Opinion



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by Dennis Coday

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If I had to choose a quote from our latest print issue that could serve as a motto for the whole edition, I think I'd have to go with Pope Francis' words to the Vatican diplomatic corps advising them to "abandon the familiar rhetoric and start from the essential consideration that we are dealing, above all, with persons."

I was struck by the number of examples in the Jan. 25-Feb. 8 issue of people doing just that, setting aside "the familiar rhetoric" and talking with folks as people.

The No. 1 example of that is found in the dialogue in which the members of Call to Action Nebraska and Bishop James Conley of Lincoln, Nebraska, have been engaged. They are working to reconcile as members of a community after 20 years of animosity. What a dramatic example for all of us in Gospel nonviolence and communion.

The best quote from that story: "During their dialogue with the bishop, there was mutual understanding that no one would be required to reject certain positions. ... They agreed to 'live in that tension.' " Wow, huh?

The honesty and bravery of the group needs to be emulated. Wouldn't we all be better off if we all agreed to "live in that tension"?

Another example of setting aside familiar rhetoric and talking person to person is the "Bishops banter" story we've reprinted from the NZ Catholic. I have a hard time imaging a similarly candid, engaging — and, yes, public — conversation happening between U.S. bishops and a selection of U.S. young people. Bishop Stephen Lowe said on the church's relationship to our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters, we are at a "Galileo moment" and on this issue the young people in the church are prophetic.

Wow, huh?

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But for stepping away from the "familiar rhetoric," you can't beat Bishop Franz-Josef Bode of Osnabruck, Germany. "I'm concerned with fundamental questions of how we deal with each other [like person to person]," he said. " 'Marriage for all' differs clearly from the church's concept of marriage, [but, you know what,] it's now a

political reality." Same-sex marriage is legal, he says, so how are we going to deal with it? By denying funerals to spouses? By treating transgender people like "collateral damage in the culture war"?

"How [are we] accompanying [our faithful] pastorally and liturgically?" Bode asks. "Shouldn't we be fairer, given that there is much that's positive?"

Wow, huh? Not only is he asking questions instead of providing the answers, he's admitting something positive could come out of a loving, committed relationship, even one between two people of the same sex.

He's trying to live with the tension.

In her review of *Pro-Choice and Christian: Reconciling Faith, Politics, and Justice* by the Rev. Kira Schlesinger, Kelly Stewart writes, "There is much … to recommend the book to moderate readers interested in learning more, and thinking better, about abortion." I couldn't agree more. I picked up the book myself after I saw the review come in, and I found it very helpful as a clear summary of the issues involved and articulating the views of what Schlesinger calls the "muddled middle." Some — no matter where they fall on the pro-abortion, anti-abortion issue — will find fault with it, but those looking to do some bridge-building will be hard-pressed to find something better to begin that exercise.

If you want to engage with that book, you will have to "abandon the familiar rhetoric" and be prepared to "live in that tension."

[Dennis Coday was named editor of NCR Jan. 1, 2012. He has worked for NCR since 2003.]