



REARRANGING THE FURNITURE

I have a simple idea that might change our political and religious conversation.

Several weeks ago I had a workman in my home. While he worked I made phone calls and he must have heard me talking because as he finished he asked, "Are you a clergyman?" "Yes," I said. "Did you see the Republican Convention last night?" he asked. "No," I said, "I tend toward the liberal end of the political spectrum myself." "He thought for a moment and then said, "I am not at all religious but I thought all churches were conservative."

As our conversation continued I realized he had a "media given" understanding of religion and religious people. He mostly heard about the actions of conservative churches and he branded all churches as conservative. Had he heard about The Episcopal Church's recent vote in convention to authorize the use of a rite for the blessing of same gender couples, he might have had to rethink his understanding of religion. As we talked further I told him about my experience of marching in the Portland Gay Pride parade and I could almost see his internal sense of the world shift as he dealt with a bishop who believed in gay pride.

This young man told me he considers himself a conservative and yet he also agreed with me about the right of same gender couples to marry. As we talked I once again found myself surprised by how he put his worldview together and that conversation has become one more example of why it is time to stop assuming we can assign political tags as if they were accurate descriptors of how a person or group understands the world around them.

I am a person who has experienced the presence of God in my life and if we had the time to sit together over a cup of coffee or a good microbrew we could have a discussion of my experience. Perhaps you would share your own experience with me of God's presence or absence in your life. Most likely we would not agree on everything, but we might be surprised at our agreements and disagreements.

I choose to believe, that is, I give my heart to God's presence in my life. The experience of God comes to me as I attend to the deep matters of the heart, listen carefully to another person, and discover their true self. I believe that true religious and political discourse only happens as we deeply connect with those who do not share our understanding of the world.

So my simple idea is to invite people to sit at round tables. In the Episcopal House of Bishops we gather twice a year to talk about our common life together. A decade ago we were a contentious group, often talking at each other and fighting over our beliefs. But then we were invited to rearrange the furniture and began to sit at round tables with those who disagree with us. Every three years we change up where we sit and we continually invite newcomers to the House to join a table. This simple act has made a profound difference in how we work together.

At our new round tables there is no place of honor, all are equal. In this configuration we see and hear better, we share food, offer stories of our lives and families and come to know the challenges we face in the work we all do. We are closer together at round tables rubbing elbows with little ability to hide ourselves from each other. We have come to love each other more as we have come to know each other. We have a deeper sense of community now and we act with compassion far more often than in the past.

It is a simple idea but I would really like to see what would happen if we put round tables on the floor of the Senate and House of Representatives! \$

The Right Reverend Michael Hanley, Episcopal Bishop of Oregon, can be reached at bishop@episcopaldioceseoregon.org.

just out™

November 2012

PUBLISHERS
Jonathan Kipp
Eddie Glenn

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Alley Hector

ART DIRECTOR
Horace Long

A&E EDITOR
Ken Hoyt

COPY EDITOR
Ellen Fiscus

WRITERS

Cathleen Busha	Anna Deligio
Atlas Flynn	Jonathan Hopp
Anne Jaeger	Brad Larsen
Logan Lynn	Scott MacDonald
Lyska Mondor	Courtney O'Donnell
Leo Schuman	Aaron Spencer
	Rev. Jennifer Yocum

DIRECTOR of SALES
Roy Melani

ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE
David Wagner

AD DESIGN & COORDINATION
Juliette Miratsky Heather White

just out™
P.O. Box 10609
Portland, OR 97296

editor@JustOut.com
sales@JustOut.com

Phone/Fax: 503.828.3034

©Copyright 2012. All rights reserved.

Published by
Glenn-Kipp Publishing, Inc

LLM Publications, Inc.
authorized local advertising representative

Rivendell Media, Inc.
authorized national advertising representative

just out™
Founded in 1983

FORMER PUBLISHERS
Founders Renee LaChance & Jay Brown
Marty Davis

Just Out has a long and proud history of informing and entertaining the LGBTQ community in Oregon and SW Washington, our supporters near and far, and working to build bridges that lead to justice, fairness, and equality for all people.

Printed in the U.S.A.