



a MATTER of SPIRIT

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“We are the people we’ve been waiting for”

In these times of change and challenge, we remind ourselves not to lose heart. We remember that God has given us the gifts and talents we need to respond to today’s challenges with courage and love.

In this issue of *A Matter of Spirit*, we look at various ways in which we, the people, can build a more just and peaceful world.

Nick Mele looks at how we can participate in and influence our federal government. *Cara Evanson* explores the importance of a free press to a functioning democracy. *Andrew Hanauer* reflects on the divisions in our society and how faith leaders can help to bridge those gaps. We look at three examples of people drawn to activism. *Rick Reynolds* shares some thoughts on how we can sustain our spirit to continue the work of justice.

We hope these perspectives will encourage you to explore the ways in which together we can be the people we’ve been waiting for.

Sustaining Spirituality to do Justice

Such confidence we have through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

1st Corinthians 3:4-6

By Rev. Rick Reynolds

I came to my work with homeless people in Seattle after 12 years of parish ministry. I now cringe, thinking about my grandiose vision and confidence when I arrived at Operation Nightwatch. One single moment stripped away any pretense I had about myself, my competency, my approach to providing care for homeless people late at night.

Nightwatch began 50 years ago as an ecumenical ministry of presence in downtown Seattle. Clergy, priests, nuns, seminarians, and deacons took turns going out late at night—visiting dive bars, walking dark alleys, hanging out with homeless people.

Responding to desperate people wanting ba-

sic safe shelter was a priority. Nightwatch morphed into a late-night place for food and shelter, housing for seniors, and we still walk the city streets.

My second month on the job, I stood in a room full of homeless people, facing Ronnie, one of our guests. He was an out-of-control guy who could not restrain his mouth. Wherever he went, there was trouble. We would try to find a place for Ronnie to sleep, but the shelter workers would tell us, “Don’t ever send us that guy again!” Ronnie’s mental health and alcohol addiction left him with no options. Each night he would eat a meal, take a blanket, and go sleep in the park.

But tonight was different. Ronnie stood in front of me with a big crooked grin on his face. He held in his hand an entry ticket to a local shelter. He smiled and asked me this question: “Pastor Rick, ain’t I beautiful?”

I did some quick ministerial theologizing to cover myself. “Yes, Ronnie, you’re beautiful,” I lied. He’s made in the image of



CC- Matt Wilson



God, but it was pretty obscure to my middle class way of thinking. Anyway, I figured I was through with him for the night.

“Then hug me.”

I tried to get up next to Ronnie to throw one arm around his shoulder, but he turned and threw both his arms around me in a massive bear hug, his rough whiskers digging into my cheek. The smell of body odor, tobacco and cheap wine descended on us like a fog. He pulled back, kissed me on the cheek, and went off into the dark night, to a mat on the floor of a shelter.

My first impulse, sadly, was self-congratulatory. “That was really a God-moment,” I told myself. Later, on reflection, an uncomfortable question popped into my mind: “Who was being ugly in that situation with Ronnie?”

I had to acknowledge that Ronnie had shown unabashed love for me, while I tried keeping him at arm’s length.

Jesus does not keep people at arm’s length. Jesus loves all the people who we find difficult to love. Rich. Poor. Republicans. Democrats. Anarchists. Libertarians. And maybe more to the point, he loves the irritating coworker in the next cubicle, the neighbor who has a junk car in the front yard, the brother-in-law who forgot to pay back the \$100 he borrowed last year. Yep, Jesus loves all the crabby, broken, mean

people. Thank God.

Because, I finally realized: **Some-times I’m the Ronnie.** Sweet-tempered, loving, kind, gracious me. I can be downright hard to love at times. Yes, sometimes I’m the Ronnie—more often than I care to admit.

“You want to avoid burnout? This is the way. Walk in it.”

This is the great challenge to all of us who follow Jesus—to get over ourselves, and learn to love the people in our lives who are not easy to love, wherever that leads us. What does it matter if you only love the people who are like-minded, good-looking, smart, and well-off? We are called to love the Ronnies of the world, the prickly people, the folks who irritate us.

For all my peers in social action ministry, I urge you—consider your own brokenness.

In the language of recovery, we have to recognize our own powerlessness. We cannot resurrect ourselves. We cannot resurrect the communities that we feel so passionately about. We turn our lives and our work over to the only One who can accomplish the resurrection work we want. Once we get it off our shoulders, the yoke is easy, the burden light.

You want to avoid burnout? This is the way. Walk in it.

As the homeless preacher told me

once (try to say this out loud with an Oklahoma twang), “If yer not rollin’ in the Spirit, yer gonna git tuckered out.”

But how do we throw off the tyranny of busyness, when there is so much to be done? We live in an age of fragmentation. A steady stream of emails,

Facebook postings, tweets, radio, television, podcasts and text messages, distract us and trap us.

We carry smart phones which guarantee we never get a break from messaging of all kinds. This fragmentation means we are never really at rest. Is there room for activists to be quiet? With all the noise, how can we manage to hear the still small voice?

If we don’t take control of the messaging, it will take control of us. **Time to unplug.**

I’ve been experimenting with a Sabbath from my iPhone. I spent an anxious, restless day with no phone. It was fantastic. One liberated day of the week brought relief—the antidote to overwhelming messages and the stranglehold of technology. I learned that the world will not fall apart without me.

Another practice I have found critically important—being in the moment—aware and inwardly quiet throughout a busy day.

The importance of being quiet in the midst of the busyness was impressed upon me this week. I wear my clerical collar and visit my homeless friends late



Nicklesville. CC-Joe Mabel

at night—in a homeless camp, at a shelter. We bring socks, blankets, and hot pizza in the night. Thursday night was a wild stormy night in Seattle. Rolling thunder, gusts of wind, pelting rain in bursts. I arrived at the homeless camp which is currently located in Shoreline and put hot pizzas into the food tent. Most of the camp residents were hunkered down in their tents. A few people ventured out to get pizza when they heard the announcement. But nobody really seemed interested in talking. The usual friendly banter and occasional serious conversation did not happen this night.

My mood matched the weather as I left the camp. I was wet, tired, cranky. I've been doing this for 35 years. I'm getting too old for this. I'm feeling it. I have enough to do as an executive director. Maybe it's time to hang it up. I mean, what's the point?

My next stop was a homeless shelter in Rainier Valley. I'm clutching frozen pizzas to my chest, toes squishing in wet shoes, the internal dialogue raging. On the way to and from the car to the shelter door, I shut off my inner whining, for a brief moment of silence. Very brief.

The voice in my head asked "Do you do this because people are thankful to you for the pizza? Or, are you doing this because it is the right thing to do?"

It's 10:00 pm. I'm soaking wet. But now I'm smiling. Suddenly, mystically,

I was refreshed. I'm doing the right thing, because it's the right thing to do. I'm not here for the thanks and praise of homeless people. This is what all of us are called to do—to love our neighbor—through service and advocacy. Our goal is not the praise and adulation of those neighbors. "So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'" (Luke 17:10)

In the middle of the storm, I'm learning to shut up and listen.

"This is what all of us are called to do—to love our neighbor—through service and advocacy."

Another discipline I've found helpful is so obvious that I almost didn't mention it: a commitment to participation in a faith community, in which Word and Sacrament are practiced. In the context of worship we enter into God's story of redemption. Our work is placed within the context of God's redeeming of the entire creation. The act of presenting ourselves allows for a reformation of our character. We grow in Christ-likeness through this practice of being present and participating in the life of the Church.

And no, it is not always easy. For many of us, church becomes the place where we encounter Ronnie. We may be with people of wildly differing val-

ues. We experience pettiness, internal turf wars, clergy issues, hypocrisy, and brokenness. Yet, it is for these reasons Jesus died, and He calls us to practice grace. And if you have given up for some reason, please try again. We need each other, desperately.

In AA, newly sober people are encouraged to go to 90 meetings in 90 days. There is something that becomes evident very quickly. People cling to those meetings like a drowning person clings to a life-preserver. Their safety—their salvation—relies on the spiritual growth and accountability they find in those church basements and fellowship halls. Everyone who walks in begins at the same point.

"I'm Rick, and I'm broken." A drowning person is not that particular. This is why I cling to my faith community, and find solace in the readings, homily and Eucharist. I need this food for my soul.

And I find myself back where I started. Too broken to properly love Ronnie. Recognizing my own powerlessness to change the world in my own strength. Needing to unplug, and listen in the storm. And finally, to let myself be fed with spiritual food, through Christ who strengthens me.

▲ *Rev. Rick Reynolds is a Free Methodist chaplain who has been serving as Executive Director of Operation Nightwatch since 1994. His book "Street Stories" is available on Amazon.*

Who's in Charge?

The U.S. System of Government

By Nick Mele

In primary school, I learned the basic outline of the American system of government: the separation of powers, legislators and president elected by secret ballots and federal judiciary appointed by the president and confirmed by the Senate. The United States is sometimes described as a democracy, other times as a republic, but either name indicates that power flows from the citizens up to the governing apparatus. A full democracy is a government in which the citizens exercise full power directly. In a republic, a form of democracy, citizens exercise their power through their elected representatives and by more direct means such as ballot initiatives. In school textbooks, the system was neatly diagrammed, with three boxes representing the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government, with lines and arrows indicating their relationships, and usually some symbol to indicate that all their powers derived directly or indirectly from us, the populace. The diagrams represented a simplified image of American democracy, omitting complications like the tension between the national and state governments and focusing on the checks and balances built in to the separation of executive, legislative and judicial prerogatives. These diagrams and descriptions were adequate for most purposes right up to the early Cold War era.

Since then, new institutions and influences have further complicated the simple picture of three centers of power mutually limiting one another's ability to dominate the national agenda. Now, corporate donors have an outsized influence over the legislative process, their paid lobbyists often drafting



bills that become law; political action funds and other new institutions channel money from wealthy individual and corporate donors to candidates for elective office; gerrymandering, drawing electoral districts to favor one party, almost guarantees “safe” seats to the majority party; and fake news sites and segmented programming misrepresent candidates, policies, and events to an electorate that lives increasingly inside isolated bubbles of our own conscious or unconscious choosing. News sources have lost public trust and the tradition of investigative journalism as a “fourth branch” of government has

been swamped by the 24 hour news cycle and the need for ever new headlines.

In addition to these current ills, throughout its history different groups of people have been excluded from voting, so the United States has never been a full democracy; until very recently, a series of amendments to the Constitution and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 had extended the right to vote to African-Americans, women and citizens eighteen years of age or older. (African-Americans were not granted their Constitutional right to vote until 1870, women until 1920.) The Voting Rights Act offered special protection to the voting rights of people of color until the Supreme Court struck down some provisions of the Act in 2013.¹

The Constitution clearly outlines the three branches of the federal government—Congress, the Presidency and the federal judiciary—and lays out the powers appropriate to each branch. The legislature's powers and limitations are most thoroughly, and lengthily, described in the Constitution. Judging by how much space the constitution devotes to each branch, the drafters and signers clearly gave priority to the legislature. Likewise, the rights of the individual states seemed more important to the founders than we now think of them.

Of course, since the Constitution was signed toward the end of the eighteenth century, many things have changed. At times, the Constitution has met new challenges; in addition to the extensions of the vote mentioned above, Constitutional amendments outlawed slavery, allowed Congress to levy an income tax and provided for direct election of members of the Senate. In their

time, each of these changes was a necessary and forward-looking measure. The Constitution has not yet changed in response to new technologies, like the internet or cell phones, or to recent developments like fake news and the influence of political action committees funded by wealthy donors. These changes have been addressed through legislation or judicial decisions.

While Constitutional amendments could be one way to adapt our government system to changes in our society, there are other ways to change the current system. Any method of change requires some form of direct action. Elected officials and their staff members consider face-to-face encounters, telephone calls and handwritten letters the most effective ways for constituents to affect legislation. This is true at all levels of government, from one's municipality through one's county and state governments to the federal level. In view of the impact of local elections, every effort is important. Pick one issue or piece of legislation and let all your elected representatives hear from you once a month until the issue is addressed in a way that satisfies you. It is important to develop relationships with our representatives and senators. We can't take them to lunch, offer them speaking engagements or write legislative drafts for them like corporate lobbyists, but we can contact them regularly to thank them when appropri-

ate as well as to let them know how we want them to vote on the bills under consideration.

Media campaigns are another form of action for change. In one county in Washington State, a small group of citizens concerned about the effects of fossil fuel industry donations on local government started meeting once a month to learn about local issues, often from a local expert, and then wrote letters to the press about the issue on the spot. One member reviewed the letters for accuracy and clarity and then submitted them to local media outlets in a steady stream. In the next county council election, candidates in favor of sustainable development won a majority and were instrumental in passing rules that addressed several environmental concerns. The effort began when one woman, worried about climate change and air quality, asked herself what she could do; her answer was to recruit a few others to attend a monthly soup supper at her home. Others invited friends or acquaintances who knew the issues and still others offered tips on writing letters to the editor.

Letters to the editor and opinion pieces are also useful as ways to introduce issues and

concerns to the public, informing other citizens about them, and holding elected officials accountable. In addition, most representatives and senators pay particular attention to the media outlets in their districts and have counted letters to the editor as well as letters directly to their offices as evidence of what voters want them to do on their behalf. It is not enough to cast our votes every November, we must stay informed and regularly converse about the issues with our elected officials and with our fellow citizens, especially those whose views differ from our own. By doing so as often and as directly as possible, we put names and faces to the people who elect them, and offer a reality check against the assertions of ideologues and corporate representatives.

During election season, many citizens and citizen groups used signs quoting the first three words of the preamble to our Constitution: "We the people..." It is time to go beyond the preamble by studying the issues and acting as citizens should to hold our government accountable for the state of the common good.

▲ *Nick Mele, a retired U.S. diplomat, spent three decades explaining American government and society to foreign audiences. He continues to work internationally to prevent war.*

¹ *Shelby County, Alabama v. Holder, Attorney General, Et Al. (June 25, 2013).*



How do we bridge the divide?

By Andrew Hanauer

In the days following the Presidential Election, while Americans yelled at each other over Facebook and attacks against Muslims and immigrants spiked, a group of faith leaders sat down and mapped out a different vision for the country.

They talked about how to bridge the growing divisions in our society, how to address the growing isolation we feel from each other, the “bubbles” we increasingly find ourselves living in. They talked about how to build a movement for a better way of treating each other—and how to begin by living out the values behind that movement.

The end result was the organization I direct: the One America Movement. Our goal is to build that movement, and to start by living it—by bringing people together across religious, racial and political divides to participate in community service projects together and then sit down and have a meal and a conversation together. To talk with each other respectfully. To learn from each other. To listen to each other.

One of our first projects is to bring together Jews, Muslims and Evangelical Christians in Washington, DC, Pennsylvania, Minnesota, New Hampshire and other states. In Chicago, we’re working with veterans to build a Habitat for Humanity house for a refugee family.

For me, the “aha” moment came two weeks after the election. I was hanging out with some friends when the topic turned to politics. At that moment, my friend said something that shouldn’t have shocked me, but it did.

“I’m a Republican who voted third

party,” he said. “I work at an energy company. And I don’t know a single person who voted for Trump. Or at least one who will admit they did.”

I knew our country was deeply divided long before the campaign began. I knew that while the election deepened some of those divides, it mostly just exposed them. I knew this intellectually, but my friend’s remark was stunning. This is a white, male, Christian Republican who lives in a politically mixed county and works in a conservative occupation and he’s saying that his personal “bubble” was so thick that he didn’t know a single person who voted for the man who had just been elected president.

“Our society has been fracturing for some time.”

If we’d been paying attention, however, we would have seen this coming. Our society has been fracturing for some time.

I take the train from Washington to New York on a regular basis. In between the high ceilings of Union Station and the wonderland of mid-town Manhattan, the train passes by abandoned row houses and hollowed-out industrial towns. Not that you need to board a train to experience this. Homeless men and women lie in the nooks of the entrance to Union Station, the US Capitol glittering just blocks away.

Whereas a majority of Americans were once middle-class, now a majority are either poor or rich. For many Americans—black, brown and white, liberal, moderate and conservative—you can feel the fractures.

After the election, we saw a spike in hate crimes: swastikas painted on synagogue walls, hijabs ripped off heads. These are symptoms—symptoms of a “bubble” society where racism and bigotry are the most extreme manifestations of our isolation from each other. We retreat into social media where algorithms push us to read only the opinions we already agree with. New literature released this year looks at how that isolation is now spreading into our physical communities, making Ann Arbor, MI and Santa Monica, CA and Alexandria, VA more and more alike while the rural communities in between those cities resemble a different planet altogether. This phenomenon even inspired a New York Times article this year entitled: “Travel abroad in your own country.”

We’ve seen this before. A little over 100 years ago, America experienced a deep fracturing. Immigration transformed our cities overnight: in 1860, Chicago had 30,000 residents, but in 1910 it had 2 million. This era gave us the growth of the Ku Klux Klan, the Chinese Exclusion Act and racist books like *The Passing of the Great Race*, which inspired the Nazis. There was also real pain and fear, enormous income inequality and elitism that ignored the needs of working class people of all political stripes.

But in the midst of today’s fractures is another critical factor: the shrinking of religion in American life. Writing in *The Atlantic*, Peter Beinart notes that the conventional wisdom was that the growing secularization of America (in contrast to the “moralizing” of the religious establishment) would heal divides in US society. But it hasn’t. “As

Americans have left organized religion, they haven’t stopped viewing politics as a struggle between ‘us’ and ‘them,’” Beinart writes. “Many have come to define us and them in even

One America Movement Faith Leaders gather for their first meeting.



more primal and irreconcilable ways.” And so our country is fractured, our society in danger of falling into a void of divisiveness and hatred.

Into this void, our priests, rabbis, pastors, imams and women religious cannot blink. Into this void they cannot say, “the country is growing secular, our voices are not wanted.” Because as Beinart notes, one of the prime objections that those in the white nationalist movement have of religion is its “universalism,” the radical notion that all of God’s children have value. The radical notion that grouping the world into “us vs them” isn’t just a recipe for conflict and genocide. It’s also a recipe for spiritual death.

No, into this void faith leaders and faith communities and people of conscience of all beliefs cannot blink because their universalism is the only ideology capable of healing divisiveness. The only ideology capable of challenging the twin evils of elitism and racism. The only ideology that says that the person who cleans your house is as worthy as you are of a bright future, even though she isn’t rich, and even if she isn’t white.

It’s why faith leaders were at the center of founding the One America Movement. They recognize the need to heal divisions, not just because it feels good, but because it is consistent with the central tenets of their faith. Take Christianity for instance. Jesus doesn’t judge from a distance—he steps into personal relationships with the people he meets. He doesn’t just talk with people who agree with him, or have intellectually stimulating conversations or even disagreements with peers. He wades into the waters of humanity, touching people, talking to people, listening to people.

Building authentic relationships with other human beings is how we live out the belief that all people have value. It’s how we model for politicians how to work together. It’s how we begin to heal a fractured, fearful, violent society. It’s how we ensure that when an external shock comes—a terror attack, a divisive election, a foreign country spreading fake news stories intended to divide us—our societal bonds hold.

And building authentic relationships while serving our communities is how we rebuild our country both spiritually and physically.

Most spiritual traditions teach that the world is interconnected. In this moment, we would do well to remember that truth. You can hide in your Facebook news feed or in a segregated neighborhood. You can listen only to conservative talk radio or you can move to Canada. But our interconnectedness means that ultimately, our isolation won’t save us.

The truth is, it was never going to.

▲ *Andrew Hanauer is the Director of the One America Movement (www.werepair.org/oneamerica).*



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A free and open press is vital to a healthy democracy. The information disseminated by the press enables citizens to become informed, and informed citizens have the agency to make intentional choices about whom to elect as their representatives and what to do in support of or opposition to actions taken by government officials. Fake news presents an incorrect picture of what is actually happening in the world, and thus diminishes our agency as citizens to make informed choices. Furthermore, if we do not trust the press we can no longer use the information it disseminates as a decision-making tool and we lose the check it provides on governmental authority. Uninformed or misinformed citizens have considerably less power at the polls and in the streets—a shaky foundation for a democratic society.

Fake news

Fake news predates social media and even the internet. Ever since the advent of the press people have exploited the opportunity to spin news stories to their advantage and disseminate untruths under the guise of authority. One notable example is the yellow journalism phenomenon of the 1890s in which several major newspapers of the era published sensationalist headlines and exaggerated stories in an attempt to increase circulation and readership.

Our current age of social media enables similar types of journalistic embellishments to occur at a breakneck pace and on a massive scale. Historically, the reach of fake news was limited to the readership of a physical newspaper. Technological advances over time have increased the power of the individual to more easily and quickly share news. Today, social media enables us to spread news, real or fake, to hundreds of people with just one post or click of a

“like” button.

The term “fake news” gained traction as a buzzword during the recent presidential election. The phrase can encompass many types of content, with sloppy journalism at one end and completely fabricated news on the other. Media coverage of fake news often focuses on extreme examples, which can be used as a way to discredit real news and to generate an attitude of alarm and suspicion among readers and viewers.

Role of the **FREE PRESS** in a Democracy

BY CARA EVANSON

In addition, even minor instances of journalistic carelessness are sometimes labeled as fake news. All of this makes for a complicated news media environment, which may lead news consumers to develop an unhealthy skepticism of the press and the information it produces.

It is our responsibility

While we have limited control over the producers of fake news and the social media platforms by which fake news spreads, we are accountable for our own actions related to news consumption. Our fast-moving media environment makes it easy, and tempting, to share news articles without fully

reading them or examining their content. Additionally, ad revenue for fake news is driven by clicks, so the clicks generated from even just one share on social media contribute to the revenue stream driving fake news. Our best defense against the spread of fake news is to become conscious, and ethical, news-consumers in order ensure we do not become misled by, or unwittingly promote, false news stories. Instead of getting angry or casting blame on others for producing or sharing questionable news, we can choose to proactively engage in our own healthy news literacy practices.

Questions to ask yourself

Critical thinking is a key component to becoming a responsible news consumer. One way to engage your critical thinking skills as you read or watch the news is to keep the following two questions in mind: “What is the primary purpose of this news?” and “What evidence do I have that this news is reliable?”

Primary purpose

News should inform, but this primary purpose can sometimes be obscured when news producers place a greater emphasis on generating clicks or views. As you read or watch the news, check your emotional response to what you are reading or viewing. If you have an intense emotional reaction, it may be because the news story was intentionally written to provoke that type of response from you. If your news consumption is primarily gratifying or infuriating, it is no longer nearly as effective at informing you. Getting your news from multiple sources and a range of viewpoints can help you to avoid news consumption that is primarily emotional.

Evidence of reliability

As consumers of news, especially in a digital environment, it can be easy to

miss key indicators of reliability. The content of an article can *feel* authoritative even when it is not. Like a detective, you can look for pieces of evidence to create a more complete picture of the reliability of a particular news story. Important elements to look for include author, publication, and context.

Author

When a name accompanies a news article, it signals the author's endorsement of the content. It shows he or she has a stake in the reporting and its consequences. Further, a listed author allows you as the news consumer to check out the author's credentials. A quick Google search or peek into an author's "about" section can help you figure out if the author is a professional journalist or brings other expertise relevant to reporting on the issue.

Publication

News stories on social media are often disconnected from their original place of publication. Tracing an article back to where it originated can be a helpful method, as this process can provide important information about scope, audience, and related content. Reputable publication platforms lend credibility to the articles published on them and vice versa.

Context

The information provided within the news story itself should provide you as the reader with enough context to do further investigation. For instance, you should be able to look up the organizations and people mentioned in the story, or find other, related news stories. Be wary if the article uses anonymous sources without explicit justification or does not provide enough context for you to look into the story in more depth.

Conclusion

We have the opportunity to take the lead in our own news consumption and in our social media communities. Some



social media platforms have recently introduced various algorithms to flag fake news, but there is no substitute for individual agency and critical thinking when it comes to news vetting. While personal news vetting practices may seem like trivial actions in the face of today's media environment and the threat of fake news, it is the most effective way to ensure we ourselves do not get misled by questionable news or unintentionally mislead others.

When it comes to making choices about consumption in other aspects of our life, such as the clothes we buy or the food we eat, we know that our personal decisions on a small scale can affect working conditions, landfill waste, and climate conditions on a global scale. The same relationship between our individual actions and wider consequences is true of news consumption. The choices we each make about our news habits feed into a greater whole. Just like landfill build-up, our current fake news phenomenon is a result of all our collective choices regarding news consumption. By taking responsibility for the news we read, watch, and share, we can create positive and ethical changes in our news media environment.

▲ *Cara Evanson is as an Information Literacy Librarian at Davidson College. She received her master's degree in Library and Information Studies from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.*

POPULAR FACT-CHECKING RESOURCES

FactCheck.org www.factcheck.org

FactCheck.org is a project of the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania. A nonpartisan, nonprofit "consumer advocate" for voters that aims to reduce the level of deception and confusion in US politics, FactCheck.org monitors the factual accuracy of what is said by major US political players.

PolitiFact www.politifact.org

PolitiFact is a fact-checking website that rates the accuracy of claims by elected officials and others who speak up in American politics. It is run by editors and reporters from the *Tampa Bay Times*, an independent newspaper in Florida, as is PunditFact, a site devoted to fact-checking pundits. The PolitiFact state sites are run by news organizations that have partnered with the *Times*.

Snopes www.snopes.com

Snopes began as a fact check site for urban legends and has since grown into the oldest and largest fact-checking site on the Internet. The Snopes.com web site is an independent, self-sufficient entity wholly owned by its operators and funded through advertising revenues.

Activism for Daily Life

Hidden Figures

By Erin Flotte

The first time I saw the trailer for *Hidden Figures*, I was in shock. There was a movie—a *major* movie, with *trailers*—and it was about women, no, not just women, *women of color*, who calculated mathematical trajectories and computations for NASA. I am a math teacher; one who is always looking for examples of women in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields, and I didn't have the slightest idea these women existed. The second time I saw the trailer, I cried. The third time I saw the trailer, I was *mad*. How had these amazing, inspiring women been withheld from me as a teenager?

And so it was with this complex combination of emotions—inspiration, excitement, anger for my younger self, that I found myself in the office of my school's Middle School Director, pitching what I was sure was a ridiculous idea. I wanted to take my 8th grade class on a field trip to see a movie.

My 8th graders were about to start working on our "Contributors to Mathematics" project in which they would research the growth and history of mathematics in six historical civilizations. In previous years, I had noticed something—there were almost no female mathematicians mentioned in students' research. In the days leading to our field trip, I discussed with my students a number of questions. What do mathematicians "look like?" What are our stereotypes? Do we see women? People of color? People with disabilities? Does lack of representation seem like a problem? If so, how do we, individually, and as a society, fix it?

Hidden Figures became a jumping-off point to transform an assignment on the history of mathematics into a social-justice centered project—a jump that might not seem intuitive. Math and social justice were two subjects I believed to be mutually exclusive until I entered graduate school at the University of Washington. Through my coursework, I discovered that mathematics and social justice can inform each other in distinctive and powerful ways.

The key to understanding how social justice can be used in a math classroom is recognizing the immense amount of power that numbers hold. They are not objective; numbers can be manipulated and construed to support either extreme of an issue. When you understand this power and how it can inform students, the possibilities are limited only by how deep you are willing to go. Systems of equations to analyze the equity of traffic tickets based on an individual's ability to pay. Ratios and proportions to examine water usage and waste. Exponential functions to discuss income inequality in the US.

Most traditional math classes sterilize math content. Numbers are given with no context, and any problems with context are largely contrived. When students are presented with these complex, open-ended questions, they are not only being exposed to the use of *real* math in the *real* world, but being guided to become thoughtful, engaged, and empathetic young people. By integrating social justice with mathematics, students are simultaneously asked to explore these deep problems and are being empowered to use their

knowledge to create real change.

In the end, the *Hidden Figures* field trip extended to all of the 7th and 8th grade students. This expanded the number of conversations about representation in math that the school was able to have, resulting in responses such as "I really liked [*Hidden Figures*] because I didn't know anything about those women, and it gave me the chance to learn more about them, because they are women of color and no one thinks they are important. It was very empowering."

Through watching and discussing *Hidden Figures*, the students were able to have the conversations and see role models that I never could as a student. The connections the students were able to make, the ideas of fairness and equity and justice they could so easily understand, filled me with hope.

▲ *Erin Flotte is a middle school math teacher at Villa Academy in Seattle, WA. She regularly participates in IPJC's Justice Café and is a member of IPJC's Young Adult Advisory Committee.*





Muslim Ban Airport Protest (CC-Brennis Bratland)

Protest Skeptic Turned Activist

By Shelly Saini

I am a third year law student focusing on criminal public defense, born and raised in California, and have always had a drive for social justice. I have participated in protests in the past on a variety of issues—not many protests, but some. Many times I have felt that my attendance at a protest made no difference. Why would I bother participating when there's uncertainty as to whether or not change would actually be made? But one recent protest opened my eyes to the value of people coming together to take action.

At around 7 PM on Saturday, January 28, 2017, I was taking a night off from studying and enjoying dinner with two

of my classmates. I opened my phone to casually stroll through my Facebook newsfeed—as many millennials do—and I saw that some of my classmates were on their way to protest the travel ban at SFO. I quickly searched among articles from NPR and the *New York Times* to see if this was real, and to my surprise, it was. I have never been so quickly outraged.

It didn't take us any time to decide that we needed to be at SFO because we knew that we had to act as the advocates that we have trained to be. Sure, we are just law students who have yet to receive our bar licenses, but we are people equipped with the tools for advocacy.

As soon as we stepped off of the BART train, we instantly heard the chants, cheers, and drums—we were in the right place. I have traveled countless times through SFO and I have never seen it so packed and swarmed with people. It was beautiful to see the organized chants, distribution of food and water, musicians playing their instruments, news cameras throughout, and the crowd of people.

It was breathtaking to see everyone in synchronized voices getting louder and louder. We wanted those who were detained to hear us so that they knew

people outside were fighting for their freedom, we wanted them to know that there are Americans who believe in equality, and we wanted them to know that they will be welcomed with open arms and hearts, not with hate.

I continued to protest throughout that weekend to be supportive of the families and individuals I saw being released, and of the attorneys working tirelessly and persistently to help the detainees.

The passion and emotions of everyone that night were intense and strong. It was a surreal experience to be in a place where everyone felt so strongly about the same issue especially at a time when our country is so divided.

My view of protests has changed drastically because I learned that it is important to be with your community and show people that you are committed to a cause. We are living in a time when technology has transformed our interactions so that to be physically present with others is much more emotional and empowering. My plan moving forward is to continue being physically present and fighting for the rights of others whether it concerns travel bans or any other discriminatory issues.

▲ Shelly Saini recently graduated from the University of San Francisco School of Law.

Disrupt *and* Rebuild

Giselle Cárcamo, Justice for Women Coordinator, represented IPJC at the World Meeting of Popular Movements in February. A Matter of Spirit asked her about her insights from this historic meeting. Bishop Robert McElroy of San Diego spoke on a panel.

A Matter of Spirit: What were your initial hopes going into the WMPM?

Giselle Cárcamo: Our hope for participating was to find alternative ways to respond to social injustice, and to organize for structural change that promotes racial and economic justice. My goal was to gather with other social justice promoters and also to regain hope

after a very difficult period of time. The fact that we were gathering with people from international delegations and grassroots leaders from the U.S. was the ideal scenario to speak about rebuilding. That is something I carry with me in my heart. I also wanted to create the basis for a network that will tie our local efforts to efforts in other states and countries, resounding the theme of “one people one fight.”

AMOS: Name one moment, learning, person, or memory at the WMPM that stands out to you.

GC: I think Bishop McElroy’s speech was the most moving speech from a Catholic Bishop that I have ever heard. One of the goals of the meeting was to ask the clergy to respond and to take bold action in solidarity with the needs of marginalized communities of color. He spoke precisely to that. When he called for disruption, I can’t even begin to describe the feeling... everyone was cheering! It was perfect timing and wording to everything we had voiced during the

first day of the gathering and what we’ve been doing in our own communities. And he wasn’t just talking about disrupting, he was talking about rebuilding. He said, “The tears of the human heart should shape everything that you do.” He also spoke about the importance of *seeing* what is happening because so many struggles of our communities are invisible. Bishop McElroy called us to rebuild in solidarity by placing service at the heart of society.

AMOS: What is one thing from the WMPM that you will take back and apply to your work?

GC: The validation that we are the protagonists of change, not simply passive objects and the fact that we are at a historic turning point. The resolution of the crisis facing immigrants depends on the participation, mobilization, and action of our communities.

AMOS: Pope Francis’ Letter to WMPM participants, as well as Bishop McElroy’s speech, spoke about the economic system, which fails to put people and planet at the center. How do you see this manifesting in your work?

GC: I see it in the stories of participants in our Women’s Justice Circles. They have to pick which bills to pay, they fear deportation so they stay home, sacrificing their health. I see it in the very low wages that the women make compared to their male co-workers for the same work. I see it in the inhumane treatment of people who are detained at the NW Detention Center and the misery of their family members who can’t afford an immigration attorney.

AMOS: Bishop McElroy calls us to “disrupt and rebuild” unjust systems. What are one or two things we can all do in an effort to become “disrupters”?

GC: The first step is to give voice to injustice, to use our privilege, our money and our power to exercise our right to advocate for what is just for all. We must understand the connection of our liberation to the liberation of marginalized communities. The second step: be informed, read from different sources, engage in civic discourse, send letters to and call your representatives, take part in a march. You should be a witness, engage and recognize the dignity in every person who is around you. You will be surprised by all the things you discover just by talking to people who don’t look like you.

“You will be surprised by all the things you discover just by talking to people who don’t look like you.”



Giselle (second from left) with Bishop McElroy

How can we **BECOME** the people we've been waiting for?

In this issue of *A Matter of Spirit*, we've been offered many ways that we can become the "people we've been waiting for." We invite you to reflect on the call to action from each article, and brainstorm some concrete ways you can act for peace and justice in our times.

1. Sustain your spirituality to do justice

Rev. Rick Reynolds calls to those of us in social action ministry to "consider your own brokenness." We can all relate to the feeling of encountering someone who is "hard to love," whether it's someone experiencing homelessness, as Rev. Rick, or encountering someone with a different political view.

What is my own brokenness? How am I hard to love? How can I learn to love "the Ronnies" in my life? How might this help me to sustain my spirituality to do justice?

2. Make your voice heard

Nick Mele offers words of wisdom as we search for the most effective way

to make our democracy just that, a government by, for and of "We the people..." We are the people that make up this country, and through building relationships with our elected officials, Nick shows us that we can create lasting change.

Nick offers this piece of advice, "Pick one issue or piece of legislation and let all your elected representatives hear from you once a month until the issue is addressed in a way that satisfies you." *What is an issue that I care about? Can I commit to calling my elected representatives once a month to show why that issue is important to me and other constituents?*

3. Recognize your power in overcoming the divisions of our country

In the midst of the hateful rhetoric on social media, in the news, and even among our own friends and family, Andrew Hanauer offers a way that people of faith can work to heal the divides. He says, "Building authentic relationships with other human beings is how we live out the belief that all people have value. It's how we model for politicians how to work together. It's how we begin to heal a fractured, fearful, violent society."

How can I continue to see the humanity in others, even when they disagree with me? How can I help others bridge

the divisions that I witness today? What am I willing to risk in order to listen deeply and openly to other views?

4. Seek quality information

Having a free and open press that disseminates information to citizens allows us to be informed about the issues affecting us. However, "fake news" can make it hard to decipher the truth. Cara Evanson reminds us that it is our responsibility to be responsible news consumers and she offers concrete steps that we can use to vet our news sources.

Cara notes, "The choices we each make about our news habits feed into a greater whole." *How can I practice being a responsible news consumer in my daily life? What habits can I adopt to make this practice second nature?*

5. Remember that being an activist takes many forms

We heard from three people whose experience with social justice is vastly different. We heard from Erin, a math teacher, who challenged stereotypes about mathematicians; Shelly, a law student, about her experience at a protest; and Giselle, a social worker, who gave us suggestions on how to use our privilege to give voice to injustice.

When asked about how to "disrupt and rebuild" unjust systems, Giselle reminds us, "You should be a witness, engage and recognize the dignity in every person who is around you." *What is one way that I can disrupt and rebuild unjust systems in my life?*





INTERCOMMUNITY

▶ 2017 Just Video Contest Winners!



- 1st Place: San Francisco's Homeless Crisis**
Dylan Kelly & Leon Tsai, Stuart Hall High School, San Francisco
- 2nd Place: Power: An Environmental Short Film**
Stuart Hall High School
- 3rd Place (tie): Water Crisis**
Ramona Convent Secondary School, Los Angeles
- 3rd Place (tie): If Only It was That Simple**
Sacred Heart High School, Los Angeles

Watch all of the winning entries at ipjc.org

▶ Catholic Advocacy Day



Inspired by the Washington State Bishops' Pastoral on Poverty: **Who is my Neighbor? The Face of Poverty in Washington State**, IPJC organized over 500 Catholics from across the State to meet with their legislators on issues impacting our neighbors in need.

▶ A New Solidarity with Creation



Catholics Discerning & Acting on Laudato Si' Two Years Later

On June 6 IPJC convened Catholic leaders in Western Washington to discern how we as Catholic parishes and organizations can inspire our communities to make a lasting commitment to care for our common home.

▶ Justice for Women

St. Louise Parish Justice Circle, Bellevue

To ensure that healthy lunches are available in schools, Justice Circle participants conducted a survey with parents and elementary school kids, gave a presentation at their parish, and partnered with the Bellevue PTSA Council president to bring this important issue to the Bellevue School District's Board of Directors meeting.

Know Your Rights Workshop, Seattle



IPJC collaborated with St. Mary Parish to present a workshop designed to transform fear into power and to provide information and tools that can be useful in case of an encounter with Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE).

▶ Gratitude is the Memory of the Heart

With this issue IPJC bids farewell to **Gretchen Gundrum** who has served on the AMOS editorial board for 10 years. Even at 7:30 am meetings we could always count on Gretchen to bring inspiration, scholarship and experience to the justice topic under consideration. She was also a frequent contributor of articles, a recent one of which is being used in Australia! *Many Thanks, Gretchen!*

▶ Donations

In honor of: Avery Haller; John Whitney, SJ; Kit McGarry; Linda Haydock, SNJM; Pat Erickson, OP; Sisters of the Holy Names Jubilarians; Tacoma Dominican Jubilarians; 20th Anniversary of FreeRange Cycles

In Memory of: Anne Heger, OP; Pat Daly, SNJM; Sue Ford

PEACE & JUSTICE CENTER

NEWS • ANNOUNCEMENTS • UPCOMING EVENTS

▶ Thank you
to everyone who
made our Spring
Benefit Dinner
such a success!



It was wonderful to celebrate with our IPJC community our work for a world where all are valued and respected.

▶ Northwest Coalition for Responsible Investment

Good News for the climate at the Annual Meetings of Corporations! Our resolutions asking companies for an annual assessment and report on their Business Plan for a 2°C Warming Scenario are being supported by over 40% of shareholders, and by 67% of Occidental Petroleum shareholders—that's a majority vote! NWCRI and ICCR members are hopeful that these votes bode well for our resolutions at ExxonMobil and Chevron which will be decided on May 31.



Corporate Governance Resolutions: Over one-fifth of **Wells Fargo** shareholders supported our proposal requesting a comprehensive report on the root causes of its fraudulent activity and steps taken to improve risk management.



A resolution with **Wyndham Worldwide** asking for transparency and accountability in its corporate spending on political activities was supported by 37% of its shareholders.

▶ Young Adult Justice Cafés

We wrapped up our 8th year of Justice Cafés by celebrating the justice actions participants took for the April Act for Justice Café! This year, we discussed

- ☞ healing from mass violence
- ☞ food justice
- ☞ building interfaith relationships
- ☞ housing and homelessness
- ☞ community peacebuilding
- ☞ how to build a sustainable future.

Are you interested in hosting a Justice Café for the 2017-2018 year? Contact Elizabeth at emurphy@ipjc.org.



The Burien, WA Justice Café attended the Multifaith Coalition to Address Human Trafficking through the Lens of Compassion's April Gathering to learn more about how to support immigrant survivors of trafficking. IPJC is a co-convenor of the Multifaith Coalition.



The Seattle, WA Justice Café hosted a party for young adults to write to their elected officials about issues impacting their community.



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We are the people we've been waiting for

After reading A Matter of Spirit, gather around a table with a candle and ritual cloth. “lone wolves.” To make lasting change, we must work as one. **R.**

Leader: In this issue of *A Matter of Spirit*, we have explored concrete ways to nourish our spirit, to be involved in the political system, to consume news responsibly, and considered examples of every day activism.

A Hopi elder reminds us, “The time for the lone wolf is over. Gather yourselves! Banish the word struggle from your attitude and your vocabulary. All that we do now must be done in a sacred manner and in celebration. **“We are the ones we’ve been waiting for.”**

Take a few moments to think about one way you can become the one you’ve/we’ve been waiting for to work for peace and justice in the world. *[Pause for quiet contemplation.]*

I invite those of you who wish to share to do so now. *[Sharing]*

With these commitments in mind, let us pray for the wisdom to carry out our call. Please respond: **We are the ones we’ve been waiting for.**

Reader: As we gather in community, we remember that we are not

Reader: The work is long and difficult. Although it is easy to lose hope and to think that nothing we do will make a difference, we must continue working for peace and justice in the face of struggle. **R.**

Reader: Despite the world’s suffering, we find hope and joy in our community, and find time to celebrate our work for a world where all are respected and valued. This is the sacred work that we carry on because it is up to us. **R.**

All: Creator God, we thank you for gathering us in community today. We are *your* people, and we are called to carry out your sacred work. Guide us in our commitment that we may continue to listen to your call with joy and celebration. *Amen.*

