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Majority Stranger

Posted on [October 8, 2010](#) by Reverend Don Hill, staff member of Northeast Partners in Episcopal Ministry, Wayne County, NY

As you can tell from other postings and the information about me on this site I am a white heterosexual male who has completed a graduate degree. So I qualify for being in the majority structure of our culture and society.

On Sunday I had a wonderful day. I was invited, following the morning service at Grace Church Lyons to attend a Fiesta for Farm Workers, sponsored by Rural & Migrant Ministry. This gathering provided food, music and inspiration to these people, mostly men in attendance, who work such long hours often living in rather primitive conditions in the work camps. They harvest, transport or process food that helps feed the world.

Pastor Rolfi Elivo, who organized the Fiesta gave a speech/sermon on the theme of breaking the isolation of workers, emphasizing that these workers should not be invisible to the majority culture, that they are human beings who should have rights, should not be subjected to abuse, derision and discrimination and should be treated like human beings beloved of God. A rousing call was made for change that would end the often less than humane treatment of migrant workers. But most of the time was spent in singing and animated conversation accentuated by laughter and joy. This was no somber gathering; it **was** a FIESTA. The workers, in various small groups, sang while the rest enjoyed the music joining in on familiar tunes or choruses. They enjoyed the food, but most especially they enjoyed the community they formed. A community of people formed from several nations and language groups; formed not by blood or nationality or common history but formed in work camps and at the fiesta.

Later that afternoon Nancy and I attended the 35th Anniversary Eucharist of Dignity-Integrity Rochester (an organization of the LGBT community and their friends). I have been a celebrant at their weekly service several times a year for the past 9 years. We have come to know and love this community of people.

And in the sermon with a different preacher, different lessons, very different music and a different theme, I heard a familiar echo. You are children of God, beloved and valued. You should not be invisible, and in the shadows. You should not be the object of derision and abuse. And drawing on the recent news of the young college student who committed suicide because of the total invasion of privacy by other students, the preacher called for an end to bias and discrimination on the basis of sexual preference. But most of the time spent celebrating this anniversary was spent in conversation, in laughter, and sharing. This too is a joyful community built not on bloodline but on respect and caring.

And here I was, a straight, privileged white male who, on the same day, had been invited and welcomed into these two communities whose members experience living on the margins; experience discrimination and bias, who have experienced emotional or physical abuse and bullying.

I also realized that in many congregations we struggle to form a cohesive, authentic, caring community. Yet in the midst of adversity these groups on the margins are able to transcend differences and bond into a supportive community becoming an extended family for one another to share concerns, difficulties and joys. They help, support and care about and for one another in very real ways.

We in the society's center, in seats of power, in the midst of the majority culture have much to learn from those we have marginalized about how to open ourselves to one another, and to the spirit of God, to become more fully brothers and sisters to one another.