

Traveling Companion: Don't Blush in my Office!

Fr. Michael Tracey

I inherited an office that was paneled. Its long, dark, furrowed panels rose like lines of longitude on its walls. After a little encouragement, I decided it was time for a change. I went to both "Lowe's" and "Home Depot" to pick up some paint swatches and see if they could wet my appetite to do something more colorful with my office. Armed with a smorgasbord of colors and shades I arrived home to begin the task of narrowing my color selection for my office. I invited the secretary and other priest to choose their own color scheme for their particular office. With some professional insights, we decided.

Deciding on a color scheme is a very personal endeavor. It not only reflects one's tastes but also character as well as what kind of environs one wishes to create.

Of course, people had lots of suggestions for my office. Some said I should choose a light green. Maybe that was because I was Irish. Others indicated I might choose a sky blue. Maybe because my eyes are blue. No one suggested that I paint it the color I eventually painted it.

I put self-adhesive liner paper on the walls to cover up the lines of panel longitudes. Then I decided to paint the walls my color choice.

When I told some friends that I was painting my office "Tomahawk Red," I got lots of reactions. One told me that the color red makes one hungry. I indicated that I had no problem with that. In fact, I have no problem being hungry. I eat and nibble with great regularity. Another friend was amazed at my choice of color and indicated, "That's not you. You would never paint your office red! I just don't believe you." Others, emphatically said, "Red!" indicating an air of puzzlement at my choice.

During the weekend, I did paint my office "Tomahawk Red." Those who saw it, indicated they liked it. I'm not sure if they were being polite or genuine but I accepted their comments.

This whole experience led me to think of how often we put people in "frames," "box" them up; confine their thinking "within the box." Once we frame people, put them in boxes or think of them in the context of fitting within a certain box, then we think we can relate to them because we have projected upon them our own tailor-made straight-jacketed expectations of them. We find it difficult to accept, relate to and understand people who "think outside the box" we have created for them.

Jesus had the same problem. People projected on him their expectations of him. He piped his one tune but they would not dance to it. He ate and drank with the "wrong" people. He had the audacity to talk with "women." He didn't accept their offer to be their political savior. He criticized their posturing for front seats, places of honor and marks of respect; instead he told that that the last should be first and the first last.

When some people say, "what if," I say "why not!" when some people say, "that person rubs me the wrong way," I say, "that's good because they are different." When some people say "I don't expect you..." I say, "Let me surprise you." When someone says, "I know you," I say, "Is that my name and social security number?" When someone says, "You would never do that," I say, "Try me."

So, the next time, you come into my office and you see "red," don't blush! That's just me!