

Monthly Update

December 2015

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

As in the past two years, we are holding a one-month moratorium on the unpleasant news of the problems in our United Methodist Church, nation, and world. Instead we are including, for the most part, information and stories sharing what Christmas means to us.

In this issue, however, we do have two sobering bits of information. The first is marking the passing of a true spiritual giant in our denomination, Dr. J. Ellsworth Kalas. Just after he had been appointed as the interim president of Asbury Theological Seminary, I was at a ministers' conference there. I went to the church there on campus where he would preach. Since his predecessor had summarily been fired by the seminary's board of directors, rumors were flying as to what the cause might be. I confess, I was curious also. At the beginning of his sermon, he announced that he would be speaking on Matthew 7:1-5. In his message, he deflected unspoken questions as to what had transpired over his predecessor and invited each of us to examine his own issues so as to better ourselves. It was a masterpiece of a message. It caused us to think. That, in addition to reading his books, sitting in on his lectures, and using Sunday School material that he had written caused me to develop a deep admiration for the man. He will be greatly missed.

The second is information dealing with the French. We grieve with our brothers and sisters in that country over the attacks they suffered on November 13th when terrorists carried out shootings and bombings on an unsuspecting populace in Paris. Assuredly, we have a challenge here in facing the continued atrocities by some who support a radical Islamic worldview. We can only sympathize with the people of that city and that country.

Each December, we make our annual request for contributions. We ask that you pray and seek the Lord's leading as to how you might support the ministry in which Concerned Methodists is engaged. We make the most efficient use possible of the money you entrust to our work. Since we have no paid employees, minimize overhead, and use cost-cutting measures, we translate the maximum amount of your donations into our ministry of informing people about what is happening within our United Methodist Church. In addition we are focused on the 2016 General Conference which will be held in Portland, Oregon and have an ambitious plan to affirm our orthodox Christian doctrine and oppose those who would overturn it for "social activism." We stand firmly on our Wesleyan teachings and heritage that have extended back for over 200 years. May we ask for your continued help through your gifts and your prayers?

From all of us here, we wish you the very best during this Christmas season and throughout the coming year. Let us continue to pray for our United Methodist Church and our country.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris,
Executive Director

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December 2015 Update

As we did last year, in this December Update we have decided to declare a moratorium on the serious news of all that is happening in the United Methodist Church and reprint stories and information for Christmas. We are repeating something that we had included in the 2013 December Update talking about Christmas customs.

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+ *The Birth of Jesus*. In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while[a] Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them. And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

“Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.” So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived.

When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord”), and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: “a pair of doves or two young pigeons.” Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace.
For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:
a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.”

[Joseph and] the child’s mother marveled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own

soul too.” There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.

– From the Bible, Luke 2:1-40 New International Version (NIV). Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

+ **Prejudice.** When I played Little League baseball as a kid, my coach was Robert Duran. One day as he was driving my brother and me home, he talked with us, “I am not Mexican. I am not Hispanic. I am not Mexican-American. I was born and raised here in Texas; went to school here; fought in the Korean War; and am working here. I am an American. My wife and I teach our kids English at home. We also teach them Spanish, but English is our primary language.” That was an eye-opener for me. From that point on, I looked at the whole issue differently.

If I were to ever preach a sermon on prejudice, I would entitle it “So What?” Then I would talk about a prejudice that I grew up with – and with which I was forced to come to terms – as life would have it. The reason I would call my little message “So What?” is to sift out what is really important in life from the stuff that is not so important. To do that, I use the “foxhole” analogy. Pretend you are in a foxhole. Now pretend that there is one other person with you in that “fighting position” which is the modern term for the foxhole. Now pretend that you see 200 enemy soldiers coming over the ridge about half a mile away. You have just a few minutes to coordinate your battle plan with your “foxhole buddy.” Now let’s freeze that point in time. You evaluate your chances of surviving, much less making a good combat effort against the enemy who greatly outnumber you. How well you do depends on you and your “foxhole buddy.”

The French. As I’d said, I grew up with a prejudice – against the French. As life would have it, while assigned as a liaison officer with our partnership units, one of my duties was to the French 42^e Regiment du Transmissions in Rastatt, Germany. I was uneasy because I had that prejudice and spoke no French. Not to worry. My counterpart was Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Roland Herve, who was absolutely amazing. He was the consummate gentleman and had such a pleasant personality. He spoke very good English since he had spent four years in Washington, DC on the diplomatic staff; indeed, his nickname among the French officers was “Le American” (“The American”) since he liked America so much.

As the French Liaison officer for our battalion, I spent a good deal of time at their compound in Rastatt, Germany. However, his wife spoke only French. One evening, I had to speak with LTC Herve, so I called him on the phone. I heard a lady’s voice on the other end say, “Oui?” (“Yes?”) Since I speak no French and thinking it was his wife, I apologetically said, “I will call back later.” Immediately, the voice on the other end was speaking American – not English, but American! It was their daughter. I told her what I needed and she promised to relay it on to her father. We then talked, with her so enthusiastically telling me about her life in the United States when she went from being 14 to 18 years of age and how she loved it so much. Later when I complimented LTC Herve on his daughter’s ability to speak “American” without any accent whatsoever and that at first I thought he had an American maid, he laughed and said, “Lieutenant Morris, she speaks four types of American: regular American, Southern, Brooklynese, and American Negro” as he put it. Amazing. She spoke “American” better than some Americans I knew – with absolutely no trace of an accent of any kind. Although I never met her, their daughter was impressive.

Later when he was transferred away from the regiment, another French officer was assigned as my counterpart – Lieutenant Michel Crouzet. He spoke no English and I speak no French, but since he had grown up in southern France just north of the Pyrenees Mountains, he spoke Spanish. I soon came to know and love him and his family: Michel (French for the name Michael but pronounced like “Michelle”), his wife Brigitte (pronounced “Bruh-zheet”), son Frederic (pronounced “Fred-er-eek”), and daughter Benedict (pronounced “Ben-uh-deekt”). While Frederic was about eight, Benedict was about five, had light blue eyes and hair so blond that it was almost white.

Once when we were at a favorite Yugoslavian restaurant in Rastatt, we had finished eating and were just sitting in the booth talking. Benedict climbed up on the back of the booth where I was and lowered herself onto my shoulders. Her mother was about to tell her to get down when I indicated by a sign that it was okay – leave her there. So there I sat with Benedict looking down on everyone else. While the other three adults were discussing something in French, I picked up a stack of cardboard drink coasters that were on our table and, pretended that we were playing cards “dealing” them to Frederic and me. He “won” of course. He laughed as I threw up my hands in surrender.

Afterwards, we “guys” were going to separate from the “girls” and go somewhere else, linking up with them later. We did. When we all got back together, Margitte told me that Benedict had wanted to go with us but, of course, couldn’t and had to go with the girls. When her mother was firm, her big blue eyes filled with tears and she started crying. All of us were much happier when we went to their home for more conversation before I took Margitte home.

Working with him, LTC Herve, and the other French soldiers was a very rewarding experience.

When I had deployed for Operation Desert Shield/Storm, one of the men with whom I worked was a French officer LTC “Marceau” (not his real name). I was surprised that he was an integral part of another American unit. One day, after I had observed him and his hard work – and knew that in the fighting to come he might very well be killed along with many of us, I asked, “Don’t you think it is a little curious that you, a French Colonel, are going to war with the Americans?”

He looked at me as if I had asked the most absurd question; his quick answer to my question was genuine. He reminded me of how the French had helped win the American Revolution with extensive cooperation and especially by sending the young Marquis De Lafayette. They had given us the Statue of Liberty, and we had helped his country in both World War I and World War II. He recited many other instances of our two countries’ history – so many I can’t recall. After he finished, it was clear that he was passionate in his belief – and thought that his being with us was the most natural thing in the world. During the operations that followed and throughout the fighting, he was the hardest working, most enthusiastic officer I saw – bar none.

It is ironic how life makes you eat your own words and changes your view on things. I came to love and appreciate the French as individuals, their joviality, their sense of humor – and our sense of joint history. Getting back to the idea that prejudice is like ignorance. We can dislike a group of people – but when we get to know some of them as individuals, they become real people and that is where prejudices can disappear.

– AOM

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Christmas

The birthplace of the true Christmas carol was Italy. In the 13th Century, Saint Francis of Assisi was the first to introduce the joyous carol spirit, which soon spread all over Europe. Saint Francis wrote a beautiful Christmas Hymn in Latin, Psalmus in Nativitate, but there is no evidence that he composed carols in Italian. From Italy the carol quickly spread to Spain, France and Germany, where many carols were written under the inspiration of the 14th Century Dominican mystics: John Eckhardt, John Taler and Blessed Henry Suso. [Note: This was previously published in 2013. – AOM]

A Christmas Tradition

I recently read of a custom in times past called “burning of the greens” done on Twelfth Night or Epiphany, which celebrated the coming of the Wise Men to the stable to pay homage to the Christ Child. Evidently, celebration of Epiphany dates back to the third or fourth century A.D. Ms. Lillian Elders of St. Louis, Missouri wrote of an old family custom of burning the Christmas tree in a celebratory way. This included inviting people to:

1. Take pen and paper, find a peaceful place to sit and meditate. Let your mind go back over the past year, but don't dwell on disappointments; rather, write down the five most pleasant memories of the year.
2. Then, write down your plans and goals for the new year.
3. Consider the burning of the tree itself. If you can burn your tree without violating fire laws, do so. Otherwise, burn some branches of it in your fireplace or other safe place. As they burn, think of it as burning away the unwanted “residue” of unpleasant memories from the past year. Remember the fragrant smell that is left. Let that be the memory you keep.

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The singing of Hymns and Carols can be a way for families and neighbors to reflect on the wonder and joy of Advent and Christmas. Good King Wenceslas and Twelve Days of Christmas are examples of carols for Christmas that are not sung in Church services but carry strong Christmas messages and have interesting historic origins. Good King Wenceslas tells the story of the king who ruled Bohemia in the 10th Century. While it does not address the story of the Nativity, it is a hymn about Christian charity and his extraordinary efforts to give food to poor families.

The Twelve Days of Christmas originated as a Hebrew hymn which began: “In those twelve days”. In the Middle Ages the song was rewritten in Latin with Christian images, and by 1645 an English version of the hymn had appeared. By the 18th Century, that had, in turn, become the Christmas carol we know today. One author describes this traditional English carol as “a catechetical mnemonic device that Catholics used to teach their children the truths of the faith during the years that the Catholic faith was suppressed in England” and goes like this:

Partridge	The One True God
Two Turtle Doves	Old and New Testaments
Three French Hens	Three persons of the Trinity (or the Three Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob)
Four Colley Birds	(“colley” means black) The four Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John
Five Gold Rings	The first five books of the Bible, believed to be written by Moses, called the Pentateuch
Six Geese	Six jars of water turned to wine by Jesus at the wedding at Cana.
Seven Swans	Seven Sacraments
Eight maids a milking	Eight Beatitudes
Nine Ladies dancing	Nine Choirs (or ranks) of Angels
Ten Lords a leaping	Ten Commandments
Eleven Pipers	Eleven faithful disciples (not including Judas) or the eleven stars seen in the Old Testament account of Joseph's dream
Twelve drummers	Twelve Apostles or the twelve tribes of Israel.

– Reprinted from the book *This 'N' That*; permission granted.

+ *A Letter from Santa Claus*, by Mark Twain. Palace of Saint Nicholas in the Moon, Christmas Morning
My Dear Susy Clemens,

I have received and read all the letters which you and your little sister have written me I can read your and your baby sister's jagged and fantastic marks without any trouble at all. But I had trouble with those letters which you dictated through your mother and the nurses, for I am a foreigner and cannot read English writing well. You will find that I made no mistakes about the things which you and the baby ordered in your own letters--I went

down your chimney at midnight when you were asleep and delivered them all myself--and kissed both of you, too But . . . there were . . . one or two small orders which I could not fill because we ran out of stock

There was a word or two in your mama's letter which . . . I took to be "a trunk full of doll's clothes." Is that it? I will call at your kitchen door about nine o'clock this morning to inquire. But I must not see anybody and I must not speak to anybody but you. When the kitchen doorbell rings, George must be blindfolded and sent to the door. You must tell George he must walk on tiptoe and not speak--otherwise he will die someday. Then you must go up to the nursery and stand on a chair or the nurse's bed and put your ear to the speaking tube that leads down to the kitchen and when I whistle through it you must speak in the tube and say, "Welcome, Santa Claus!" Then I will ask whether it was a trunk you ordered or not. If you say it was, I shall ask you what color you want the trunk to be . . . and then you must tell me every single thing in detail which you want the trunk to contain. Then when I say "Good-bye and a merry Christmas to my little Susy Clemens," you must say "Good-bye, good old Santa Claus, I thank you very much." Then you must go down into the library and make George close all the doors that open into the main hall, and everybody must keep still for a little while. I will go to the moon and get those things and in a few minutes I will come down the chimney that belongs to the fireplace that is in the hall--if it is a trunk you want--because I couldn't get such a thing as a trunk down the nursery chimney, you knowIf I should leave any snow in the hall, you must tell George to sweep it into the fireplace, for I haven't time to do such things. George must not use a broom, but a rag--else he will die someday If my boot should leave a stain on the marble, George must not holystone it away. Leave it there always in memory of my visit; and whenever you look at it or show it to anybody you must let it remind you to be a good little girl. Whenever you are naughty and someone points to that mark which your good old Santa Claus's boot made on the marble, what will you say, little sweetheart?

Good-bye for a few minutes, till I come down to the world and ring the kitchen doorbell.

Your loving Santa Claus
Whom people sometimes call
"The Man in the Moon"

– This work was published before January 1, 1923, and is in the public domain worldwide because the author died at least 100 years ago. "A Letter From Santa Claus – Mark Twain," published by Samuel Langhorne Clemens (November 30, 1835 – April 21, 1910), well known by his pen name Mark Twain, was an American author and humorist. Twain is noted for his novels *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, which has been called "the Great American Novel", and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. His elder daughter, Suzy Clemens, was born in Elmira, New York, and lived a short life, dying at the age of 23 from meningitis. In childhood, Suzy often had poor health. Mark Twain wrote a letter to his daughter, which he sent from Santa Claus, during one of her childhood illnesses.

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Count Your Blessings!
[Stop Complaining]

Most seniors never get enough exercise. So in His wisdom, God decreed that seniors would become so forgetful that they would have to search for their glasses, keys and other things misplaced and so do some walking.
And God Looked down and saw that it was good.

Then God saw there was yet a need. So God in his wisdom made seniors lose coordination, that they would drop things which would require them to bend and reach and stretch.
And God looked down and saw that it was good.

Then God considered the functioning of senior bladders and decided that in His wisdom, there might be calls of nature more frequently requiring more trips to the relief station that would burn calories.

God looked down and saw that it was good.

Seniors were obliged to exercise more from these senior shortcomings and did become more active as a result. So if you find you are required to get up and down more as you age, remember it's God's will and in your best interests even though you mutter under your breath.

Recipe for a Happy New Year

Take twelve whole months, clean them thoroughly of all bitterness, hate, and jealousy.

Make them just as fresh and clean as possible.

Now cut each month into twenty-eight, thirty, or thirty-one different parts, but don't make up the whole batch at once.

Prepare it one day at a time out of these ingredients.

Mix well into each day one part of faith, one part of patience, one part of courage, and one part of work.

Add to each day one part of hope, faithfulness, generosity, and kindness.

Blend with one part prayer, one part meditation, and one good deed.

Season the whole with a dash of good spirits, a sprinkle of fun, a pinch of play, and a cupful of good humor.

Pour all of this into a vessel of love.

Cook thoroughly over radiant joy, garnish with a smile, and serve with quietness, unselfishness, and cheerfulness.

– Received from Weeks Parker, Fayetteville, NC.

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+ *The Gift of the Magi* by O. Henry.

One dollar and eighty-seven cents. That was all. And sixty cents of it was in pennies. Pennies saved one and two at a time by bulldozing the grocer and the vegetable man and the butcher until one's cheeks burned with the silent imputation of parsimony that such close dealing implied. Three times Della counted it. One dollar and eighty-seven cents. And the next day would be Christmas. There was clearly nothing to do but flop down on the shabby little couch and howl. So Della did it. Which instigates the moral reflection that life is made up of sobs, sniffles, and smiles, with sniffles predominating.

While the mistress of the home is gradually subsiding from the first stage to the second, take a look at the home. A furnished flat at \$8 per week. It did not exactly beggar description, but it certainly had that word on the lookout for the mendicancy squad. In the vestibule below was a letter-box into which no letter would go, and an electric button from which no mortal finger could coax a ring. Also appertaining thereunto was a card bearing the name "Mr. James Dillingham Young." The "Dillingham" had been flung to the breeze during a former period of prosperity when its possessor was being paid \$30 per week. Now, when the income was shrunk to \$20, though, they were thinking seriously of contracting to a modest and unassuming D. But whenever Mr. James Dillingham Young came home and reached his flat above he was called "Jim" and greatly hugged by Mrs. James Dillingham Young, already introduced to you as Della. Which is all very good.

Della finished her cry and attended to her cheeks with the powder rag. She stood by the window and looked out dully at a gray cat walking a gray fence in a gray backyard. Tomorrow would be Christmas Day, and she had only \$1.87 with which to buy Jim a present. She had been saving every penny she could for months, with this result. Twenty dollars a week doesn't go far. Expenses had been greater than she had calculated. They always are. Only \$1.87 to buy a present for Jim. Her Jim. Many a happy hour she had spent planning for something nice for him. Something fine and rare and sterling--something just a little bit near to being worthy of the honor of being owned by Jim.

There was a pier-glass between the windows of the room. Perhaps you have seen a pier-glass in an \$8 flat. A very thin and very agile person may, by observing his reflection in a rapid sequence of longitudinal strips, obtain a

fairly accurate conception of his looks. Della, being slender, had mastered the art. Suddenly she whirled from the window and stood before the glass. Her eyes were shining brilliantly, but her face had lost its color within twenty seconds. Rapidly she pulled down her hair and let it fall to its full length.

Now, there were two possessions of the James Dillingham Youngs in which they both took a mighty pride. One was Jim's gold watch that had been his father's and his grandfather's. The other was Della's hair. Had the queen of Sheba lived in the flat across the airshaft, Della would have let her hair hang out the window some day to dry just to depreciate Her Majesty's jewels and gifts. Had King Solomon been the janitor, with all his treasures piled up in the basement, Jim would have pulled out his watch every time he passed, just to see him pluck at his beard from envy.

So now Della's beautiful hair fell about her rippling and shining like a cascade of brown waters. It reached below her knee and made itself almost a garment for her. And then she did it up again nervously and quickly. Once she faltered for a minute and stood still while a tear or two splashed on the worn red carpet. On went her old brown jacket; on went her old brown hat. With a whirl of skirts and with the brilliant sparkle still in her eyes, she fluttered out the door and down the stairs to the street. Where she stopped the sign read: "Mme. Sofronie. Hair Goods of All Kinds." One flight up Della ran, and collected herself, panting. Madame, large, too white, chilly, hardly looked the "Sofronie."

"Will you buy my hair?" asked Della.

"I buy hair," said Madame. "Take yer hat off and let's have a sight at the looks of it." Down rippled the brown cascade.

"Twenty dollars," said Madame, lifting the mass with a practised hand.

"Give it to me quick," said Della.

Oh, and the next two hours tripped by on rosy wings. Forget the hashed metaphor. She was ransacking the stores for Jim's present. She found it at last. It surely had been made for Jim and no one else. There was no other like it in any of the stores, and she had turned all of them inside out. It was a platinum fob chain simple and chaste in design, properly proclaiming its value by substance alone and not by meretricious ornamentation--as all good things should do. It was even worthy of The Watch. As soon as she saw it she knew that it must be Jim's. It was like him. Quietness and value--the description applied to both. Twenty-one dollars they took from her for it, and she hurried home with the 87 cents. With that chain on his watch Jim might be properly anxious about the time in any company. Grand as the watch was, he sometimes looked at it on the sly on account of the old leather strap that he used in place of a chain.

When Della reached home her intoxication gave way a little to prudence and reason. She got out her curling irons and lighted the gas and went to work repairing the ravages made by generosity added to love. Which is always a tremendous task, dear friends--a mammoth task. Within forty minutes her head was covered with tiny, close-lying curls that made her look wonderfully like a truant schoolboy. She looked at her reflection in the mirror long, carefully, and critically.

"If Jim doesn't kill me," she said to herself, "before he takes a second look at me, he'll say I look like a Coney Island chorus girl. But what could I do--oh! What could I do with a dollar and eighty-seven cents?"

At 7 o'clock the coffee was made and the frying-pan was on the back of the stove hot and ready to cook the chops. Jim was never late. Della doubled the fob chain in her hand and sat on the corner of the table near the door that he always entered. Then she heard his step on the stair away down on the first flight, and she turned white for just a moment. She had a habit for saying little silent prayer about the simplest everyday things, and now she whispered: "Please God, make him think I am still pretty."

The door opened and Jim stepped in and closed it. He looked thin and very serious. Poor fellow, he was only twenty-two--and to be burdened with a family! He needed a new overcoat and he was without gloves. Jim stopped inside the door, as immovable as a setter at the scent of quail. His eyes were fixed upon Della, and there was an expression in them that she could not read, and it terrified her. It was not anger, nor surprise, nor disapproval, nor horror, nor any of the sentiments that she had been prepared for. He simply stared at her fixedly with that peculiar expression on his face. Della wriggled off the table and went for him.

"Jim, darling," she cried, "don't look at me that way. I had my hair cut off and sold because I couldn't have lived through Christmas without giving you a present. It'll grow out again--you won't mind, will you? I just had to do it. My hair grows awfully fast. Say 'Merry Christmas!' Jim, and let's be happy. You don't know what a nice-- what a beautiful, nice gift I've got for you."

"You've cut off your hair?" asked Jim, laboriously, as if he had not arrived at that patent fact yet even after the hardest mental labor.

"Cut it off and sold it," said Della. "Don't you like me just as well, anyhow? I'm me without my hair, ain't I?"

Jim looked about the room curiously. "You say your hair is gone?" he said, with an air almost of idiocy.

"You needn't look for it," said Della. "It's sold, I tell you--sold and gone, too. It's Christmas Eve, boy. Be good to me, for it went for you. Maybe the hairs of my head were numbered," she went on with sudden serious sweetness, "but nobody could ever count my love for you. Shall I put the chops on, Jim?"

Out of his trance Jim seemed quickly to wake. He enfolded his Della. For ten seconds let us regard with discreet scrutiny some inconsequential object in the other direction. Eight dollars a week or a million a year--what is the difference? A mathematician or a wit would give you the wrong answer. The magi brought valuable gifts, but that was not among them. This dark assertion will be illuminated later on. Jim drew a package from his overcoat pocket and threw it upon the table. "Don't make any mistake, Dell," he said, "about me. I don't think there's anything in the way of a haircut or a shave or a shampoo that could make me like my girl any less. But if you'll unwrap that package you may see why you had me going a while at first."

White fingers and nimble tore at the string and paper. And then an ecstatic scream of joy; and then, alas! a quick feminine change to hysterical tears and wails, necessitating the immediate employment of all the comforting powers of the lord of the flat. For there lay The Combs--the set of combs, side and back, that Della had worshiped long in a Broadway window. Beautiful combs, pure tortoise shell, with jeweled rims--just the shade to wear in the beautiful vanished hair. They were expensive combs, she knew, and her heart had simply craved and yearned over them without the least hope of possession. And now, they were hers, but the tresses that should have adorned the coveted adornments were gone.

But she hugged them to her bosom, and at length she was able to look up with dim eyes and a smile and say: "My hair grows so fast, Jim!" And then Della leaped up like a little singed cat and cried, "Oh, oh!" Jim had not yet seen his beautiful present. She held it out to him eagerly upon her open palm. The dull precious metal seemed to flash with a reflection of her bright and ardent spirit. "Isn't it a dandy, Jim? I hunted all over town to find it. You'll have to look at the time a hundred times a day now. Give me your watch. I want to see how it looks on it."

Instead of obeying, Jim tumbled down on the couch and put his hands under the back of his head and smiled. "Dell," said he, "let's put our Christmas presents away and keep 'em a while. They're too nice to use just at present. I sold the watch to get the money to buy your combs. And now suppose you put the chops on."

The magi, as you know, were wise men--wonderfully wise men--who brought gifts to the Babe in the manger. They invented the art of giving Christmas presents. Being wise, their gifts were no doubt wise ones, possibly bearing the privilege of exchange in case of duplication. And here I have lamely related to you the uneventful chronicle of two foolish children in a flat who most unwisely sacrificed for each other the greatest treasures of their house. But in a last word to the wise of these days let it be said that of all who give gifts these two were the wisest. O all who give and receive gifts, such as they are wisest. Everywhere they are wisest. They are the magi.

– O. Henry was the pseudonym of the American writer William Sydney Porter (September 11, 1862 – June 5, 1910). O. Henry's short stories are well known for their wit, wordplay, warm characterization and clever twist endings. The Gift of the Magi is one of O. Henry's most famous stories. The story contains many of the elements for which O. Henry is widely known, including poor, working-class characters, a humorous tone, realistic detail, and a surprise ending. A major reason given for its enduring appeal is its affirmation of unselfish love. Such love,

the story and its title suggest, is like the gifts given by the wise men, called the Magi, who brought gold, frankincense, and myrrh to the newborn Jesus.

+ ***Remembering Dr. J. Ellsworth Kalas.*** ...United Methodists all over the globe [are] in mourning the passing of Dr. J. Ellsworth Kalas, former president of Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky. He was 92 years old. "Ellsworth Kalas was a great leader among United Methodists. He was one of the most gifted and effective preachers I have known," Dr. James V. Heidinger II, president emeritus of Good News, said. "Ellsworth was a gracious, Christ-like giant of a man. His kind spirit made his Christian experience winsome and contagious. I thank God for this dear friend and for the great ministry he has had within United Methodism and beyond. I consider him one of the great Christian leaders of our day."

A pastor, teacher, and associate in evangelism with the World Methodist Council, Kalas went to Asbury in 1993 with the opening of the Beeson Preaching and Leadership program. He served as mentor to the Beeson pastors and as their preaching professor until joining the Seminary preaching faculty in 2000. Kalas has received honorary doctorates from four colleges and universities. More than 35 of his books have been published, as well as 13 adult studies. He authored *Christian Believer*, an intensive study of Christian doctrine produced for interdenominational use. His study *The Grand Sweep* is now available for iPhone.

Kalas is survived by his wife, Janet, four children, and nine grandchildren.

"A true giant of the faith has passed into the presence of the Lord!" Asbury Seminary President Timothy Tennent remarked. "He faithfully taught thousands of our students to preach, and he shepherded Asbury through a difficult season in its history. Only eternity will tell the full story of his faithfulness. He regularly reminded me of his prayers for me and his love for the ministry of Asbury. On behalf of the entire Asbury Seminary community and over 10,000 alumni, he will be greatly missed."

Ellsworth was also a friend of the renewal efforts within United Methodism. He was one of seven prominent United Methodist pastors to sign a letter of invitation that led 48 leading UM clergy to gather in Houston in December of 1987. The result of the meeting was the issuing of a statement that became known as the Houston Declaration, cautioning the United Methodist Church against any move away from traditional doctrine.

– Good News

+ ***AFA's 2015 Christmas 'Naughty or Nice' store listing.*** Which stores recognize Christmas in their advertising...and who's the Scrooge? As the 2015 Christmas shopping season begins full swing, AFA has prepared its annual Naughty or Nice retailer list. We have taken the top 100 national retailers and reviewed their websites, media advertising and in-store signage in an effort to help you know which companies are Christmas-friendly. There are secular forces in our country that hate Christmas because the word itself is a reminder of Jesus Christ. They want to eradicate anything that reminds Americans of Christianity. That is why it is important to remind governments and companies to keep the word Christmas alive. AFA wants to keep Christ in Christmas and Christmas in America.

Criteria – AFA reviewed up to four areas to determine if a company was "Christmas-friendly" in their advertising: print

media (newspaper inserts), broadcast media (radio/television), website and/or personal visits to the store. If a company's ad has references to items associated with Christmas (trees, wreaths, lights, etc.), it was considered as an attempt to reach "Christmas" shoppers. If a company has items associated with Christmas, but did not use the word "Christmas," then the company is considered as censoring "Christmas." Note: AFA does not list local or regional companies. Only nationally-recognized companies will be listed. This list only reflects a company's "Christmas" advertising and does not take into account other corporate policies AFA may not agree with.

Nice:

Exceptional. This year, six companies earned AFA's highest "Five-Star" rating by promoting and celebrating Christmas on an exceptional basis. An AFA "5-Star" rated company that promotes and celebrates Christmas on an exceptional basis.

Christmas-friendly. Company uses the term "Christmas" on a regular basis, we consider that company Christmas-friendly. Company refers to Christmas infrequently, or in a single advertising medium, but not in others. Company may use "Christmas" sparingly in a single or unique product description, but as a company, does not recognize it.

Marginal. Company refers to Christmas infrequently, or in a single advertising medium, but not in others.

Naughty. Company may use "Christmas" sparingly in a single or unique product description, but as a company, does not recognize it.

Exceptional. AFA Online Store (<https://www.afastore.net>), Cracker Barrel, Hobby Lobby, Lowe's, Michael's Stores, Wal-Mart, and Ace Hardware.

Christmas-friendly. Amazon.com, Banana Republic, Bass Pro Shops, Bed Bath & Beyond, Belk, Big Lots, Books-A-Million, Cabela's, Dick's Sporting Goods, Dillards, Do-It-Best Hardware, Dollar General, Gap, Inc., H.E.B. Stores, HSN.com, Hallmark, Hancock Fabrics, Harris Teeter Stores, Home Depot, Hy-Vee Stores, JCPenney, JoAnn Fabrics, Kmart, Kohl's, Kroger, L.L. Bean, Macy's, Marshalls, Meijer, Menard's, Neiman Marcus, Nordstrom, Old Navy, Pier One Imports, ProFlowers.com, Publix, QVC.com, Rite Aid, Sam's Club, Scheels Sporting Goods, Sears, Super D Drug, Target, TJ Maxx, Toys R Us, and Zappos.com.

Marginal. 1-800-Flowers.com, Academy Sports + Outdoors, Bath & Body Works, Best Buy, Cooking.com, CVS Pharmacy, Fred's, Safeway, Starbucks, True Value, UncommonGoods.com, Walgreens, and Whole Foods.

Naughty. Barnes & Noble, Family Dollar (Family Dollar shamelessly opens their stores on Christmas morning, showing they think more of the dollar than the family.), Foot Locker, The Limited, Maurice's, Office Depot, Office Max (Office Max is now owned by Office Depot.), Pet Smart, Staples, Stein Mart, Supervalu, and Victoria's Secret.

– November 16, 2015. <http://www.afa.net/action-alerts/here-it-is-afas-2015-christmas-naughty-or-nice-store-listing/>

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Kids' Stuff

- When you want something expensive ask your grandparents. Matthew, age 12. –
- Never smart off to a teacher whose eyes and ears are twitching. Andrew, age 9.
- Wear a hat when feeding seagulls. Rocky 9.
- Sleep in your clothes so you will be dressed in the morning. Stephanie, age 8
- Never ask for anything that costs more than \$5 when your parents are doing taxes. Carol, age 4.
- Don't ever be too full for dessert. Kelly, age 10.
- If your dad is mad and he asks you, "Do I look stupid?" Don't answer him. Heather, age 16.
- Never tell your mom her diet is not working. Michele, age 14
- Never bug a pregnant mom. Nicholas, age 4
- Never pick on your sister when she's holding a baseball bat. Joel, age 12.
- When you get a bad grade, show it to your mom when she's talking on the phone. Alyesha, age 13.
- Never do pranks at a police station. Sam, age 11.
- Beware of cafeteria food that moves. Rob, age 10.
- Never tell your little brother that you're not going to do what your mom told you to do.

Remember you're never too old to hold your father's hand. Molly, age 11.

Never dare your little brother to paint the family car.

Forget the cake, go for the icing.

There are two places where you are always welcome – Church and grandma's house. Joanne