

Community Trauma: Navigating a Pandemic, Article #3: Write Yourself a Letter

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Back in the day, I used to go on retreats for normally five to seven days. They were days designed to take time to reflect, pray, get healthy, sleep, renew. I have participated in week long silent retreats where you did not speak to other residents. The meals were in silence and we wandering long hallways and huge libraries of religious order retreat house's, never speaking a word to one another. We learned to communicate with facial expressions or hand gestures. A smile and a pointed finger meant, "Please pass the salt". We found ways to engage without fulling engaging.

I had forgotten about those experiences because it has been so long ago and feels like a whole different life time as I look back. The point is I have chosen self-isolation many times in my life voluntarily. The truth is: I liked those experiences. I had to try to tame my extrovert in favor of being more introspective like most introverts. Both introverts and extroverts come with many gifts and some real struggles depending on the level to which we are manifesting those traits.

The experiences of regular retreats taught me some valuable lessons. I had to call on my inner reserve in order to tame my need to be around people talking all the time and bustling about like a crazy person. Those times also forced me to look at things about myself I wasn't so sure I liked. But they also allowed me to make changes that I feel made me a better person. I realized 'perfection' wasn't a personal goal nor was it achievable even though the machine of ministry and the demands of other people made it feel as though I needed to be perfect. Once I freed myself of that burden, I could concentrate on just being the best version of me I could be. One of the wonderful ideas that often accompanied a retreat experience was to write ourselves a letter with what we were learning on retreat and what we hoped things might manifest for us in 6 months to a year. We would seal and address them to ourselves and the retreat house would mail them back to us within that six to twelve-month time frame. It was always quit a joy to receive the letters and be reminded of where we were and also how we had fared since writing the letters. We would also include in the letter some of our aspirations for our future. It was always surprising what did and what did not come to be.

So, with all that said, maybe take the time to write yourself a letter. Tell yourself what you are learning in this new reality; your hopes and fears; your goals for six to twelve months.

Remind yourself about some of the things you are feeling now and what you hope will be different when we return to life post-pandemic. Then put it in a drawer, sealed and put a reminder on your calendar to open it and read it in the near future.

Dear Me, I hope this letter finds me well! Let me tell you about some things;