

Dinner and a debate

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

May 29, 2012

So it sounds like Tony Perkins--whose relative civility [we both acknowledged and declined to be overly impressed by](#) last week--[will accept a dinner invitation](#) from gay rights activist Jennifer Chrisler, who is married to a woman. Chrisler's invitation to Perkins followed [Dan Savage's to Brian Brown](#), of the anti-same-sex-marriage National Organization for Marriage.

After Savage [acted somewhat ungraciously at a public event](#), Brown had this to say:

Let me lay down a public challenge to Dan Savage right here and now: You want to savage the Bible? Christian morality? Traditional marriage? Pope Benedict? I'm here, you name the time and the place and let's see what a big man you are in a debate with someone who can talk back.

Savage replied by [going ahead and naming the place](#):

We can fill a room with my screaming partisans and your screaming partisans, and we'll both play to our respective peanut galleries... I think that will create more heat than light. So what I'd like to do is challenge you to come to my house for dinner. Bring the wife; my husband will be there. And I will hire a video crew, and we will videotape an after-dinner debate. And the trick here is you have to acknowledge my humanity by accepting my hospitality, and I have to acknowledge yours by extending my hospitality to you.

There's no reason to believe that the players in these stories aren't thinking about the PR battles to be won or lost. But I hesitate to dismiss these invitations as mere stunts. Savage is right: his idea requires both parties to acknowledge the other's humanity, a crucial step toward a better conversation. I'd go farther: sharing a meal in your home is a *profoundly* intimate act, and one that's a lot rarer in our culture than it used to be, across political differences or otherwise. In my experience, it can be a socially and spiritually powerful thing.

So I'm not too cynical about these marriage-debate-opponent dinners; sounds like a terrific idea to me. The only detail I find disappointing: Savage includes a bit about how a hetero neighbor of his will make the food, so his guests won't have to eat anything touched by gay fingers. Along with being an unhelpful moment for a (mild) dig, this makes the idea a bit less radical: the vulnerability and intimacy of a dinner party relies in no small part on *cooking* for your guests.

Still, I hope Brown accepts Savage's request, as Perkins has indicated he'll accept Chrisler's. It's a good thing when people break bread together.