

Let Us Put Away Childish Things

By Maurice Carter in The Covington News – February 3, 2013

It was front page news last summer when Chick-fil-A restaurants across America became the flashpoint for one of our nation's most divisive issues. Following statements by the restaurant chain's President, Dan Cathy, opposing same sex marriage, gay rights groups organized a nationwide boycott. To counter, conservatives opposed to same-sex marriage flooded the nearest Chick-fil-A to make a statement. It got ugly.

Typical of our times, it was front page news... and then it wasn't.

So, it hardly made a splash last week when Campus Pride founder and executive director Shane Windmeyer wrote a blog in the Huffington Post titled: "Dan and Me: My Coming Out as a Friend of Dan Cathy and Chick-fil-A ." Campus Pride was at the center of last summer's boycott, and Windmeyer loudly called the company out for Cathy's public statements and a history of donating to anti-gay organizations. In a campaign called "Five Simple Facts about Chick-fil-A," Campus Pride accused the company of using a family-controlled non-profit to fund "hate groups."

They suspended the campaign in September, and last week, Windmeyer told us why. In a story featuring a picture taken with Cathy at the December 31 Chick-fil-A Bowl, Windmeyer tells of a friendship that developed following an unexpected call to his personal cell phone on August 10. The man calling was Dan Cathy, and that first conversation lasted over an hour. It was followed by more calls and regular text messages from Cathy.

As Windmeyer tells the story, Cathy was on a quest to understand. His questions were "awkward at times but always genuine and kind." Their phone conversations were eventually augmented by face-to-face meetings between the two men. I can't repeat the whole story here, but I encourage you to find and read it.

During their meetings, Cathy showed his new friend internal documents and not-yet-public tax filings for the WinShape Foundation, which Campus Pride had challenged the prior year. According to Windmeyer, documents from 2011 and 2012 prove WinShape had already stopped giving money to the organizations Campus Pride considered "hate groups" when the "Five Simple Truths" campaign was launched last summer. Yet, Cathy never made a public statement at the time. Instead, he reached out to his critic quietly, on a personal level. He sought to first understand.

Windmeyer is clear neither he nor Cathy changed their deeply held beliefs about same-sex marriage. As a self-described "follower of Christ," Cathy has a definition of marriage that will not change. And, as a man married to another man, Windmeyer has a very different perspective. But they found common ground in refusing to let differing beliefs cause division and hate. Writes Windmeyer: "Dan expressed regret and genuine

sadness when he heard of people being treated unkindly in the name of Chick-fil-A -- but he offered no apologies for his genuine beliefs about marriage.”

Gay rights advocates have questioned Windmeyer’s turnabout. Some groups are reinforcing calls for a continued boycott by the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender communities. But, those people are missing the point. Dan Cathy and Shane Windmeyer understand it’s not about being right or wrong; it’s about listening and understanding. It’s about realizing you must first truly want to understand the other side before expecting them to understand you.

It’s about living true to the words Mr. Cathy can no doubt quote for us from the Bible: “When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.”

I can’t help but wonder what problems we might solve if we could just live up to that wisdom... and emulate the example of Cathy and Windmeyer.

How much more productive and less harmful might the debate over Second Amendment rights and gun laws be if gun advocates and those concerned with public safety would only sit together and seek genuine understanding between them?

How much greater would be the chances a united Covington City Council could stand proudly behind a new City Manager as he or she takes up the torch to lead our community forward?

Concludes Windmeyer: “In the end, it is not about eating (or not eating) a certain chicken sandwich. It is about sitting down at a table together and sharing our views as human beings, engaged in real, respectful, civil dialogue. Dan would probably call this act the biblical definition of hospitality. I would call it human decency. So long as we are all at the same table and talking, does it matter what we call it or what we eat?”

Amen to that. May we all put aside childish things.

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