

ROCKY MOUNTAIN CONFERENCE - AUGUST 21, 2011

Reflections

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

WHEN ROD & STAFF NO LONGER COMFORT

BY DAVID K. POPHAM



I already knew the truth of our situation. Not only has experience taught me, but The Barna Group's book, *Unchristian*, demonstrated in demographic detail the truth of our situation: the church is the enemy. My latest encounter with this perception came at my daughter's pool party where an Indie friend laid out her argument for the failure of Christianity.

Her insight is born out by The Barna Group's extensive religious surveys. According to them, in 1996 those outside the church (the majority of Americans) viewed us (those within the church) as good and our religious expression as beneficial for society. By 2006 we were perceived as non-compassionate and detrimental to society. My daughter's friend obviously speaks for more than just herself.

Before we start finger pointing and adopt the motto "that's them not us" keep these insights in mind. People outside the church do not differentiate the nuances of Christianity. For those outside the church there is barely Catholic and Protestant, little less inclusive or exclusive. There is just the Church and we are the enemy.

The sex scandals of the past decade have tainted us as a community that hides, denies, and lies about sexual misconduct. We are proving to be a very different Church than the one which faced sex scandals in the 1970's and 1980's by removing credentials when warranted. Unfortunately, the latest scandals show the Church more willing to blame the victims and side with the perpetrators than seeking the correct path of justice.

According to The Barna Group, the other contributor to the reversal of perception is the strong stance against sexual minorities. Again, we might point fingers, but for those outside our walls there is no differentiation. These folks identify the Church as harassers and oppressors of individuals who self-identify as something other than straight. This strong indictment helps to paint us as the enemy.

My daughter's friend indicts us. How are we going to respond? "You're wrong!" "You're right but..." Words seem to fall short. Better to speak through actions. Make sure your congregation has an active safer church policy and proclaim it to your community. Stand with the oppressed and speak to all who will hear that God's love is not limited to one set of people. Do this now. Do it during this coming presidential election cycle when these issues will be very public.

Christ only works through the church when we the people of the church become channels for Christ's love and peace. When this happens then we may extend to others the rod and staff that has brought us great comfort.

Interested in submitting your own Reflection for the RMCUCC to use? contact us:

www.rmcc.org / chance@rmcc.org