



A purpose driven opportunity

By Anthony McCarthy
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It's hard to explain but on Election Day the world changed.

Given the horrible stain of slavery on America's history, electing a black man to be the leader of the free world says volumes about our country and how far we've come.

I maintained a strict objectivity in my role as a host on public radio. A lot of my friends expressed their frustration. They knew I supported Barack Obama.

I would explain that my job was to present the facts and allow the public to make up their own minds. They didn't care about my media scruples. Either I was on board or I was simply helping elect John McCain.

A ministerial colleague called me when it was announced that evangelical leader Rick Warren was set to deliver the invocation at Obama's inauguration.

She was inconsolable.

She used phrases like religious bigot, homophobe, intolerant and shameful. "Obama betrayed the millions of gays and lesbians who voted for him," she ranted.

And then I said it.

I really like Rick Warren.

I was left to imagine the horror etched across her face as her light-speed tirade came to a screeching halt. She hung up.

Excuse me but didn't Obama ask us to think differently?

He challenged us to reach out and embrace a new political dynamic. A dynamic that believed it was possible for a Democrat to win Southern states and where young people actually showed up to vote.

Warren's best seller, "A Purpose Driven Life," was given to me for Christmas a few years ago and it is something everyone should read.

If you visit his Web site or have heard him give a sermon, it's hard to see him as anything other than a genuine breath of fresh air in a rigid conservative movement.

Warren opposes abortion and he is in no way a friend to the gay and lesbian community. But he does work to eradicate AIDS, speaks out against racism and calls on Christians to protect the environment.

Truthfully, he reminds me more of my less sophisticated relatives than the demon he's been made out to be by gay activists.

I have spent hours debating my gay colleagues over affirmative action or women's equality. I have had gay friends tell me they are uncomfortable with interracial relationships or with transgender people being considered part of our movement.

Warren, like the rest of us, is a complexity of viewpoints. We may have disagreed with his position on Proposition 8, which banned gay marriage in California, but it was his position.

Instead of seeing Obama's invitation as a betrayal, let's use it as an opportunity to have a long overdue conversation with evangelical leaders about hate crimes, adoption and yes, marriage.

Let's expose Warren and Obama to openly gay faith leaders such as the Rev. Troy Perry, Archbishop Carl Bean and Yvette Flounder.

Is there room in our political discourse for people to have genuine disagreements?

Isn't it possible for us to sit down at the same table and fiercely debate why it is discriminatory for gays and lesbians to be denied the more than 1,400 rights and privileges that come with marriage and then get up from that same table, shake hands and respect one another?

My mom and I disagree on many things. She has never joined me at a Pride parade, a P-FLAG meeting and respectfully asks that my partner and I not sleep in the same bed when we visit her home.

But she does love me. Of that I have no doubt. We just have a different view of the world.

I have news for Warren and everyone else opposed to same-sex marriage. It is coming.

It's already legal in Massachusetts and Connecticut, in Canada and in some parts of Europe.

Minds are changing every day because reasonable people have taken the bold step of debating the issue and actually listening to each other. When we listen, we learn and oftentimes change our minds and our hearts.

I respect the Human Rights Campaign and the **National Gay and Lesbian Task Force** immensely. But on the issue of Warren offering a prayer during the inauguration of Barack Obama, I believe they are missing the point and may miss an important opportunity.

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