

Sanctuary

By [Diane Roth](#)

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Sometimes, especially lately, someone will come up to me and sort of whisper to me, "You know, I'm not that liberal, but I really do think we need to do something about gun violence in this country. At least background checks. Or access to semi-automatic weapons." I don't know why. Perhaps it is because they sense that I am safe, in a certain way. Maybe they know that I might agree with them, or, even if I don't completely agree with them, I won't jump down their throat with all of the arguments why what they are saying is wrong.

I know a good number of the people who wish were were more welcoming of gays and lesbians in our congregation, and also a few folks who have spoken to me about how they are concerned about our denomination's stance regarding gays and lesbians. They talk to me. I listen. I might ask them to consider an aspect of their position, where it is warranted.

And even this: some people have even told me that they miss the choir and the organ at the contemporary service. Some people tell me that the most meaningful portion of the liturgy is the recitation of the creed, others that they love the upbeat songs at the 10:00 service, that they hate the songs at the service, that they love the liturgy and find its repetition deeply faithful, that they think liturgy is 'empty ritual', that they think contemporary worship is shallow and self-absorbed. People talk to me. I listen. We have a conversation. I might ask them to consider an aspect of their position, if it is warranted.

But lately I've been thinking: what would it be like if some of the people who talk to me, would talk to each other? What would it be like if we considered each other safe -- if we were a sanctuary where we could share our views, and disagree, of course, but listen and learn from one another, too?

Of course, I realize that there are risks as well as opportunities when we have a conversation, when we listen to one another. I suppose one of the risks is that we listen but never share, especially if our views are different. The other risk is that

our knee jerks when we hear something we disagree with passionately, and we speak in intemperate or abusive ways. A lot of our contemporary discourse is, unfortunately, like this.

The opportunity, of course, when we talk and listen to one another, is a more nuanced, and more truthful view of the world: living color rather than black and white. Life is more complicated, and solutions for problems sometimes less obvious. And of course, we get a glimpse into who our neighbors, our friends, our family really are, in all their complicated beauty. The same is true for us, of course.

We spend a lot of time with people who believe like us: or at least, with people we assume believe like us, have similar opinions, similar values, similar convictions. But what if we really thought it was safe to talk to one another, and listen? What if we thought it was safe to love one another, not just those who are like us, but those who believe and speak and act in ways we don't understand?

They may be nearer than we think.

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