

Troublesome pigeon-holes and secular clergy



Highland Views

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Guest columnist

In her memoir, "Dust Tracks on a Road," African-American writer, Zora Neale Hurston writes:

"Grown people know that they do not always know the why of things, and even if they think they know, they do not know where and how they got the proof." There is great wisdom packed

into that sentence. She goes on: "Hence the irritation they show when children keep on demanding to know if a thing is so and how the grown folks got the proof of it. It is so troublesome because it is disturbing to the pigeon-hole way of life."

Sit back and read those lines again. Through my years as a chaplain among people often pigeon-holed by their community (those with mental illness, suffering from addiction, living with a criminal record or without stable housing) I listened and learned; I got schooled. As I used to say, my real education began in "the seminary of the

streets." I learned a whole lot about human beings, the best and worst things we do, and I learned quite a bit about pigeon-holes.

According to The Cornell Lab ("All About Birds"): "City pigeons nest on buildings and window ledges. In the countryside they also nest on barns and grain towers, under bridges, and on natural cliffs." In other words, pigeons find someplace to settle wherever they are. They don't just live in "holes." They can be creative, inventive, trying new places to find rest and make a nest.

As a secular clergyperson I'm interested in those places people find to nest,

to settle. I like to find out where someone comes from. I also like to know where someone is "coming from" in their thoughts, ideas, beliefs. When we're open to learn, not threatened by diversity of beliefs, the world can be a fascinating place for all of us pigeons!

Chris Highland served as a Protestant minister and interfaith chaplain for many years. He is a teacher, writer, freethinker and humanist celebrant. Learn more at chighland.com. Chris' new book, "Broken Bridges: Building Community in a World Divided by Beliefs," is now available on Amazon.