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Choosing to Stand



C. GARLAND DULAN

It has been said that the world is a bad place, not because it is filled with bad people but because the good people sit idly by and refuse to speak up when they have the opportunity. This allows evil people to control things.

One of the challenges for those who sit on committees and boards is to allow opportunities for multiple perspectives to be shared. Often during discussions, we think of ideas that might be explored, which might reveal another line of reasoning or change the course of potential actions. However, we sit silently either out of respect for the one who is speaking or out of trepidation that our view might be in the minority and cast aside. By our silence, we condone the actions taken if we fail to provide another perspective.

To hold a minority opinion is not necessarily bad. Most of the time, Christ and His disciples found themselves on the side of the minority. Jesus lived in nearly all respects in opposition to the leaders of His time. That does not mean that He was wrong. Christ never lost sight of His mission to save the world. Neither should we. When we are asked to serve on committees and boards, it is our privilege to provide a perspective that could perhaps be gained only through our presence. When issues are introduced that cause us concern, it is our responsibility to speak up. Otherwise, we merely take up space in the room and fail to contribute to the goals of the group.

The possibility that we might be ridiculed should not keep us from carrying out our responsibility to share our ideas. Some of the most fruitful advances come from “out of the box” thinking. All of us can recall instances when during a meeting we had an idea that we later realized might have brought new light to the discussion. But the time had passed. Windows of opportunity are rare, and we must take advantage of them when they present themselves.

I once spoke with a state Supreme Court judge who sentenced defendants to life imprisonment or death. I asked him how he knew whether he had made a correct decision. His reply was that after the sentence was handed out, if he could sleep peacefully, he would stick by his decision, but if he tossed and turned during the night, reviewing the case in his mind and feeling troubled by the decision, he would revisit his earlier decision and change it. The judge stated, “After all, I must live with myself.” What courage it must have taken to change a public decision!

Often, we find it more expedient to remain silent even after it becomes clear that a wrong decision has been made—or when we learn about administrative behavior that is unethical or harmful to an institution or to the church. We need to develop the courage to stand up and address these problems, even if it means revisiting an issue that has already been voted. This is not a popular thing to do, but to live with ourselves, and to fulfill our responsibility to the institution and to the church, we must state our convictions clearly and honestly.

As members of committees and boards, we should share not only our own ideas, but also the perspectives of those who are not on the committee, especially those whose voices cannot be heard, because they are not represented in decision making. This may mean taking a stand that is unpopular, but that is our solemn responsibility. Otherwise, our participation is a waste of time, and we are not rightly serving God and the church.

—C. Garland Dulan