

*What does God require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God. — Micah 6:8*

## Secret Admissions

People tell me things. Often people tell me things I would never ask about. There are certain subjects that are none of my business, but people tell me anyway. Which is fine. I like to listen. And sometimes I learn a lot by these unexpected conversations.

I've noticed this dynamic a lot more since the presidential election. People have quietly, sometimes sheepishly, told me they voted for the candidate that no one would ever have expected. For example, several gay people—Pullenites and non-Pullenites alike—have told me they voted for McCain. The Pullenites who admitted this have all said they would not feel comfortable admitting this fact publicly at Pullen. They don't feel safe espousing such a minority view in our church, and they fear they might lose the support of their GLBT brothers and sisters.

On the other hand, a friend of mine who is a minister at a large evangelical church in town admitted to me that he voted for Obama. This is a church that has taken a public stand against same-sex marriage and other issues related to homosexuality. He laughed nervously when he told me and said two other people on the church's staff had also voted for Obama. He acknowledged he did not feel comfortable admitting his vote to others at his church. He feared the backlash such an admission would bring.

So, some gay people vote Republican and some evangelicals vote Democratic. Hardly an earth-shattering revelation, even if it might be mildly surprising to some of us. Therefore, why make a big deal about it?

Because what caught my attention in each of these conversations was not the confession of an unexpected vote, but the fear that friends and church members would reject the person if he or she was honest. And that fear is no different at the conservative evangelical church than at liberal Pullen.

One of my core convictions is that religious faith is healthiest when it promotes openness and honesty. For so long the Church's identity has been defined by "defending the faith" in a way that prevents people from saying what they honestly believe. I love the fact that Pullen's history has been marked by a commitment to openness and honesty. We are a better church because we have been guided by such principles.

The difficulty arises when people perceive that their views are not shared by the majority and are reluctant to risk being transparent. This is not just a Pullen problem; it happens in many churches, families, businesses, and other walks of life. How do we speak authentically when such authenticity might cost us relationships and standing in our community? How can our church continue to promote openness and honesty, but in a way that allows all people to feel safe in having their say?

The answer isn't that we need to stop talking about things that are important to us so that we avoid offending someone who disagrees. Such silence on matters of substance only means we cease to learn from one another. But as with many things in life, it is how we speak our truth that makes the difference. Can we talk about difficult subjects in a way that invites other viewpoints? Can we hear dissent without getting defensive or feeling the need to "correct" the other person's thinking?

I don't know. The art of living in community is a difficult art to master. We have to be ourselves and at the same time invite others to be themselves. Getting that balance right is an ongoing struggle. We fail at it more often than we succeed. But working on both ends of the equation, defining ourselves and giving others the room for self-definition, is worth the struggle. We will learn more from each other that way. We will deepen our relationships. And we will be a better church for it.

—Jack