

A remodeled house, not a new foundation

By [Janet Edwards](#)

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I was enjoying brunch after presiding at the lovely wedding of two wonderful young men. The father of one of the grooms sat down beside me looking eager to talk, so I asked him to tell me his story.

I already knew his family was a pillar of their very conservative Presbyterian church. His son had been, for many years, the sound man for Sunday worship and a member of the praise band.

When his son came out as gay, the man said, he just did not know what to think. To make sense of it he would have to rethink his stance on homosexuality. And he felt that if he rethought that, he would have to rethink everything about his faith. All of a sudden he felt like he was on sinking sand.

At the time, I couldn't find the words I wanted to speak to this man who so clearly loves his son and loves his Lord. Since then, I've spent a good deal of time pondering this cry from a devout Christian's heart. Perhaps I have the words now.

Yes, evangelical Christians are rethinking their stance toward LGBT people, but this does not require "rethinking everything." I suggest we consider an image Jesus uses for our faith: the house with the sure foundation built upon the rock.

[Jesus teaches](#) that the one who hears his words and does them is "like a man building a house, who dug deeply and laid the foundation on the rock." Jesus himself is that rock, [as the 19th-century hymn refrain based proclaims](#). Jesus and his words—love God and your neighbor—are firm beneath us; they guide what we are to do.

When we read scripture with an eye toward loving Christ and loving LGBT people—like this father loves his son—what we are changing are the trappings of the house. Think of it as adding a porch or a room for being together, for receiving one another with the love Jesus desires and commands of us.

As we remodel the house, the foundation remains strong and secure. Our reevaluation of the place of LGBT people in the eyes of God actually strengthens the foundation of our faith in Christ: our rootedness in the love God has for all God's children, and our consistent living out of that love in this world.

Yes, some parts of our spiritual house will be different. We will, at the very least, suspend our judgment of homosexuality. But even this strengthens our faith in God as the one who knows all and judges all. It strengthens our humility in the acknowledgement that we are creatures made in the image of God—we are not God. This is a rebuilding of our spiritual house while holding fast to the rock upon which it is built.

Rethinking our stance toward LGBT people has always been about the house, not the rock.

I know there are Christian leaders who insist that rethinking the place of LGBT people in God's heart undermines church foundations. I can understand this. They have much invested in the trappings of the present house, and something to gain in slowing the remodeling by claiming a threat to the rock beneath. What I see threatened is their place in the house.

One example of this is [the astounding vote in Ireland this year to approve marriage equality](#). Some observers saw this as a denunciation of the Catholic Church, and it may be that from the perspective of the Catholic leadership. It strikes me as a resounding affirmation of Jesus' bedrock teaching, captured in the 21st-century proclamation, "Love wins!" The marriage vote witnesses to an amazing remodeling of the Irish Catholic house, very much still built upon the rock.

We can all take heart in the fact that remodeling or repairing our spiritual house has been an element of Christian life since the earliest days of the church. The success of the proclamation of good news to the Gentiles required rethinking and expanding the house. Gaining power under Constantine, providing social structure in medieval Europe, sorting out differences in the Reformation, accommodating cultural nuances among national Orthodox churches or in far-flung mission fields—all of these demanded remodeling the house. Yet the foundation in Christ has never shifted to sinking sand.

This is what I wish I had told the father on his son's wedding day: we are in the middle of a major remodeling project in the church, driven to a large extent by the

courageous faith of LGBT Christians—like his son—who patiently insist on room in the house for them. This loving, faithful father has rebuilt his spiritual house to provide that room. In doing this, I see him strengthening his foundation in Christ. He is an inspiration to me and to all of us seeking to build our faith upon this rock.