

Here is a Christmas letter that Brian Doyle wrote about his family one year. "Greetings and salutations! A quick look at the year past in our family: The Woman of the House started a ska band, had a fistfight with a shopping cart, lost her right eye but then found it again under the couch cushions, and was the object of a terrific crush from one of the 2 very well-dressed boys who came to the door one day on behalf of the Church of the Risen Lord of the Swamps of Jesus. One boy started into a reasoned discussion of spirituality and community as the twin foundation pillars of the Church of the Risen Lord of the Swamps of Jesus and the other one just gaped and blubbered until he, this second boy, finally blurted out that she, the Woman of the House, was the very personification of his lifelong dreams of feminine allure, and if she could see her way clear to opening her heart to more than one husband, he, the second boy, could and would adjust his career plan with the Church of the Risen etcetera to include purchasing a ranch in Utah where perhaps societal norms were more open to committed love in other forms than the usual straitjacket of monogamous marriage. The Woman of the House declined but was deeply flattered and made a small contribution to the Church of the Risen etcetera, fine people, as she said later, tall, with excellent teeth. Dental hygiene is VERY IMPORTANT, as she says often, as she pores over a map of Utah." (THE THORNY GRACE OF IT, p. 109)

So we have, by God's goodness and grace, come to another year. What a gift! And what an opportunity. We can ponder, as Mary did, about what all of this means. And culturally, that often leads us to the making of resolutions, a hope-filled practice that always reminds us that God is forever about making us new, and the very heart of Christianity is conversion, change of heart. Here are 10 NEW COMMANDMENTS that we might try to befriend this new year:

This year try to make friends.....

1. With our humanity. To be human is to be fallible, wounded, dysfunctional, scarred, and living in a far from perfect world, family, church, body and history. Don't look for somebody to blame, to sue, to be angry at. This is the human condition. Make friends with it. Grief, not rage, is the proper response. Chaos, not blame, is what is at issue. Theologically, we call it 'original sin.' It's there. We must forgive others – and God – and ourselves. The world is fallen, but soaked in grace. It's a beautiful place and we are blessed to have another year, month, day, moment, even if they are filled with struggle, illness, and challenge. Life is a gift. Always.
2. Make friends with what is best within us. Henri Nouwen wrote: "Here lies the great call to conversion: to look not with the eyes of my own low self-esteem, but with the eyes of God's love. As long as we look out at the world and others through our wounds, we will be full of self-pity, bitterness and jealousy. If, however, we can look out through the prism of what's best in us, through the sense of gratitude for how we've been blessed, our jealousy will turn to appreciation and we will be astonished by other people's goodness.
3. Make friends with those who love us. John Powell once said that there are only 2 potential tragedies in life: The first is to go through life without loving, and the second is not to express love and affection for those who love us. We need to make better friends with our friends. We need to express affection, appreciation, contrition, and love frequently and readily. Thank those who love us, tell those whom we love that we love them.
4. Make friends with chastity. So much of our pain and restlessness comes from our lack of chastity. So much of our dishonesty and subsequent hardness of heart comes from not admitting this. Those with the heart of a child and virgin enter the kingdom of God. We have sophisticated

ourselves into unhappiness. Make friends with chastity. Make a searing and honest confession sometime this year.

5. Make friends with our body. Do not be afraid of our body, of its goodness, its sexuality, its pleasures, its tiredness and its limits. It's the only one we've got! Be friends with it. Don't punish it, don't spoil it, don't denigrate it. It's a temple and it's the medium through which we love and communicate. Give it enough rest, exercise, respect and love.
6. Make friends with the other gender. Women are angry, men are grieving, everyone is uneasy and picking away at somebody. Gender issues are real – but their resolution lies in deep and mutual sympathy. Make friends with what seems threatening to you in the other gender. Make friends with gay, straight, bi, trans, and questioning individuals. Everyone carries a divine gift within them. We are enriched by diversity in our friendships.
7. Make friends with our parents, living or deceased. All of our parents loved us imperfectly. And our grandparents loved our parents imperfectly. All the way back to the Adam and Eve. Good grief, they only had 2 boys and one killed the other. Not exactly the best role models! If we are parents ourselves, we are loving our children imperfectly. Same with our friends. We need to forgive all of it – and all of them – and all of us – for our imperfections and failings. It's the only path forward.
8. Make friends with our mortality. Death comes to us all. Make friends with mortality, with aging, with wrinkles, with gray hair and with the fact that, as we age, we are asked to give our blessing and life to the young, to let go, move on, and bless and encourage them as they take our places in the world. It is a good and holy thing to become a grandfather or grandmother, whether that is biological or not.
9. Make friends with our sense of humor. The fact that we can laugh, irrespective of whatever enslaves us, shows that we are somehow transcendent, above, all situations. Our hearts and our souls can soar, through them we can fly above the things that bind us. Humor is a marvelous way of flying. Thomas More made a joke with the man who was to behead him. As he was ordered to position his head on the chopping block, he said to the executioner: "Though you have warrant to cut off my head, you have none to cut off my beard." Gives a whole new meaning to 'gallows humor!' But no prison could break Thomas More – and no bad thing will break us if we can continue to laugh.
10. Make friends with our God. God, as Julian of Norwich assures us, looks down on us with a face that is completely relaxed, smiling and beaming out a goodness that resounds like a marvelous symphony. God also assures us that, present pain and sin notwithstanding, in the end, all will be well, and all will be well, and every manner of being will be well. We want to try to be better friends with that God. In 2023, begin to befriend. May this be a holy and happy new year for all. Amen. (adapted from Rolheiser, posting of 10 January 1994)