

## IRREFUTABLE DATA POINTS - Susan Russell

"Legislation doesn't change hearts and minds."

That's a statement I hear a lot these days -- and will hear more and more as we move further down this road to Minneapolis and General Convention. It's usually intended to end the discussion about how we should respond to the ongoing questions regarding the blessing of same sex unions -- offered by those whose desire it is that we do NOT bring the question to a vote -- offered as what my friend Kevin calls "an irrefutable data point."

Well, I've decided they are right.

The recent conversations about women and power have reminded me how few hearts and minds were actually changed on the controversial issue of women's ordination -- the LAST great schism that didn't split the church -- by the vote that was taken in Minneapolis in 1976.

I myself wasn't at all convinced women's ordination was such a great idea. At least I wasn't in 1976 -- and it wasn't legislation that changed my mind. It was the incarnational experience of a woman as priest in 1988 on a Cursillo weekend.

Now don't get me wrong -- I was appropriately "liberal" about the concept. I mean, I was all for the ERA and women's rights and everything. But when it came to me, personally -- well, I wanted a "real priest" -- and what that looked like to me was a "Father" -- because that was the only image I had for priesthood. So when I left for the weekend, knowing there'd be a woman priest on staff, I was rather condescendingly "open to the experience" -- and patting myself on the back for being so. A perfect set up for the Holy Spirit.

On the opening night, as I sat in the silence of the candlelit chapel after the priest gave the opening meditation, I realized that it was the first time I had ever been cognitively sorry that a preacher had stopped preaching. As I walked back to the dorm room following the service it was already clear to me that I was going to have to re-evaluate my whole position on this issue. And by 1993 I was in seminary.

The 1976 vote in Minneapolis didn't change my mind or touch my heart. She did. But her ministry would not have been able to if the vote hadn't happened. And I think today of the hundreds of women whose gifts and graces have enlivened our worship, inspired our spirits, challenged our intellect, pastored our people in the years since we last gathered in Minneapolis. I try to imagine this church without them. I not only can't?" I don't want to. And I can say the same about scores of gay and lesbian people -- lay and ordained -- living lives of faithful service, committed to God and to each other -- touching hearts, changing minds, living the Gospel.

I believe that it is their witness and example that the Holy Spirit will use to change the hearts and minds of those still wrestling with the full inclusion of GLBT persons into the Body of Christ. And I am convinced that it is our job in Minneapolis in 2003 to take the

prophetic step forward which will enable those changes to occur.

Yes, it's a big deal to take make this move out ahead of the rest of the Anglican Communion -- but in doing so we're claiming the blessing of our own history. It was risky to march in Selma and to process in Philadelphia -- it was with fear and trembling that this great church stepped out in 1976 on the question of women's ordination -- amid threats of schism and accusations of apostasy, heresy -- and worse. And we are poised to do so again -- amid the same threats, the same accusations -- and, I believe, inspired by the same Spirit.

Scripture tells us that what is of the Spirit will flourish -- and what is not will wither away. The witness and wisdom of the women of the church have flourished since General Convention acted courageously and faithfully-- with fear and trembling -- by opening to them all orders of ministry.

That's an irrefutable data point.

It is time for us to act as faithfully on behalf of GLBT people. Legislation doesn't change hearts and minds -- the Spirit does. But She's counting on us to participate with Her in the process when we return to Minneapolis in July. Let's not disappoint Her!