foundation of hope and change.

The steps move us from an experience of powerlessness to empowerment. The steps move us from the insanity of practical agnosticism to the sanity of authentic faith. The steps urge us to be accountable for our moral failures and own what we did wrong. The steps move us from a retention of character defects

to a willingness to mend our ways. The steps urge us to abandon our narcissism and develop lifestyles of compassion to others.

What's new? We are. The program of recovery and wholeness works a miracle of transformation if we work it. Recovering addicts testify this is true. Today—yes, today! An old addict I once knew called: "I have been sober 36 years, and I am still serving the Lord." 



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is a bi-monthly news and views letter from Rev. Dr. William Lenters, Rosecrance Church Relations Coordinator. Bread for the Journey is written on behalf of people who live with substance use and mental health disorders. Together, and by God's grace, we will try to make a difference.

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