

Divorce: lonely way down road

IN RECENT months I have witnessed too many divorces. I have seen too many divisions among family members. Even in mid-America, alienation is on the march.

A year ago I gathered with a family around a hospital bed. A family member was dying. The family had all taken turns staying with this person. The woman died, surrounded by love.

Many are not so fortunate. There are old and ill people who face such a long crisis almost alone. They seem to belong to no one.

ALIENATION occurs when we are no longer special people connected to familiar places and familiar people.

We see this happening as a family goes through divorce. Homes are broken up. Children will not speak with one of their parents. Trust and openness are destroyed. Family members become isolated physically, emotionally and spiritually.

Karl Marx believed that the source of alienation was economic. He described it as the experience of "my means of life belong to someone else, my desires are the unattainable possession of someone else and an

inhuman power rules over everything."

This can be true in a capitalistic and a socialistic society.

WE WONDER why so many Americans will not vote for a president Nov. 8. It is largely because they believe that neither candidate will benefit their miserable lives. They feel outside mainstream society.

The ultimate source of alienation is not economic, but religious. It is God who proclaims that he will never desert us no matter what we do. It is God who reconciles differences. God is the source of the power to be long and to reconcile.

The gradual destruction of the human spirit is described by the famous Czechoslovakian playwright Vaclav Havel:

"It has something to do with the fact that we live in the first atheist civilization in human history. People have ceased to respect any so-called higher metaphysical values . . . I am referring to whatever is absolute, transcendental, suprahuman."

"These fundamental considerations once represented a support, a



moral perspectives
Rev. David Strong

horizon for people, but now they have been lost. As soon as humanity declared itself to be the supreme ruler of the universe — at that moment, the world began to lose its human dimension."

Havel describes how he sees this alienation affecting the life of his people. He calls it "a state of permanent humiliation."

WHAT CAN change this? Only belief in a God who cares will counteract such forces in the world.

When I see people unwilling or unable to heal a broken relationship, I wonder: Do they believe in a God who forgives and heals broken lives?

Do they not understand that genuine reconciliation brings about a deeper love and understanding than was there before the rift? Will we not grasp the healing power that is available?

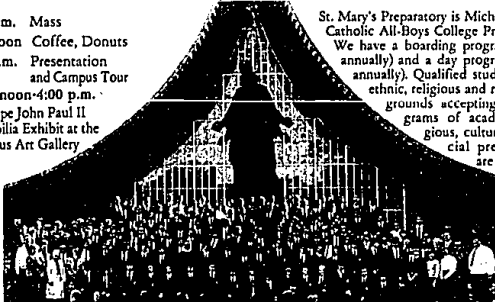
Reconciliation is difficult. It requires our most mature human capacities. It also requires a belief that deep down in the nature of life itself is God's ultimate power of healing.

The Rev. David Strong is pastor of St. Matthew's United Methodist Church in Livonia.

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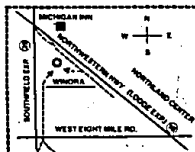
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