

MEDIATE THIS !

HOW TO UNITE THE DIVIDED AMONG A FRACTURED FLOCK

BY STEVEN P. DINKIN

Dear Mediator,

My parents are long-time members of a Christian congregation that has split into two warring factions. A new pastor was appointed last year who is an openly gay woman. My parents are proud that their church has embraced a lesbian, but others are furious. They believe homosexuality is against God's laws, and they cannot accept her, so many have left. The remaining congregants are really distressed. They are standing by their pastor, but they miss their friends, and they feel a lingering sense of sadness.

Concerned Son in La Mesa

Dear Concerned Son,

Disputes involving a clash of religious beliefs help illustrate the difference between conflict resolution and conflict management.

In conflict resolution, adversaries set aside grievances to agree on an outcome that benefits everyone. As the collaborative process moves the parties forward, they develop a new personal dynamic, and divisive issues lose their emotional hold.

But when the issues are too big to set aside, we turn to conflict management.

Some adversaries are just too

far apart to reach consensus. If they can find a way to manage their differences — if they can agree to disagree, even on matters of faith — they can co-exist peacefully.

Your parents are not the first members of a divided congregation. Christianity has been weathering such ruptures since the Chalcedonian Schism (also known as the First Great Schism) in 451 A.D.

Throughout history, religious schisms have sprung from differences in doctrinal interpretation, language and even political jurisdiction. In recent years, the most common friction point has been the twin issues of same-sex marriage and the ordination of gay clergy.

As this congregation has learned, attempts to persuade estranged congregants to accept the new pastor will backfire. When people are adhering to spiritual precepts that do not directly harm others, their convictions cannot be dismissed outright.

So how might this spiritual breach be healed enough to keep everyone connected?

The devotional bonds that once joined this flock have fractured. But the congregants have surely developed social ties over the years, and those emotional



GETTY IMAGES

This week's conflict deals with a congregation's acceptance of a gay female pastor who is new to the church.

attachments should still be viable.

Rapprochement should start on a small scale. Your parents could contact a few former congregants whom they know best with an invitation to meet. This should be framed as a reunion of old friends with no pressure tactics and no rehashing of disputes.

After spending time catching up, the envoys could float the idea of reconnecting members of both groups for a special occasion. They

could present the option of organizing a community service project that would appeal to everyone's shared value of Christian charity.

Mediators often try to reboot broken relationships by bringing the parties together in a new environment. A change in setting can open up new channels of communication and new ways of interacting.

We live in an era plagued by rigid tribal identities that whip up

acrimony. Too many of us cling to "our side" of a religious or political divide and shun "those people" who don't adhere to our views.

Nobody should exist in such psychological confinement. Your parents are wise to look for a way out. They can remain fully supportive of their new pastor and her congregation. And they can seek areas of common ground with past congregants.

Opening up a new dialogue may never bring about a formal reconciliation. But it will help relieve the pain both sides have felt since the split. As happens with divorcing couples who reach amicable terms, hostility can give way to acceptance and new bonds of affection.

And then we can put our parents to work on the political breach between Red America and Blue America.

Steven P. Dinkin is a professional mediator who has served as President of the San-Diego based National Conflict Resolution Center since 2003. Do you have a conflict that needs a resolution? Share your story with The Mediator via email at mediate@ncrconline.com or as an online submission by visiting www.ncrconline.com/MediateThis. All submissions will be kept anonymous. If you have questions, email me at lora.cicalo@suniontribune.com

NOTEBOOKS

From Union-Tribune reporting staff

OUTDOORS: ERNIE COWAN

Hiking is good when weather is bad

Like many kids, my boots are happy when covered in mud.

They are really happy now.

Several hikes in the past two weeks have encountered muddy spots along dirt trails, but the latest in the Volcan Mountains north of Julian was mud all the way.

The words of an old friend echoed in my ears as I began to hike. "The best outdoor photos and hikes happen when the weather gets bad," he told me.

The weather was certainly bad. I could smell snow and the winter chill, magnified by the brisk wind, seeped through my hiking pants as I started west on the Kanaka Loop Trail at the Santa Ysabel East Preserve.

A misty rain was falling, mixed with occasional specks of ice that stung my cheek because I was walking into the wind. The trees at the crest of Volcan Mountain were already encased in a white cocoon of hoarfrost and water from the recent series of steady rains seemed to ooze from the decomposed granite trail.

Surprisingly, there were quite a few hikers on the trail. But it wasn't like a summer hike where you spend a few minutes chatting with fellow travelers. A smile and brief

wave were about all that was exchanged as heads dipped to avoid the harsh wind.

Misty rain would come and go, but threatening clouds continued to build. Over the howling wind I heard a gobbling and looked to the south where there were about 30 wild turkeys feeding in a meadow, seemingly unconcerned by the nasty weather.

Temperatures had to be down to nearly freezing, and walking into the wind was not the most enjoyable way to go. At 2 miles or so into the hike, it was time to start back.

While the sputtering rain had not been a factor, the darkening clouds seemed to be sending a signal to seek a drier place.

Almost like the storm waited for me to get to shelter, it began to snow as I slammed the door of my truck.

Now warm and comfortable, the words of my old friend returned as I rounded a corner to see a spectacular view of sun rays darting down through gathering storm clouds on the oak-studded hills.

He was right, some of the best hikes and best pictures happen when the weather gets bad.

Email ernie@packtrain.com

Storm clouds float over the hills near Julian.

ERNIE COWAN

FROM THE PUBLISHER: JEFF LIGHT

Union-Tribune publisher apologizes for offensive editorial cartoon

Steve Breen's editorial cartoon from Friday's newspaper should not have been published and we have removed it from our website. At The San Diego Union-Tribune, we take matters of race and social justice seriously, which means handling these topics with care. That did not happen in this case. The cartoon drew an ironic parallel between two august figures — James Baldwin and Toni Morrison — and Jussie Smollett, the television actor accused of lying to police after posing as the victim of a hate crime.

I have spoken to Steve, and I understand the point he was trying to make. Nonetheless, I consider the cartoon offensive, and not in line with our values as a company. For that, I apologize.

Below, Steve and Editorial and Opinion Director Matthew T. Hall discuss the piece.

Matt: Why did you draw this cartoon?

Steve: Because Jussie Smollett is a public figure who police say lied. And not just a little lie. A giant, elaborate lie. Cartoonists love to go after liars. I had a feeling every other cartoonist was going to draw him winning an Academy Award due to the Oscars on Sunday. I wanted to address it in an original way.

Matt: Why did you pair these iconic African Americans with him?

Steve: All three figures in the cartoon have told stories of the African-American experience. Creating art to make the world understand the black experience is a wonderfully positive thing. Telling a racially divisive lie is a horribly negative thing. So I was contrasting Smollett with Baldwin and Morrison, not comparing. The incongruous third item in a grouping is a common device in humor and I've used it many times in the past. It was not my intention to have anyone think less of these two powerful American voices.

Matt: In hindsight, how could we have

made our point differently?

Steve: Maybe I should have found a way to criticize Smollett with a different approach. A black friend on Facebook suggested I should have depicted Baldwin and Morrison looking aghast at Smollett. That would have been a better solution.

Matt: What can be done differently as we move forward?

Steve: Going forward, before a cartoon involving race runs, I will show it to friends and colleagues of color and ask two questions: "Does this make sense?" and "Regardless of what I'm trying to say, how will this cartoon be perceived?"

Matt: I'll add a few thoughts in closing, starting with an apology of my own.

As the person who OK'd the cartoon, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to offend anyone other than Smollett, and I see now how — and that — we did. You and I handle all sorts of complex, fraught issues, often on deadline, always with care. We go to great lengths to be perceptive and fair in an age when mistakes and missteps are rightly scrutinized.

We've also dealt with racial issues before. Last month, I went to you with the idea of devoting nearly our entire editorial page to that evocative image of Martin Luther King Jr. and President Donald Trump. Last year, you and I visited a classroom at La Jolla High School after a racist cartoon ran in that school's paper to discuss what the students could have done differently.

We should've heeded the advice we gave them then in this situation — and taken more time to think about how others would have perceived the cartoon and shown it to people in the African-American community. We won't fall short that way again. One part of the journalism that we practice on my team that I'm most proud of is our efforts to see issues from different perspectives, to foster community conversation, to learn from it. We have here.

"We should've ... taken more time to think about how others would have perceived the cartoon and shown it to people in the African-American community. We won't fall short that way again."

Matthew T. Hall, U-T editorial and opinion director

FROM THE ARCHIVES

THEOSOPHISTS FOUNDED LOMALAND IN 1897

In 1897, Katherine Tingley laid the cornerstone for the Theosophical Institute on Point Loma. Formally christened the "School for the Revival of the Lost Mysteries of Antiquity," it was called Lomaland.

At Lomaland, Madam Tingley aspired to create a "temple of living light" where children would be taught physical, mental and moral health and to live in harmony with nature.

Lomaland declined after Tingley died in 1929. Architectural remnants of the Utopian community, including two small buildings and the Greek theater, can be found on the campus of Point Loma Nazarene University.

From The San Diego Union, Wednesday, February, 24, 1897.

CORNER STONE LAID.

MYSTIC CEREMONIAL BY THEOSOPHISTS ON POINT LOMA.

Corner Stone of the School for the Revival of the Lost Mysteries of Antiquity Laid by Mrs. Tingle, Successor to Madame Blavatsky and Wm. Q. Judge.

The laying of the corner stone of the School for the Revival of the Lost Mysteries of Antiquity, on Point Loma yesterday afternoon, was accompanied by most impressive ceremonies, and the event will be long remembered by those who were fortunate enough to be present. The programme was set to begin at 2 o'clock, but long before that hour there was a large crowd present. By the time the exercises opened nearly a thousand

people had gathered, about 250 of whom were accommodated with seats, the others standing patiently all afternoon.

That this number of people took the trouble to drive six or seven miles into the country, most of them for the privilege of standing for three hours to witness the unique ceremonies, gave evidence of the deep interest San Diego citizens have in the institution and its proposed work. Every available livery



rig seemed to be brought into requisition, besides bicycles and other conveyances, to get the people to the grounds.

Upon arriving there, what first attracts the attention is the superb view, a portion of which is shown in the cut on this page. This is the view which Charles Dudley Warner designated as one of the three finest in all the world, and it is truly inspiring. The vision is unobstructed for at least fifty miles in all directions, the glistening waters of the Pacific on one side, the bay and the city of San Diego on the other. And while at this favored spot, the fragrance of the orange and lemon is in the air and the ground is covered with a carpet of richest green, the snow-capped mountain range back of the city serves to remind one of less favored climes.

The cornerstone was in the center of a

square enclosed by ropes of cypress, with a large arch made of evergreen at the front, around which were inscribed the words, "Truth, Light, Liberation for Discouraged Humanity," in large letters of purple on a gold background. From the derrick which was used to lower the corner stone to its place, two ropes were stretched, from which floated in the breeze the flags of all the many nations through which the crusaders have passed on their journey around the world.

These flags, which were presented to them by the people of the different countries, seemed to comprise all the colors of the rainbow, making a most pleasing effect with the many contrasts of colors and shapes outlined against the blue sky. There were also several unique banners from different branches of the society, one of antique Egyptian design being especially noticeable. The stars and stripes covered the stand, which was used as a pulpit. Upon it were life-size pictures of Madame Blavatsky, William Q. Judge, Katherine A. Tingley and E.T. Hargrove.

After a number of selections by the City Guard band, those who were to take part in the ceremonies entered the enclosure around the cornerstone, and formed in two lines facing toward the center, while Mrs. Tingley stood at the end next to the cornerstone.

HISTORICAL PHOTOS AND ARTICLES FROM THE SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIBUNE ARCHIVES ARE COMPILED BY MERRIE.MONTEAGUDO@SDUNIONTRIBUNE.COM. SEARCH THE U-T HISTORIC ARCHIVES AT NEWSLIBRARY.COM/SITES/SDUB.